NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

711

Interview with

JEAN KOOKER

February 2, 1988

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Mary Lohr

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Approved: Jean Kooker
(Signature)

Date: Feb. 2, 1988

Oral History Collection

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Ms. Lohr: This is Mary Allen Lohr interviewing Jean Kooker for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 2, 1988, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mrs. Kooker in order to obtain her recollections concerning the Denton Women's Christian Interracial Fellowship.

Would you mind giving me some biographical background for yourself--your birthdate, where you were born?

Ms. Kooker: I was born on December 29, 1924, in Lampasas, Texas.

Ms. Lohr: What about your schooling--your educational background?

Ms. Kooker: I went to grade school in the little country school of Littlefield, and I went to high school in Lampasas. Then I went to one semester at Mary Hardin-Baylor and decided that wasn't for me and transferred to North Texas State University. Over a period of years, I was out of school for a while, and then I finished a master's degree in education.

Ms. Lohr: After you finished that, what did you do?

Ms. Kooker: Since I finished my master's, I've done some teaching in

social studies, some substituting. I taught some before I got my master's, also. I've been a housewife a large part of the time and have done a lot of volunteer work and work with children.

Lohr: Was your education segregated? Did you attend segregated schools?

Kooker: Yes.

Lohr: How did you become interested in the race question--integration?

Kooker: I knew some black women, but not very well. I'd been interested in it, I guess, for quite a while simply because it was one of those things that just hadn't happened. It looked like something that was going to happen or needed to happen. There really was no opportunity for people in Denton--black and white--to get together to visit with each other on any kind of a basis other than working for somebody or seeing somebody in some kind of official capacity.

Lohr: How did you become involved with the women's group here?

Kooker: Well, the first meeting was in my home (chuckle). Two women came back from a women's Presbyterian group in which there were suggestions of ways to become acquainted with black people in your community, and this was one of the suggestions, that you invite black women that you know into your home and form a group. The first meeting of this group was here.

Lohr: Do you know who the women were?

Kooker: I think I know. There were only five or six of us at the first meeting. We avoided inviting people that we knew as people who worked for somebody as a maid or something like that. That wasn't the kind of a relationship we were looking for. We were looking for one that would become social and political--this kind of thing--and we were afraid that we would squelch it, to begin with. Also, our church was involved in a tutoring group for black children who were going into the integrated schools, to be sure that they had the opportunity to meet some white kids. We had met some black people that way.

I believe you asked who was involved in the first meeting?

Lohr: Well, who was involved in getting the first meeting started?

Kooker: A group of three or four women from Trinity Presbyterian Church. We talked about some of the suggestions that they had brought back from this meeting. We knew a couple of people that we wanted to get to know better, and there really wasn't an opportunity to do this.

Lohr: Do you remember the names of the women?

Kooker: Some of them. I'm not sure this is all, but I think it was Dorothy Adkins, Euline Brock, Alice Kjer, Ginnie Nead, myself, Linnie McAdams, Othella Hill and one of her daughters, Norvell.

Lohr: Mrs. Kjer...we have been trying to find her. I think she's

the one that we haven't been able to locate.

Kooker: She no longer lives in Denton. I have her address; she lives just outside Baltimore. They moved from here quite awhile ago.

Lohr: Was she a teacher or...

Kooker: Yes. Well, she was an early childhood person and did some teaching. When they left here, she went to work teaching at Johns Hopkins, directing part of their early childhood program.

Lohr: We have been trying to find her, but we haven't been able to do so. We thought she worked at North Texas at one time.

Kooker: I'll give you her address (chuckle). Her husband had been in the School of Education there, and she had done some work with the nursery school.

Lohr: Was she white or black?

Kooker: She's white.

Lohr: How did you get the first meeting organized? How did you decide to organize it?

Kooker: Well, the three or four of us who knew each other very well decided we were going to have a meeting, and we decided we were going to have it at my house. At the time there was pressure against doing even that kind of a social meeting between women who simply wanted to be friends (chuckle). We decided that each of us would call whoever we could think of that we had met in some other capacity. A couple of them knew Linnie McAdams from having worked with the youth group

from her black church. I knew Bessie Hardin and her daughter —they didn't come to the first meeting, although they came very soon afterwards--through the Democratic Party. I don't know which one of the people knew Othella Hill. Her husband worked at North Texas for the fellow who ran the bookstore, so they may have known them through that channel. I knew a grandaughter of hers who was much younger than that at that time. I didn't know her, so I don't know who invited her or how they knew her, but her husband worked at North Texas.

Lohr: How did you decide to have the meeting at your house?

Kooker: I'm not sure. I wanted to have it here, and everybody said, "Okay!" (chuckle)

Lohr: Were there an equal number of white women and black women?

Kooker: We were very nearly equal because each of us tried to invite somebody, one or two people. Of course, some of the people couldn't come and we...but it was a very small group the first time--about six to ten people...probably eight or nine.

Lohr: Was it a rather clandestine meeting? Did you keep it quiet?

