Florence Atherton Dickey
GERTRUDE ATHERTON, FAMILY, AND CELEBRATED FRIENDS
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An Interview Conducted by
Emily Leider
1981

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

The importance and interest and circumstances of this oral history interview with Florence Atherton Dickey will be clear to the reader from the Interview History and the correspondence which follows. It has been a pleasure for the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library to accept and work with these exceptional tapes, taken and donated by a skilled and scholarly volunteer.

What would still exist only as donated tapes, available for listening to in The Bancroft Library, are now a usable memoir, thanks to the generosity of the Setzer Foundation, of Sacramento, California. The Setzer Foundation made a gift to the Regional Oral History Office for transcribing tapes of unusual interest from our Donated Oral Histories Collection, and the office was delighted to nominate Mrs. Leider's interviews with Mrs. Dickey. They have been transcribed, yet left in the original verbatim form, with corrections and additions inserted by the interviewer and interviewee.

We thank the Setzer Foundation for their foresight, and we thank Emily Leider for her insight!

Suzanne B. Riess
Senior Editor

March 1982
Regional Oral History Office
University of California
Berkeley, California
Interview History

I first met Florence Dickey in 1979, when I became interested in writing a biography of her grandmother, Gertrude Atherton. I approached her in a letter, after tracking her down through a reference in a Gertrude Atherton Bibliography published in *American Literary Realism* (Spring, 1976). With her husband, William Duvall Dickey, we met for lunch in San Francisco and Mrs. Dickey agreed to lend me her support and cooperation in my biographical pursuit.

During the ensuing years, a warm friendship developed. We went on several biography-related excursions, including a memorable one to Montalvo, which Mrs. Dickey had not visited in almost fifty years. It became evident to me that in addition to being a fund of information about Gertrude Atherton, Mrs. Dickey was in herself an interesting and unique individual whose experiences at the Duncan school and as a Hollywood and stage actress in the post World War I era would be of interest to others. Since Mrs. Dickey is a charming, lively and articulate conversationalist who has her grandmother's quality of agelessness, she seemed an ideal subject for an Oral History.

The interviews were conducted on two separate spring afternoons in my home in the Richmond District of San Francisco, in 1981. To prepare, we discussed some of the events she wished to cover and she made a list of these, as well as of some individuals who might be mentioned. She supplied the tape recorder, and I got the tapes.

For researchers interested in more information on Gertrude Atherton, I would suggest, first her autobiography, *Adventures of A Novelist* (1932). Charlotte McClure's Bibliography, mentioned above, is essential, and her volume in the Twayne Series on U.S. Authors (1979)

The Bancroft Library has the largest collection of Atherton papers. Other libraries with manuscript materials are the Humanities Research Center in Austin, Texas, the New York Public Library and the Huntington, as well as the library of the California Historical Society.

Mrs. Dickey has written an unpublished memoir of Gertrude Atherton that is in her possession. A videotape of a talk she gave on the Duncan School is owned by the Isadora Duncan Heritage Society (Mignon Garland, Director) of 501 Taylor St., San Francisco.

Emily Wortis Leider
March 11, 1982
Dear Mrs. Baum:

I would like to suggest that the Regional Oral History Office interview Florence Atherton (Russell) Dickey. She is the granddaughter of Gertrude Atherton and lived with Mrs. Atherton at various times. She attended the Elizabeth Duncan school and has interesting things to say about the differences between Elizabeth and her sister Isadora. She was an actress on the stage in the 1920s (David Belasco and Margaret Anglin are among the people she worked with or under) and in Hollywood during the Silent Era. She is now in her late 70s, lives in Santa Rosa, and works with her husband, William Duval Dickey, in the real estate business.

I have gotten to know her quite well because I am writing a biography of Gertrude Atherton. None of my interviews, however, are on tape. I think Mrs. Dickey's recollections will be of interest to others and should be available to scholars through the Bancroft. Should you agree, this is her address:

Florence Atherton Dickey
2320 Eastwood Dr.
Santa Rosa, Ca. 95404

Phone: (707) 545-2691

Sincerely,

Emily W. Leider

(Mrs.) Emily Leider
Dear Ms. Riess:

I have completed my review of the transcript of the Florence Dickey Interview, and am sending it on, with corrections, to her. She will in turn review and correct it, and mail it to you.

