

Anna Gorham April  
14, 1989 Pat  
Schwappach

*\*This is an abridged transcript from Anna Gorham's full Oral History interview given on April 14, 1989 for History 21: The Podcast! Episode 1.08. The unabridged transcript and audio is available in History 21: The Vault at AnokaCountyHistory.org.*

PS ...Anna Gorham, retired school teacher of the Anoka-Hennepin School District # 11 at Anoka Minnesota. Miss Gorham is an active, productive resident of Anoka, and is involved in many community organizations.

My name is Pat Schwappach. I'm of the Anoka County Historical Society. Today's date is Tuesday, April 14 th. Good morning, Anna.

AG: Good morning.

PS: Let's start out with your full name, please. AG:

My name is Anna Theresa Gorham.

PS: Where were you born, Anna?

AG: I was born up in Burns, which was our home.

PS: Can you describe the farm? I assume it was a farm that you lived on in Burns.

AG: Yes. My father bought 40 acres from my grandpa, who homesteaded up near St. Francis, and because it was sandy, and because it was too far away, he bought 120 acres, and that was all wooded. ... And the farm, when Grandpa moved out on it, he worked for the railroad company, and he moved out, and there was five acres that was cleared, and a little house that was on the land.

PS: Who is Grandpa? What was Grandpa's name? AG:

Grandpa. Thomas Gorham.

PS: When did he arrive in Anoka County? Do you ever remember hearing?

AG: Yes, he was born in Pennsylvania, and he worked in the coal mines, there, ... and he heard about the West, and so he came to the West, and came to Stillwater. They came by steamboat to Stillwater, and then he worked on a raft – a river raft of floating logs downstream. And then he heard about the railroad coming through, so he went to St. Paul, and he got a job there. Then he was transferred to Dayton, and in Dayton – then he was there for a short while, and he was transferred to Anoka in 1865.

PS: So it was in 18...?

AG: 1865. Uh-huh. Mother lived here, up by the depot. That's where my father was born.

PS: Oh.

AG: And when he was about a month old, then they moved out to the home in a wagon [which] was drawn by oxen. And there was only a trail out as far as Trout Brook, and from there there was just a path that meandered.

PS: What was the first school that you attended?

AG: District 36. The only country school that I went to. And it was a little over a mile and a half from our place, and we walked. In the wintertime, when it was real bad, my dad would pick us up and take us, and pick up all the neighbors with the sled, in fur robes. We'd cover up, and the teacher – we always – when it was bad, she'd always call to see if my dad was going to take us to school, because he would pick her up, too, because at that time, the cars weren't running, and they didn't have no snow plows.

PS: And you said "call," so they evidently had phones?

AG: Oh, yes. We had our own phone. We built – ours – they built it, and kept that up, and paid connection fees.

PS: What was the interior of your school? Can you describe it a little bit?

AG: Oh, I certainly can. It had cross lights. And it was long. We had long, and we had a furnace with a jacket on that sat in the middle of the stove, and of course, lots of times we'd sit with our overshoes on because the floor was cold. There was no basement. And we didn't have shades. When I first started school, we had no shades on the windows. And then finally we had a teacher – and because we had so many – such a large enrollment, the teacher one year had us facing the east, sitting sideways, and we faced the east. And you can imagine sitting facing the sun.

And we had a bell that we would pull a cord that came down; a rope that came down that we could pull to call us to school.

PS: When you completed your schooling in the one-room school, what did you do after that?

AG: Well, ... I didn't pass grammar, and so when I went to high school, I came to Anoka, and my dad and my mother said that I would have to take grammar, so I couldn't take a full course my freshman year, so I went clear over to the Franklin

School, and missed three classes, so that I could. And I had Miss Gowe, and I really learned my grammar.

PS: And then what did Anna do?

AG: And I had been offered a job. My aunt taught at a school in North Dakota, and she was offered the principalship in their town, and so the school board wanted me to take her place, cuz they liked her so well. And my aunt wrote to me and asked me, and I didn't answer the letter. I just wasn't interested; I still wanted to be a nurse.

And so, one day, I got a call. A long distance call from all three directors of the school board, insisting that I come out, so I thought, "Oh, this would be pretty nice. I could go out, and I could teach for a year, and then I'd have some money,"

So I went to summer school, ... I took teaching of math and teaching of reading. And I went out there...

And I taught in a little country school similar to the one that I had gone to. It wasn't as large. And I lived with a Seventh Day Advent family that was just a lovely family.