Kooker: No. We didn't call the paper or this kind of thing, but we were looking for visibility so that people would come to our future meetings. It grew very fast after the first meeting. The black ladies who were here went home and brought friends, and we invited friends. I don't remember how long it took it to grow, but I would say that in a few months we had

fifteen people or so come in. It grew to a membership of much more than that. Ordinarily, there were twenty to thirty people who came to meetings.

Lohr: Would you describe for me that first meeting--the atmosphere?

Kooker: Oh, I remember it very much as any kind of a group meeting in which you know it's going to be a group meeting, and you get people together. I knew all the white people very well who came, and they had been here several times. But we wanted to be sure that the black ladies understood what kind of a meeting it was, that it was a meeting in which we were establishing friendships. We didn't want it to be our meeting; we didn't want it to be the white people's meeting. We wanted it to be a meeting of blacks and whites on an equal basis.

Lohr: Was the atmosphere strained in any way?

Kooker: Not really strained, I wouldn't say. It took us a little while, as it would in any case in which you're not real sure what somebody else's agenda and methods and all this kind of stuff are. So we were just sort of feeling each other out to see where each of us expected to go with the thing. But I don't think it was strained in the sense that there was mistrust or that kind of thing.

Lohr: What did you do at the first meeting?

Kooker: We visited and talked about possibilities--what we could do with a group like this and why we would have a group like

this. We did some personal getting to know each other, a little talking about who we were and if we had children and what our interests were.

Lohr: Do you know how long it lasted? Do you recall?

Kooker: I have no idea. More than an hour but probably less than two or about two.

Lohr: How did you decide to have the next meeting? Was that just understood that you would have it?

Kooker: Well, we knew when we left this one that we were going to continue as a group in some way or other. We were sort of feeling our way through the whole thing. So we probably set a meeting date at someone's home.

Lohr: Do you remember the second meeting--where it was?

Kooker: No, I don't. It was one of the ladies from Trinity, I'm pretty sure, at the second meeting. But we very soon got to meeting in a white home, and then a black home with a co-hostess from the other race. If it was a white home, it was a black co-hostess; if it was a black home, it was a white co-hostess.

Lohr: Did the tone of the meeting change? Was it still just talking and visiting?

Kooker: Oh, we had some programs, and we had some projects and things that we did. The first thing that happened grew out of something someone had seen in which we ordered stickers made that said that we were for equal employment and equal opportunity. We would put them on the back of our bills that

we paid or orders that we made. Particularly, any kind of local business that we mailed something to, anybody in town that we mailed things to, we used these little stickers on. That was the first real thing that came out of it.

One of the things that we realized all along that we were trying to do, I think, was to support the black children who were going into the integrated school system because the very first integration here in Denton was simply for those children who signed up and who wanted to go. Of course, they were a small group, and it's like moving to a new town. Besides the fact that they had the disadvantage, there were going to be some kids who were going to be very ...well, not understanding, certainly. They were going to be very hard to get along with and get to know and very suspicious of the black kids, and it was hard for those first black children who went to the integrated school.

Lohr: What was the racial climate like in Denton?

Kooker: There had not been as much push in the way of integrated circumstances over the years as there had been in some of the towns. The black community had its own leadership and --this is from my viewpoint--and it pretty well stayed that way until I became conscious of trying to make an effort. I didn't know who they were or where they were or this kind of thing.

I'm trying to remember the date for this. Probably it

was before or shortly after we started meeting that there was pressure to make the theaters integrate so that the black people didn't have to sit in the balcony and this kind of thing. North Texas State University and, I think, T.W.U. had somewhat the same reaction. They had not integrated at that time or, if they had, it had just started. Anyway, their viewpoint was, "We're not going to push the community. Anything that is not a more in this community, we will not undertake." This was their stand. So it was sort of a stand-off and back-off and that kind of thing.

Lohr: What about the public restaurants and things like that?

Kooker: There weren't very many integrated restaurants. When they legally became integrated, the ones around the college were probably the first to become integrated without any problems with this kind of thing. We still had two or three in downtown Denton that said, "We will not serve black people" and made it known that they weren't welcome to come. Of course, those restaurants many of the black people didn't want to go to.

Lohr: Can you remember the names of the people who owned those restaurants?

Kooker: No, I don't, because they were restaurants that I didn't ordinarily eat at, so I don't know.

Lohr: Do you remember where they were?

Kooker: Mostly in the downtown area. Not all the downtown restaurants,

but there were two or three where the black people knew they were not invited to; in fact, they would be turned away or sent to the back door or something.

Lohr: What happened to those restaurants? Did they finally integrate or close or what?

Kooker: I really don't know. The two that I would know about are closed now, one of them simply because time closed it and this kind of thing. It became older, and it wasn't in the right place, and people no longer went there. I don't think it had anything to do with this kind of thing because there were so many other restaurants by this time that would serve the black people.

Lohr: Did black people picket these restaurants?

Kooker: No. In fact, the effort to integrate the theater was primarily led by the university students, most of whom were white, and a campus minister. A few of the black people participated.

Lohr: Well, how did it finally become integrated? Due to pressure?

Kooker: Yes. They finally just agreed to have a meeting with this group that was picketing the theater. I don't know whether they actually turned away black people to sit downstairs. Of course, this started after it was legally necessary for them to integrate.