My compliments to the transcriber. She did a fine job.

Mrs. Dickey and I both look forward to receiving a copy of the completed transcript, when it is ready.

If any additional questions develop, don't hesitate to call me at home; my number is 752-3259.

With appreciation and Best Wishes,

Emily Leider
The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

Dated Tapes Collection

Regional Oral History Office

General Topic of Interview: Recollections of Florence Atherton Dickey

Date: April 29, 1981
Place: San Francisco

Length: 4 sides, ea. 30 minutes

Narrator: Florence Atherton Dickey

Address: 2320 Eastwood Drive
Santa Rosa, Ca.

Interviewer: Emily Leider

Address: 1520 Lake St
San Francisco

Relationship to narrator: friend; biographer of Gertrude Atherton (in progress)

Place: San Francisco
Date: Feb. 14, 1983

Occupation(s): Real Estate Salesman

Interview Data

Subjects covered, in approximate order, spelling out names of persons and places mentioned

Estimated Time on Tape

Side A

Estimated Time on Tape

Side B

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godfather: John Ward Maillard

sister: Dominge Russell

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Maehle Dodge, Maurice Sterne

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Sen. James Phelan

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Jane

Harriet

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Santa Rosa

"5 generation portrait"

-- Moulin Studios

death of Mrs. Atherton
Leider: I am Emily Leider. I am talking to Florence Atherton Dickey about her earliest recollections and her family. Florence, tell me about the house you were born in.

Dickey: I was born in a house. I don't remember the exact number, address, of it, but it was on California Street between Laguna and Buchanan in about the 2100 block.

Leider: What was the year?

Dickey: The year I was born was 1903, February 14.

Leider: And you had a city house and a country house at that time?

Dickey: Well, we didn't actually have a city house because when we came to the city we usually stayed in different places because we were never certain just how long we were going to be in the city.

We did have a house in Belvedere, up on the top of the island. I say "island" because when I was a child it was an island, and that piece of land was not filled in until later. But the house was on Golden Gate Avenue, on top of the hill, and we stayed there as long as we could in the summertime, usually going in either late March or early April and staying through sometimes November, even as late as that.
Dickey: So we were never sure just where we were going to be in the city. My mother and father usually rented a flat. Sometimes (I think in the beginning) they stayed in the St. Dunstan Apartments, which was an apartment hotel on Sacramento Street between Van Ness and Franklin.

Leider: What was their reason for coming into the city for several months?

Dickey: Primarily the weather, because my father commuted every day to San Francisco from Belvedere, and in the wintertime it was pretty rough.

Leider: How did he travel? Do you know?

Dickey: On the ferryboat. In the beginning there was a ferry from Tiburon directly to the Ferry Building, and then he would take the California streetcar to his office, or very often he would walk because he was a great walker. Then, later on, they put a temporary little ferry from Sausalito to Tiburon, so the ferry from San Francisco just went as far as Sausalito, and then there was a little one there that picked the passengers up and took them into Tiburon.

Leider: What was your father's job at this time?

Dickey: In the beginning my father worked for the Spreckels Company and then later on he was in the blueprinting business.

Leider: What was his full name?

Dickey: Albert Bierstadt Russell.

Leider: And tell a little something about his background.

Dickey: Well, my father's family, (my father's) mother and father, came from New Bedford, Massachusetts. His father had been a sea
Dickey: captain. His grandfather was also interested in the sea, and he was a whaler as well as a painter, and his name was Benjamin Russell.

My father's father and mother came to California around the Horn in, I would say, probably the early 1870s because my father was born in 1871 in Santa Barbara, and his mother carried him while they were on the ship, and he was born very shortly after they landed in Santa Barbara. While they were there they stayed with Mr. Larkin. His first name was--

Leider: Thomas?

Dickey: Thomas, that's right, who was then governor of California.

Leider: This is something that your father talked to you about as part of the family lore?

Dickey: Yes, that's right, and I also learned some more from some relatives in the East that wrote us and gave us some information.

Leider: And a little bit about your mother's family.