PS: How long were you there?

AG: Just one year. One year. Cuz ... next year, they were going to live in town with the youngsters to go to high school, and do tractor farming, coming out, but I really had no place to stay except with a family with two little children, and I had to share the bedroom with two little preschool children, and I thought to myself...and they had a small home "How in the world could I do my work?" so I decided not to.

So then I got a job working for the telephone company in the information department.

But, you know, that was divided hours. I always worked a morning shift, and I always worked the late shift, you know; at night. And I worked always weekends.

PS: So where did you stay when you were doing that?

AG: I stayed – I lived with a couple other girls in an apartment in Minneapolis.

PS: Mmmhmm. When did you decide that perhaps teaching was for you?

AG: Well, in February, the superintendent from [unclear] had written to me, and wanted me to come out and take a school that the teacher wasn't certified. ... And so I went out, and when I got out there, I found out there had been two teachers; one that had been dismissed at Christmastime, because he couldn't handle the youngsters, and then the lady that had taught there previously, but was up there visiting, and had a boyfriend, and so she wanted the job, and she wasn't even

certified, but she was teaching.

PS: When was it that you came back to Anoka?

AG: I said I'd never teach in my hometown, so I had my choice of teaching either in Ramsey County or Hennepin County. Both superintendents offered me jobs.

PS: Mmmhmm. And so which did you choose?

AG: I took the one in Ramsey – in Spring Lake Park.

PS: Spring Lake Park.

AG: And drove back and forth.

AG: And so I taught there until – Mr. Evans... he was always after me to teach in Anoka, even when I was teaching in North Dakota. He'd call me every Christmastime, and ask me, and I said, "Well, I'm under contract." So he got me into the Anoka system.

PS: And which school?

AG: Franklin School.

PS: Franklin School. So you came to Franklin School in what year?

AG: '46.

PS: In 1946? And you stayed there...?

AG: Till '72.

PS: Till 1972. What was Franklin School like in 1946?

AG: Well, we had – the only kindergarten that they had was in the Franklin School.

PS: The only kindergarten that they had in the school district?

AG: In the whole district.

PS: Ah!

AG: Was in Franklin School. That's where I understood it started. And we had five grades. Miss Squires was the principal and the fifth grade teacher. And there was just one of each grade.

PS: What was the class size? Do you recall?

AG: Oh, yes. I can remember one year I had 47 children, and I had – the seats were all screwed to the floor, and nice hardwood floors, but the seats were all screwed to the floor, and of course, you know, sand burrs over there, and the sand that we had. And I can remember one time the radiator was – that I had children so close to it, and here the radiator was shooting out, and I couldn't have that, and I had them back in the library corner....

(End of Side 1)

It was hard for him to sweep, too, and he said if he could have the seats – and I had always said they should be on 2 by 4s, because that, I knew, was a requirement,... I'd done a lot of standardizing schools and bringing them up, and so I talked to Miss Squires about it, and "Oh," she says, "That would leave holes in the floors. There isn't anything I could do about it." But anyway, she evidently must have said something to Mr. Bye, and Mr. Bye came over and he said, "Miss Gorham, I understand you're not too happy." I says, "Won't you have a chair – a seat?" and so I presume the janitor, whenever there was a broken seat, he'd go down and bring up any. And so sometimes you couldn't even slide in between. Sometimes there was a high seat and a low desk, and students couldn't get in. And I said, "Well, maybe, this is more to your liking." Well, he couldn't get into that. And something was really...

PS: The point was proven.

PS: Okay. What was the hot lunch program like?

AG: When I came, we had no hot lunch program. We did have a PTA, and we had an oil stove, and then when they would do anything with the oil stove – they just had a sink down there, or when they'd flush the toilets, then we didn't have any water up on – I was the second floor. And the fountains – we couldn't drink. And then there was talk about putting in hot lunch, and of course, then, I – with me and nutrition and health, I raised the problem. I said, "Well," I said, "We can't have a hot lunch program unless the children could wash, because," I said, "That's one of the requirements I would insist on having." And I said, "They can't do that because," I said, "The pressure isn't enough pressure." And so I was on the PTA Board at that time, and I talked to Dr. Bunker, and of course, Dr. Sperzum, and finally they checked into it, and the thing was that the pipes that came in – the water pipes weren't large enough to accommodate that. So we had a problem. They started hot lunch.

Before that, we took our turns staying with staying with those that brought their lunch to school, and then supervising the playground.