Lohr: What about the school integration? How did that go?

Kooker: I wasn't black, so I don't really know. I knew most of the

black children who started to school. The very first integration was at the high school level, and the children--the young people--who wanted to go to the Denton High School, as opposed to Fred Moore High School, could go the first year they integrated. There were--I'm guessing because I don't remember--fifteen black children (there may not have been that many). One of them, who is now a teacher at the Denton High School, went at the very beginning.

One of the things that our group did was to set up tutoring for those children and to invite them to meet our own children so that they would know someone when they got to high school. Then the high school did integrate. The whole school integrated, and they closed the Fred Moore High School, the black high school, and the teachers were integrated into the system. Then after that, the elementary schools were closed and integrated.

Lohr: Did that go smoothly? Was there any trouble?

Kooker: There was no trouble. Individually for some children, I'm sure, it did not go smoothly. I did some substituting in the schools at the time, and I know there were a couple of times when kids said, "You're picking on me," if they were black, and I got after them. I'm sure there were circumstances when they were picked on. I said, "You go home and tell your mother who you had and ask her if I'm picking on you." (Chuckle) And most of the time it would

have been one of the ladies that I had met or a friend of one of the ladies. And we solved that problem (chuckle).

Lohr: What about the tutoring? Did all of these fifteen or so students come to the church for tutoring?

Kooker: I don't know whether all of them came or not, and there may not have been as many as fifteen. The youth group from the A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal] Church and youth group from Trinity Presbyterian had met together, so the kids knew some of the kids in this form. Several of them came not necessarily for tutoring so much as to find out what it was like at Denton High School and what would be demanded of them; and if they felt they were going to have some deficiencies in their background or if they got into a class in which they discovered that they were not as far along or that they needed help, then they would come. Some of them came on a short-term basis.

Then we got into tutoring all the kids who, after the elementary schools integrated, needed help, and it got up to...we were doing this at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church with a lot of volunteers, and their fellowship hall would be full of kids who had come for help with reading, this kind of thing, because there weren't as many special education programs, and they had no remedial reading program in the school at the time. So there were a lot of kids involved in that, with a lot of volunteers who later went into the

after school help for the Denton public schools.

Lohr: So you all just tutored for one...at most for one year or one semester?

Kooker: No, it was two or three-years--over a two or three year period at least.

Lohr: And was this sponsorship taken up by the women's group or through the church?

Kooker: No, it was a real informal kind of thing. I suppose our Interracial Fellowship did most of the spearheading of looking for volunteers, but the Methodist church was...and Linnie did lots of work (chuckle).

Lohr: How did the women's group get its name?

Kooker: The women who were coming...we talked about it. I remember our talking about it, and we thought of several things. I don't remember whether we officially voted on it or if it was just sort of an agreement, but it did come out of a discussion in the group after a few meetings.

Lohr: It's such a long name, and we wondered why the word "Christian" was in there. Is it because you wanted to emphasize a religious basis?

Kooker: Yes. I think some of us wondered why we needed to put that in. Although we did want people to recognize that those who had started it had done it out of a Christian love, we did not necessarily want the group to be only open to Christian people. So some of us said, "Okay, if you feel

it's important, go ahead and put it in."

Lohr: Do you remember exactly what the name is? We've had some confusion about what name comes first.

Kooker: What did you have? Let me think about it.

Lohr: Denton Women's Christian Interracial...or Interracial Christian?

Kooker: I don't know; I'm not sure. But I would think that the "Christian" came first because we called it so much the "Interracial Group" that that was what it was known by. We very seldom ever added all the other things to it; it just became known as the "Interracial Group." To us, at least, that's how we identified it.

Lohr: After you got through with just your social beginnings, you had projects?

Kooker: We had several. Still, one of our big pushes was to get to know each other and for our families to get to know each other. So one of the things that we did is that we would have a Christmas party and involve all the adults in the family. Then we would have a family get-together. We had it out at Price Camp, which belonged to the Methodist church. All the children...we'd have a picnic and a supper and games arranged and all this. Whole families would come so that our kids would have an opportunity to meet each other once in a while. My son, at least, formed a friendship out of that group, and I know some of the other children did.

Lohr: A lasting friendship?

Kooker: Yes.

Lohr: What other projects did you have?

Kooker: Let's see...the stickers, the tutoring. One of the big projects that we participated in...it wasn't our project, but we took a big part in it. The city council had been urged to pave the streets in southeast Denton, and finally one city council agreed to pave the streets. I have a feeling that they agreed to pave the streets, thinking that this project would never come through because in order to pave the streets, the people who lived there--a certain percentage of them--had to sign up to support this program with their own money by paying for their own curbing and guttering. Then it could be levied against the rest of them. But a certain percentage had to sign, saying they would do this--before it could be done.

Our group decided that this would just lay on the table forever. So along with some other people--most of the people were from our group--we knocked on doors in southeast Denton and explained to people and begged and pleaded and twisted arms until we got the needed number of people to sign the agreement that they would do their own curb and guttering. There was money available; the city had also made some money available for people who couldn't afford to pay. We found the names of the absentee landlords, and

we did all kinds of things. We did a lot of leg work on that. That was one of the things we did.