Dickey: My mother was born in San Francisco in 1879.

Leider: Seventy-eight?

Dickey: I think you're right. Seventy-eight.

Leider: I think so. And she was Muriel Atherton?

Dickey: That's correct.

Leider: And whose child was she?

Dickey: Her mother was Gertrude Atherton. Her maiden name was Gertrude Franklin Horn.
Dickey: My mother was my grandmother's second child. The first child was a boy, George, who later died when he was six or seven, something like that, and I believe he died of malaria.

Leider: I think it was diphtheria.

Dickey: Maybe you're right. You probably know better than I do!

[laughter]

Leider: [laughter] Anyhow, he died while he was being cared for by his paternal grandmother.

Dickey: That's right. You're right.

Leider: At the age of six.

Dickey: At the age of six. My mother was not much younger; I think probably only eighteen months or so.

Leider: Yes.

Dickey: So she was the only surviving child.

Leider: And she had been raised largely by the Athertons of Menlo Park?

Dickey: That's right, yes, she was. She was raised mostly by the Atherton family, and sometimes she spent some vacations with the Horn side of the family, but when she was staying with the Atherton family in Atherton she went to the Sacred Heart Convent down there.

Leider: Did she attend the one in San Francisco ever?

Dickey: I don't think it was here.

Leider: I see!

Dickey: I don't think it was here, though, because I vaguely remember when the one started in San Francisco on Pierce and Jackson Streets.

Leider: That's the same school that relocated here?
Dickey: Well, they still have one in Menlo. They still have one in Menlo.

Leider: I see. Your mother was a devout Catholic all of her life?

Dickey: Yes, yes, she was.

Leider: How about your father?

Dickey: My father was born a Unitarian, but not a practicing one, I would say. He never went to the Catholic church, but he had no objections to my mother bringing my brother and my sister and I up Catholic ourselves.

Leider: So you were raised Catholic?

Dickey: I was raised a Roman Catholic, right.

Leider: Did you go to Catholic schools?

Dickey: Yes, I went to two Catholic schools. The first one I went to was in Switzerland, in Montreux, by the name of Villa Miramonte. That school was founded by the nuns who had been put out of France in the last century, in the 1800s. They still wore black clothes but no head covering. It was run very much like a convent as far as the religion was concerned, and it was at that school where I made my first communion when I was about eleven; I guess I was then.

Leider: Was your grandmother in any way a part of your education at that time? Did she select the schools for you, or was it your mother's choice?

Dickey: I think the school was probably my mother's choice.

My grandmother was the one who instigated our travel to Europe, and we were supposedly going to be gone for two years, but then the war came along and we just stayed one year.
Leider: Your entire family was living in Europe?

Dickey: Just my mother and my brother and my sister and I. My father was in San Francisco.

Leider: I see. Let's jump back again to the beginning and some of your very early recollections in Belvedere.

Dickey: Well, the funny one, if you wanted that—[laughter] The earliest recollection I have of Belvedere was when my mother went to Europe with my grandmother; this would have been in 1905.

Leider: And your grandmother was living in Munich at that time?

Dickey: Yes. She had my mother go over and join her for a vacation, you know. I don't remember how long she was gone, but I was only two and my brother was five.

Leider: Your brother, George?

Dickey: My brother, George, yes, my only brother.

Leider: He's two years older than you?

Dickey: Three.

Leider: Three years older.

Dickey: So I was two and he was five. We were left in charge of my father, of course, and his mother, who was then living, whose name was Emma Hoyer Russell.

Leider: How do you spell the middle name?

Dickey: H-o-y-e-r.

And a nurse, an English nurse, whom we called "Nana," who was very strict but apparently very loving. However, I think she loved my brother more than she did me [chuckles] because I was so little and she couldn't take me around the way she could my brother.
So one time she decided to tie me to a tree while she took my brother down into the village of Belvedere. Some friends of the family apparently saw me and reported this to my father, who was, of course, horrified. Immediately the nurse was discharged while my mother was still in Europe, and my poor grandmother, I guess, had to cope with us until my mother got back. [laughter]

How long were you tied? Several hours?