PS: Approximately how many hours a week do you feel as though you worked, you know, at the school? How – what time did you have to be there in the morning? What time did school start?

AG: It started at 9 o'clock. I guess we were supposed to be there at 8:30, but I always came at 7 o'clock, because I had the school buses and everything, and there were many out our way, so I always – right after I had breakfast, 7 o'clock was when I came in.

PS: Mmmhmm.

AG: And then I – because I belonged to a number of things - I belonged to the Educational Association and that and the PTA and PTA Council, so then I usually stayed after – of course, I always went to the football and basketball games, and so on, so my Dad was feeling better at that time, so then I would stay, and so I would work at school, and then would go out for dinner, and go to the games or whatever it was.

PS: You put in a long day, huh?

AG: I always did.

PS: Do you recall what the pay was at that time?

AG: Yes. It was just \$100.

PS: A hundred dollars.

AG: I took a cut. I was getting more in Spring Lake Park.

PS: I see.

AG: And I took a cut, but I didn't have all that traffic, because I left at six o'clock in the morning, and I bucked all that traffic down at the Arms Plant.

PS: What kind of benefits did teachers get?

AG: When I came to Anoka, we didn't get any at all. Well, we didn't even have a teacher's organization. ... the first year I came here, they were battling. The AFT wanted to get in, so we were battling, and of course, I wouldn't belong to the AFT for the simple reason that I felt that we were smart enough to set up our own rules and regulations.

PS: Mmmhmm.

AG: And so finally we did get organized here the second year that I was here. And I was the treasurer – secretary/treasurer. And had all the job of getting all the

- correspondence and communications and so on, and getting organized.
- PS: What do the initials AFT represent?
- AG: Federation of Teachers. American Federation of Teachers.
- PS: Okay. And so it was about in 1948 that the Anoka teachers – the district organized or was it just Franklin School that organized?
- AG: Oh, no, no. It was the whole district, the whole school. But that was just the Anoka district. We didn't – we weren't organized. We didn't become Anoka-Hennepin until '54. I think it was '54.
- PS: It became Anoka-Hennepin.
- PS: When you retired in 1972, was that when your class size was at its peak. Was that when it was the largest, or...?
- AG: Oh, no. That was the smallest.
- PS: That was the smallest.
- AG: Yeah.
- PS: Okay.
- AG: I had – I suppose I had about 32 at that time. We always had more than what was required, but that was because they sent in wrong mistakes. They called the music teacher and the art supervisor and the librarian and the Phy. Ed. were classified as regular teachers.
- PS: If you were to step back in time, would you choose the same path – education – or would you be more firm in going down the path of nursing?
- AG: Well, I'm glad that I did teaching. I – of course, you know, I wasn't a popular teacher because they had to work, and that's what I was being paid for, and I came from a family that education meant a lot, and my folks always said that they wanted us to have more than they did, and they worked with us. Our education came before fun. Every night, we had school work to do. And another thing, too, our teachers were always invited into our homes. We were never allowed to come home and tattled and told what was going on. The folks always invited the teachers and found out what was going on and what we were doing.
- PS: Do you feel that in some respects the school, today and the teachers today are not fulfilling what they might? ...but just from your own viewpoint and your own heart, how do you feel about...? Because education has certainly changed; certainly changed today from, I know, when I was in school and even when my

children were in school. And I show a real concern for my grandchildren, who will soon be into school.

AG: Well, the first problem I had that I noticed here was when the parents wanted to come in and dictate to us what they wanted us to be teaching. And the thing was that I really feel that children have to have the basics, and I really feel – and of course, I was the one that started the parent-teacher conferences here, because I'd always had those before.

PS: Mmmhmm.

AG: And I always looked forward to that, and that just meant a lot to me, and I didn't wait until we had the parent-teacher conference. If I had any problem, I went right to the family to find out because I wanted to know if it was me – and of course, the fact, that finally we had here where we could get the records, so those records were passed down, so you knew what the child was doing before you got him.

PS: Well, Anna, do you have anything else that you would like to add? I've enjoyed this very much.

AG: I think I've talked too much. (Laughter)

PS: No, you haven't talked too much. It's been wonderful.

AG: I hope nobody has to hear this or read it.

PS: No, it's very beneficial, and I think that researchers – you know, youngsters today and their schools particularly have changed a great deal. Scholars in this area will be interested in this.

“Thank you very much.” I have appreciated this immensely.