Lohr: After urban renewal failed...were you involved in that urban renewal campaign?

Kooker: Not except as individuals. A lot of our individuals were involved.

Lohr: Could you tell me something about that that you remember?

Kooker: I really don't remember a whole lot about that. I remember campaigning, but it's just so long ago. We didn't get what we wanted. I don't remember all the facts and figures and that kind of thing.

Lohr: It was soundly defeated by about three or four to one.

Kooker: Yes, I remember that. We went through a rather conservative time in Denton politics, and that happened to be a part of it.

Lohr: We found that Jerry Stout was the leader of the opposition. Do you remember anything about him?

Kooker: Yes. He had a little newspaper in town at the time. Maybe somebody had mentioned this, but I can't remember the name of it.

Lohr: The Enterprise.

Kooker: Yes, the Denton Enterprise. There was also obviously some money from outside Denton sent in for this, because when I would read a letter to the editor in his paper and in the Wichita Falls paper--which was going through the same movement at the same time--I would see identically the same

letter--word for word, comma for comma--signed by someone different in Wichita Falls. Fort Worth was having somewhat of the same problem. So these letters came from somewhere besides Denton, and there was other evidence that money and this kind of thing was coming in from outside. But, yes, he probably spearheaded the movement in Denton for the conservative political group.

Lohr: We've heard that many of the black people were against it. Do you remember that or why they were?

Kooker: He knew a few of the black people and visited with them and gave them his viewpoint of things that was completely different from mine and from my friends. I remember talking to two or three people after he talked to them, and by this time I knew enough of the black people well enough that they were willing to listen to me, too, and to the other people. We actually changed the minds of some of the people in the black neighborhood about: "This is not the way it's going to work. This is the way they say it's going to work, but this is not the way it's going to work."

Lohr: So maybe he said, "They're going to take your property and throw you out."

Kooker: Well, one of the things that was said was, "If you don't pay what you agree to pay, your property can be attached." Of course, this isn't true in Texas with the homestead law.

Lohr: It was a fear campaign?

Kooker: Yes.

Lohr: What was black Denton like at that time?

Kooker: Before the integration law...I have one little story. I went looking in southeast Denton for a man that we knew who was going to help us move, and this was several years before the Interracial Group. The houses did not have numbers on them. A few of the streets were paved, but not many. There was practically no curbing, and a lot of the houses didn't...so I couldn't tell. I knew what his house number was supposed to be, but I couldn't tell where it was. So I stopped and knocked on a door, and nobody was willing to tell me where he lived because they were suspicious, I'm sure, of me. (Chuckle) I cornered a five-year-old on the street, and I said, "Could you tell me where So-and-so lives?" Incidentally, this man's wife later became a member of our group. But the five-year-old said, "Sure! Right there," and I finally found the right door. So once I found the right door, they knew me, and then there was no problem (chuckle).

Lohr: Did that suspicion permeate the black community toward the white community?

Kooker: I think so. The blacks' attitude was, "What could they possibly want? They never come on a friendly visit. What could a white person want?" This person was a very respectable member of the black community, so I'm sure that they

thought...they just didn't help white people find black people. They may have thought it was a debt, or they may have thought, you know, that...they knew I wasn't looking for him for any ill-founded reason (chuckle), that he was really in trouble.

Lohr: Did you have any reaction like that toward the women's group? Did you have anyone refuse to join?

Kooker: Well, there were several women who said to their black friends, "They're a bunch of do-gooders. What do they want? They'll be gone in six months. They really don't want to be friends." There were several black women who had this feeling from what they had seen in the community and what they had known. Because black and white Denton had been so separate.

Lohr: What about the black women's husbands? Were they reluctant for their wives to become members of this group because of ostracism?

Kooker: Well, the few black women who came in the beginning were not, for example, the one I told you whose husband worked at North Texas. Their husbands were secure enough in their positions...one of the things they may have been afraid of would be that other black people, as you said, might ostracize them. Everybody was a little suspicious about what our agenda really was, and we didn't have one to begin with (chuckle), except that we wanted to do something about getting

to know each other's problems and helping each other with them.

Lohr: How did the agenda evolve?

Kooker: Very informally. We particularly asked the black women, "What are your problems? What are your needs in working your way into the community of Denton?" You know, "How can we help with that?" "Do people wait on you when you go to a store? If you are ever turned away or have been rude to at some store, then we would like to know because we would like to respond to them as a group." That didn't happen with any of the people in the beginning that were a part of this, at least not concertedly.

A couple of times things would come up about how their children had been treated by a particular teacher at school. Not about the school as a whole, but by a particular teacher. It never got to the place...one time there was a big misunderstanding at a school. I know the teacher from which it evolved. It was just kind of a dumb thing he did--a statement that he made about black people in general that was not very bright on his part to have made. It came out entirely wrong. So we got the groups together. We got the teacher and the parents and some of these other people together just to simply talk about this, and it worked itself out.

Lohr: How did you go about getting them together? How did you

get them to accept you?