Well, it must have been, because it was a long walk down to Tiburon, you know, where the town was. So it probably was at least two hours, maybe longer. I don't know. But I don't know whether I was crying or how anyone found me. But anyway, that's the way the story goes. [chuckles]

And you stowed away when you were age five?

Yes.

At sea? [laughter]

At sea [laughter], if you can call it that.

My father was a great sailor. In fact, he was very athletic and he used to walk miles every day and he loved to sail and he loved to swim. There was a sail race going on from Belvedere. A great many of the people that he sailed with had promoted this race to the Farallons. So he had this little tiny sailboat that just held one person, and I was dying to go on that sail with him, but, of course, I couldn't because there was only room for one person.

So I decided one morning, the morning that the race was to start--I got up very early and I went down and stowed underneath the bow of his sailboat, on top of a rope that was
Dickey: covered with creosote, which didn't smell very good. Then when my father got on board he, of course, didn't see me. But after we got just about past the Golden Gate, it got very rough and I felt a little squeamish, not having had any breakfast and smelling this terrific creosote. So I pulled myself out, and my poor father almost fell overboard. [laughter] He was so horrified. He said afterwards that he was sure that was the reason he didn't win the race. [laughter]

Leider: Was it the beginning of a great seafaring career for you, or was that it?

Dickey: That was it! I always loved the water and I loved to swim and I loved boats, and whenever I had an opportunity I would participate.

Leider: You were the godchild of a Maillard.

Dickey: Maillard. Right.

Leider: Which Maillard was that?

Dickey: That was John Ward Maillard, otherwise known as Jack, and he was my godfather. His wife's maiden name was Elizabeth Page, and the Page family came from South America, where my Atherton side of the family came from, and they apparently had known each other down there.

Leider: In Chile?

Dickey: Yes, in Valparaiso. In fact, there is a story that I have never taken the trouble to trace that says that the Pages and the Athertons were intermarried way, way back sometime, but I've (never gone into it.) But they were very good friends.
Leider: And he would officiate on ceremonial occasions?

Dickey: Yes, yes, he would, and their house was just across the road from ours in Belvedere.

Leider: What happened to your house? When was it sold?

Dickey: When we came back from Europe we didn't come back to San Francisco. We stayed in the East for about seven years, six or seven years, and it was during that time that my father sold the house. I had heard at one time who bought it, but I really don't—and I have never been in it. I've seen it from the outside.

Leider: It still stands.

Dickey: Someday I'm going to go ring the doorbell.

Leider: You were three years old at the time of the great earthquake. Do you have any recollections?

Dickey: Well, I remember. It seems to me that I remember. The Blandings had a house at the very point of Belvedere which overlooked San Francisco and from there—when the fire was going on, everyone gathered at the Blandings' point to watch the city, and I feel that I remember seeing the city in flames. In fact, I can see it in my mind's eye now that I'm talking. We had just come over to our country house in Belvedere a week before the earthquake, so we were very fortunate to avoid it.

Leider: And your grandmother came and stayed with you for some time right after that.

Dickey: Yes, she did, after that, (because) she was in Oakland and couldn't get to San Francisco. That's another story.
Leider: Yes. That has been written about.

Dickey: Yes, right.

Leider: Tell us something about her personality and how she responded to her grandchildren.

Dickey: Well, Mrs. Atherton, never having been around my mother very much when she was little—and, of course, her first child died so young that she never really developed any maternal qualities. When my mother was little, my mother was in boarding school most of the time, and Mrs. Atherton was in Europe, or in the East first, in New York, and my mother's Atherton grandparents were in charge of her most of the time. So she never developed any maternal qualities. Whether she had them or not, I don't know.

Leider: It wasn't important to her to develop them.

Dickey: No, no, it wasn't, so long as my mother was cared for. She didn't neglect my mother, but so long as she knew she was well taken care of, then she felt that she could leave her, which she did. Most of my mother's life she was left with grandparents or aunts or uncles or someone, but never alone, and Mrs. Atherton was gone for years at a time.