Kooker: Well, a couple of us knew the teacher, and the Interracial group went to the black family and said, "Hey, this is going to be our best chance to work this out." Now there have been some things in which the black community as a whole have taken before the school, but we dealt mostly with individual's personal needs and things. We did write, like, letters to the editor or to the school, saying that we were glad they were integrating and that we supported it and this kind of thing.

I don't know whether it was because the black and white areas had been so separate in Denton, but we didn't have any of the violent kinds of things. Probably the demonstration at the theater was the most pointed public thing that came out of this. Discrimination was hard on the black people individually, but there was no violence or that kind of thing that we could identify.

Lohr: Do you have any idea why that was?

Kooker: Yes--I think. All I know is what I hear because I did know Mr. Moore--Fred Moore, a black gentleman--personally. I know his daughter very well, and she never particularly took issue with this statement. I think he felt that the black community was far better off to go its own separate way and do for itself what it could. And since he was one of the leaders in the black community, and one of the educated

ones, they sort of listened to him. He was a Denton man; he didn't come in from someplace else and tell them this. Of course, this made the whites realize that "we don't have anything to worry about. They're going to go their own separate way." And so for a long time this happened.

Lohr: Going back to the teacher, do you remember what it was that he said?

Kooker: I'm trying to remember. It was a science class, and it was something that he said. I don't know what it was exactly because it was so silly (chuckle). It was something that he said about Darwin. I don't remember what it was--I really don't--but I know that what he said the blacks took issue with. It was not a put-down from his part; it was something that was just completely misunderstood that he said. I couldn't believe it when they said what he said because I knew the man. I wanted to see this in context. When you took it out of context, it sounded terrible, but I can't remember exactly what it was now. But when you put it back where it was supposed to be, it just sounded like, "Oh, you really made a mistake!" (chuckle)

Lohr: Well, was he receptive when you came to him and talked to him about it? Did he know what he'd done?

Kooker: Well, he was kind of defensive about it because he said, "There is nothing wrong with what I said!" But I think that after he realized that the kids and the parents were

so disturbed and upset about it...I don't know if you would call it an apology, but at least he was willing to explain to them what he meant when he said what he did.

Lohr: Did they accept it?

Kooker: Oh, sort of but not entirely. I think they still felt that it was somewhat of a put-down.

Lohr: Do you remember any other times that your group intervened in a situation?

Kooker: No. I suppose the street incident in which we decided that "yes, you are going to pave southeast Denton" was a sort of a political intervention intervention. But otherwise, other than talking to people about their own personal problems and their knowing that they had our support, there may have been times, but I don't remember them.

Lohr: Were the problems that the black women different than the ones that the white women in the group thought they would be?

Kooker: Not really. It's hard to understand when you have never been in that kind of situation--what the black women felt. The problems, I think, we knew were there. But how they felt about them sometimes was rather eye-opening because we had no way of knowing.

There's one interesting thing that came out of this group for me. I met a lady several years after it had been organized, and we got to talking at one meeting--where everybody was from and what they had done. She was

fairly new to the group, and I discovered that she was exactly my age and had grown up in the town where I went to high school. But we had no way--and Lampasas is a small town--no way of ever seeing each other, no way of ever meeting. She knew a cousin of mine for whom she had worked. She said that her first thing was to leave Lampasas as soon as she got out of high school because there was nothing for her to do there except to continue to do the same kinds of things that she was doing--work in a restaurant or work for somebody in their home or this kind of thing. So her first move was to leave (chuckle). We were the same age, and we had been in school at the same time, but we had no way of even knowing about each other's existence.

Lohr: That's interesting. Do you remember any other instances of any other women who had problems that you were surprised to hear?

Kooker: I don't personally remember anything that I was surprised at. I knew that their kids were going to have problems. There's one thing that had happened, and this was one of the girls whose father was an insurance person and whose mother was a professional person of some kind. I don't remember exactly what she did--secretary or something. This girl was asked one day in one of her English classes if she knew somebody who would come and clean this lady's

house. The teacher asked her this. She said, "I'm sure you know" or "Would you find someone." Well, she had no idea of who would clean people's houses! You know, it was just incongruous that this question should have been asked to a girl simply because she was black!

Lohr: Did you take part in voter registration?

Kooker: Yes, we did do some of that--a great deal of that, in fact.

Lohr: Could you describe that to me?

Kooker: Again, we worked primarily through the churches and through people in the black neighborhood because the black neighborhood had had its own leadership. We did some of the asking of people to register and asking them to vote for circumstances that we felt were truly involved with the black and white integration problem. For example, Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Hardin, Linnie McAdams, and several people who were leaders in their own neighborhood were so far ahead of doing so much of that kind of work that we were sort of pushing it and helping them and so on. I remember them as doing more of that in their own block and their own neighborhood and this kind of thing than we did.

Lohr: You mentioned Democratic Party politics. Would the white Democrats do their thing and black Democrats do theirs?

Kooker: There were not very many people from the black community involved in the Democratic Party. Of course, because of the way the precincts were divided--either intentionally

or accidentally--southeast Denton was the black area at that time--they were all in one precinct. So the blacks furnished their own black leadership so that whoever happened to come out of that precinct we got to know as representatives. But there was not a lot of involvement. At that time the party never met in the precinct, you know, except for that precinct group.

Lohr: What year was your voter registration? Do you remember?

Kooker: I don't remember. We did it more than once. But the League of Women Voters became active very early in voter registration. It was one reason that I suppose I don't remember too much of our being as active as we might have been--because the League of Women Voters worked all of Denton for voter registration as soon as they got involved.

Lohr: How long did the Women's Group meet? For how many years?

Kooker: (Chuckle) You know, that's strange. I'm not sure. When I realized that we really weren't meeting anymore, somebody asked me why we had stopped, and I said, "Well, we still think of ourselves as a group, and we have since had one reunion meeting. If we had wanted to resurrect it, we could very easily." But now we have opportunities for seeing each other; it's not a necessary kind of thing to give us an opportunity to see each other. Oh, I'm sure we met for at least ten years. I'm trying to remember the ages of my children over the time we met.

Lohr: Did you meet once a week?

Kooker: No, once a month and usually only once maybe in the summertime.

Lohr: Did you publicize these meetings in the newspapers?

Kooker: We did get to where we did, yes. Occasionally, we'd put it in places...it wasn't "The Notepad" then, but it was in the announcements of club meetings and this kind of thing.

Lohr: Could anyone who saw that and thought it was an interesting idea join by that time?

Kooker: Oh, we would have loved to have anybody at any time who thought it was interesting come (chuckle)!

Lohr: Did you take up dues of any kind?

Kooker: We decided we needed a little money, and it was more a passing-of-the-hat kind of thing than it was to have regular dues, I think. It seems to me at sometime we said once, "It would be nice if everybody would give a dollar." When people gave their dollars, we never kept track of it because we didn't want it to be a thing in which the dollar might keep someone from coming.

Lohr: What about officers? Did you elect officers?

Kooker: Yes, we had co-chairpeople--a black person and a white person. We had project committees. They were not on-going committees, but whenever one of these things would come up that we were going to do, somebody would be in charge of getting together those interested or the two or three people

that the co-chairs might ask. We always had co-chairs, and then we always had somebody who was in charge of the Christmas party and somebody who was in charge of the summer picnic. But nothing was really organized in that you would say that we'd have to have a parliamentarian and all this kind of thing.

Lohr: Did you have programs each time?

Kooker: Sometimes we had programs; sometimes we didn't. When there were things coming up that we felt that we needed some kind of education, we would have people...once in a while we would have somebody from the Political Science Department at one of the colleges come and talk to us. We had a visiting minister or two, particularly one black person who came through here a couple of times and was interested in what we were doing.

Oh, yes! I forgot about this! My mind has gone blank all of a sudden. The fellow who wrote Black Like Me was here and spoke to our group, and that was really one of our highlights. He came and then he came back later. The first time he talked about his experiences in gathering material for Black Like Me and what it had been like. Then he came back later and talked to us about developments that he had seen and some of his literature.

Then we had a couple of black writers come to us later—black authors and people like this who came and visited with

us and did programs for us. I forgot those.

Lohr: Were these people who were just in Denton for some other reason and just talked to you, or did they come here especially for you?

Kooker: Of course, we contacted the author of Black Like Me and brought him on our own. Some of them were visiting at North Texas as artists in their field of literature and this kind of thing.

Lohr: Did the Women's Group change over the years in focus?

Kooker: Yes, I think it probably did. Maybe this was because of lack of need, but I think it's because we got larger. In the beginning I think we were more committed to integration and more politically-oriented than we were by the time we decided that we really had no need for continuing as a group, even though we didn't want to lose track of each other. I think we became much more like the general population. We acquired a lot of people who simply were not as interested and as committed to politics and to people and this kind of thing as we had had in the beginning. Necessarily, the first people were those who were really interested in getting something done.

Lohr: How did that change the group?

Kooker: I don't know that it changed our focus a whole lot because we decided in the beginning that, if someone was interested in a particular issue and there were people who would support

them, the whole group would not have to agree to it. This group could go do their thing. Still, those of us who were particularly interested in an issue or were very politically-oriented could go do our thing, and the rest of them could show up when they wanted to. So it didn't change what we did a lot, but it did change the...we did have this "other" group of people that in the beginning we didn't have. We became more like the general population.

Lohr: Did the black women who came in later--and I guess probably the white women, too--become more professional women than the group was to begin with?

Kooker: No, because in the beginning we sort of carefully chose... there were not a lot of black professional people in Denton because there wasn't a lot for them to do. There were a lot of people with college degrees who were doing something else in the black community. But we particularly went after those kind of people in the beginning, not in an effort to be snobbish but because we wanted a relationship that would be that kind of relationship with the people and they wouldn't think of us as somebody who hired them to work on Monday. But we acquired more of those people before it was over.

Lohr: What about feminism? Did that enter into the group?

Kooker: Well, it did somewhat because several of us were interested in it. But it never became as big a thing as it would have

had we continued meeting longer, I'm sure. Most of these people were family-oriented people. There were only very few of them--blacks or whites--that were finding themselves in the workplace with a problem. Of course, many of us were teachers, and women were hired as teachers. That was a thing that women did (chuckle). So several people would share with us when they had these problems, and we would commiserate with them, (chuckle) tell them that we thought this was unfair, but we didn't do a lot in a way of being politically active as we had in integration.

Lohr: Do you remember any black professional women who were members of the group later on?

Kooker: We had some people who came, but they never really became too active. Linnie McAdams has been active with the group from the beginning. A lady from North Texas whose husband was...and she had a degree. I don't know what it was in. They had just gotten out of college. She came for a while, but she had two small children and didn't see the need for us as I'm sure she would have had she come to Denton earlier. Many of these people didn't arrive in town until the need for an interracial group was not quite as pressing; I mean, they could make friends among the white people. Many of the first ones to come, of course, were staff people at the colleges, and they were free to move amongst their friends as they wanted. Nobody brought any pressure to them for

doing this kind of thing. Their friendships may have been limited somewhat by the people who were prejudiced, but they really didn't want to be friends with them, anyway, I'm sure.

Lohr: What about housing in Denton? Was it pretty well segregated?

Kooker: Very, very much segregated. And only in the last few years has that problem changed a lot. For example, last year there was still a thing. When somebody started looking at public housing in town and found out all the black people in public housing were living at the Phoenix--all of the blacks and the browns--and all of the white people in public housing were living over there on Bell Avenue, they said, "Whoa! Hold it! We see something wrong here!" (laughter) So there was a commitment to do something about that, and I don't know what's happened to it since then.

Lohr: What about just housing in general? For instance, say someone came to North Texas who was black.

Kooker: Then?

Lohr: Yes.

Kooker: Well, for example, the McAdamses wanted to buy a house. They were known by people all over town, and everybody knew that they were just another family who wanted to move. They had bought a lot and discovered that there were all kinds of pressures being brought to bear; they couldn't find anybody to build a house on it.

Lohr: Do you know where their lot was?

Kooker: They built a house over on Kendolph. They had bought a lot somewhere in this area.

Now Harve King, who teachers at North Texas, was the first black to move into this immediate community. He bought a house on the corner of Mistywood and Rockwood over here. I remember the year he bought it because it was the same year Phyllis George became Miss America (chuckle). I was delighted it was the same year because it gave people in this neighborhood something to talk about (laughter) besides the King's moving into their house.

Lohr: Do you remember what year it was?

Kooker: Well, it was the year that Phyliss George won the Miss America contest, and I cannot remember the year. It was before 1970, I believe--before or around that time.

Lohr: She was the first of the two who won it from Denton.

Kooker: A Denton girl, yes. There was some difficulty, particularly with blacks who wanted to rent houses outside southeast Denton. We manage a house that my mother and dad lived in here in town, and I would run an ad in the newspaper. I would have people call me and ask to see the house who obviously were black on the phone and then never show up. What they wanted to be sure of was that this house was open for anybody to see. When I said, "Yes," and would make an appointment, sometimes they would call back and break the appointment or not come. We had one black person that lived

in it, I guess. But I know from some of my black friends that many of them with children hesitated to move into the white areas because their kids wouldn't have friends; it would be hard for them.

Lohr: So the McAdamses couldn't build on the first lot, and they had to go over to Kendolph?

Kooker: Yes. They moved into another area.

Lohr: Do you remember what excuses the people gave them, or would they just be refused to build it?

Kooker: They couldn't get financing for their house, which was ridiculous because they got this other house financed without any problems at all! Nobody was sure they'd be able to build, and...I don't know...somebody may have even have talked...I can't remember whether Linnie or Burk said somebody had talked to them about it or not—was this really what they wanted to do and this kind of thing.

But I know that some of the other black people, even before they paved and curbed the streets, built really nice homes in southeast Denton because that's where they wanted to live because that was where people were going to be nice to them. That's where they could have friends (chuckle).

Lohr: What about now? Do you know what the situation is now in Denton?

Kooker: I know there are several apartments that people rent now that have not...well, it used to be The Timbers—now it's

the Villa something or other--over there right across from the TWU golf course, and it has a number of black people in it. Even before this, it had some black people in it. It now has some public-supported housing units in it which people rent and get rental support. It's not public housing, but they get rental support. So there were some more black people moving in at that time. But even before that, there are two or three areas here in town where black families have moved. A black high school teacher and his wife lived for a long time--and I have some other friends who moved there--in the area north of Strickland in that area over there. I'm sure there are other areas. Of course, part of it was not having very many professional jobs open to black people and not having very many black professionals come here because of that. You have to have that kind of money to buy a house in some areas. So most of the first ones were black staff people.

Lohr: When did North Texas begin to get blacks on their staff?

Kooker: I'm not sure. I know the Psychology Department looked for years before they were able to find black people. They consciously went out and looked for black people, but there were not enough black people to fill the jobs; and we weren't very high up on the money scale in what they could pay to compete with some of the larger colleges or some of the better paid positions. So it was quite awhile

before they were able to find somebody. There have been several other black people in the college's business office. I'm trying to think of some of the earlier ones that came in the English Department. I don't know who all of them were.

Lohr: So the group just sort of ended? You just suddenly found one day that you weren't meeting?

Kooker: Well, we didn't meet one summer, and then we were slow getting started the next fall. We decided that everybody was so busy that...and by this time, many of these people--particularly the black women—had become parts of organizations that there had not been the possibility of before for them to be a part of. We were meeting four times a year, and then we had a Christmas party one year, and I think maybe that was all we did. We decided that we were no longer meeting a need that we had been previously meeting. We didn't end the organization; we just didn't meet.

Lohr: What about the reunion? What was that like?

Kooker: Oh, that was fun because I got to see some of the people that I don't...I see a lot of the people because several of them volunteer at the Denton Christian Preschool. This was not our particular thing from our organization, but several women out of our organization started the push to get that going. The organization was behind getting it started. That's a preschool; it's not a day care center.

It's a preschool, and it's free. I don't know if you are aware of that or not. It's free and they set out to find the twenty-five children--well, now we have thirty-five children--in Denton who need a preschool experience (but won't have it) worse than anybody else. So necessarily that takes in a lot of the low income people--children who don't speak English, children who do not have proper child care. They're there for only half a day, and then they go to a child care center from there.

But I get to see a lot...and some of the people are personal friends, and I get to see them on that basis now.

Lohr: When was the reunion? What year?

Kooker: I'm not sure. Five years ago? Time flies! I'm not sure (chuckle).

Lohr: So it was probably in the 1980s?

Kooker: Yes, around the 1980s, late 1970s. It might have been the early 1980s.

Lohr: Looking back, what are your feelings and perceptions of the group?

Kooker: Well, I feel very good about it. It's something I'm very glad I did, and I know my friends from both the black and white community are glad it is something that they did. We were so proud of ourselves for having started it.

Lohr: What purpose did it serve?

Kooker: Well, it served, I think, very well the original purpose--

allowing a place where black and white women could get together to discuss their porblems and to support each other and to get to know each other. Not just necessarily on a social basis but our family and individual and personal problems as well. I think we furnished an atmosphere of trust in which blacks and whites could work out their problems together. That was something that came out of it, I think, between the people who got to know each other. I think we furnished a calm atmosphere in one or two cases--like some of the things at school and a couple of other times--for people to talk to us and get our perception and keep everybody from going off the deep end and yelling at each other when they didn't need to (chuckle).

Lohr: Did it make a difference to Denton?

Kooker: Oh, I think so, particularly in the integration of the schools. I think it gave the blacks some confidence and understanding that they might not otherwise have had; and it gave the whites--the school administration and the community, not just our group necessarily--a feeling that there are people who support this, and it is something that is going to happen, so let's see if we can't do it reasonably well.

Lohr: Were lasting friendships made?

Kooker: Yes. I can think of two or three people that otherwise I might not have gotten to know very well and might not even

see; but now I still do see them and still feel close to them.

Lohr: Did families become close as well as individual women?

Kooker: In a few cases, yes. And our husbands did get to know each other. They played softball at the picnics and enjoyed it and this kind of thing, so when they would see each other, they could speak, you know, "This is someone I know."

Lohr: Was the group more for white women or the black women?

Kooker: Well, I hope it was for black women as much as it was for white women. That was our purpose in starting it.

Lohr: Can you remember any other things about the group that you'd like to tell?

Kooker: No, I think I've pretty well covered it. I thoroughly enjoyed the meetings, and I enjoyed seeing the people, and I enjoyed talking to them. It was something I felt good about. It was something that, I think, helped my children get to know black children because there were none living in our immediate community. Although we formed some friendships not necessarily only as a part of that, it gave us the opportunity to meet black people that we otherwise would never have gotten to meet other than on a very formal basis.

Lohr: What about church integration in Denton?

Kooker: Amazingly enough, and particularly at Trinity Presbyterian--that's the one I can speak for best because that was the one I was a part of--there was a lot of foot-dragging (chuckle).

We had all of these people who were interested and involved in this, and they didn't drag their feet about church integration. But we had a few other families who did object, even to having a black minister come and speak in our pulpit. Some of the churches for years made it clear that if blacks wanted to come, they were welcome, but they would prefer that they sit in the back of the church (chuckle). So I'm sure not very many blacks wanted to go on that basis to those same churches. Most of them that I know of are integrated now to some extent.

Lohr: Mostly with college students?

Kooker: College students and a few other people. The churches in southeast Denton have not become greatly integrated. Some of the other churches have some black members, but there was some hanging back on the part of the churches with integration.

Lohr: We read that St. Barnabas Episcopal issued a statement saying from a certain date on that black people would be welcomed.

Kooker: Yes, several churches did. Our church finally did that. They said, "Well, why do you want to do that? We know that black people are welcome here." And I said, "But do they know they're welcome? The reason you don't want to issue this statement is that you don't want them to know they're welcome." (chuckle) It took a couple of meetings or two or three times to get this done, but we finally persuaded

them that this was something that needed doing. Then some of the other churches followed suit. Of course, as the universities became integrated, the youth groups at the universities became integrated, and that helped with some of the churches, I'm sure.

Lohr: Well, thank you very much.

Kooker: You're welcome.