So when we were little, my brother and I, particularly my brother and I, if she'd come over and stay with us, she was usually writing, and we were told to be very scarce, stay out of the way and be quiet and not disturb her. As a consequence, we didn't really feel that she was a grandmother. So my brother first used to call her "my mother's mother" as
Dickey: a name. To her face he'd call her "my mother's mother" because she did not want to be known as a grandmother, because in those days women were not out in the public and she did not want people to think that she was an old grandmother.

So then this nickname was changed to just plain Mrs. Atherton, and all of her life and our lives we always called her Mrs. Atherton. I know a lot of people think it's funny, but it's just a name. I mean it was just like Granny or anything else, anybody else.

But then when my sister came along she was six years younger than I.

Leider: Dominga.

Dickey: Dominga, yes. That's the only time I have ever seen any real grandmotherly affection develop in Mrs. Atherton, because she used to rock my sister in a rocking chair, which she never had done with any of the other children, and we didn't resent it. I mean we all loved Dominga. She was so much younger than we, there was no competition. So she took it out on her.

Leider: Why do you think it was? Do you think it was because as she grew older she was more receptive, or was there some special chemistry between her and Dominga?

Dickey: Well, I think it was a combination of both. My sister was named for Dominga Begogne, Mrs. Atherton's mother-in-law, and she had written the story of Concha Arguello, and she was the founder of the Dominican Convent, and then she used that name Dominga in that. But
Dickey: that isn't why my sister was named that, though, you see.
That was just a coincidence. Then my sister went to the
Dominican Convent to school and later entered the convent.
Leider: Yes. So it's almost as if it had been foreordained that she
would have this destiny with that name.
Dickey: Yes, yes, it really did, because we always said that Dominga
was not of this world. She really wasn't. She was a beautiful
girl and she was very, very sensitive and she had lots of
admirers, but she couldn't give herself. She just felt detached
or something. I don't know. It's hard to explain. But she
had a calling, definitely, to go into the convent because she
was not of this world. She couldn't cope with the world; it
was too much for her.
Leider: And when she became a nun she was very happy in that?
Dickey: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, she was. She taught little children and
she is very fond of children.
Leider: At Dominican?
Dickey: At Dominican in San Rafael, yes.
Leider: And did the closeness between Dominga and Mrs. Atherton continue?
Dickey: Oh, yes. She used to go over and visit her with my mother at
least once a month and take other people with her, such as she
took Gertrude Stein, to visit her.
Leider: Yes. What was her particular feeling about you? Were you
considerably older when she began to take notice and take a
real interest in you?
Dickey: Yes, yes, that's true. Of course, she was responsible for having
me enter the Duncan School. Then when I came out to California
after I left the school and expressed a desire to go on the stage, which I'd always wanted to do, she became very much interested and she was influential in helping me.

Let's backtrack. What school were you in when you left to go to the Duncan School and why was that choice made?

Well, when we came back from Europe, my mother decided to enter me in the Sacred Heart Convent in New York where she had gone when she was of high-school age.

How old were you?

I was eleven. The school was tremendous and very overwhelming, and I was very unhappy in the school. I just couldn't relate to anybody. There was one girl who was the daughter of an actress. Her name was Maria Venterini and we became friends and somehow or other decided that we would just run away.

My mother was living on 116th Street in an apartment hotel at the time, and the school was on 133rd Street, which wasn't terribly far, but we had to walk through what was then Harlem and still is Harlem, but in those days it wasn't dangerous the way it is [now]. We just walked right out the front gate past the guard and he never even paid any attention to us. He didn't think that anybody would do such a thing. [chuckles]

Were you supposedly boarding in this school?

Oh, I was, yes. I was living there.

I see.

Oh, yes. I should have mentioned that.

When we arrived at the hotel, my mother was out, so we waited for her. When she came, of course, she was horrified
and the first thing she did was to telephone to the school and ask to speak to me. The nuns hemmed and hawed and they finally came back to the telephone and they said, well, they couldn't find me, I was probably out in the field somewhere, or made some excuse. Then Mother said, "She's right here with me," and she was furious because they hadn't missed me, which was probably over a space of maybe a couple of hours.

So then she took me back to the school, and Maria with me, and Maria's mother. They put me in a room they called public penance because everybody knew where I was, up in the rafters of the school, looking down on the playground. Well, that was the last straw. I couldn't stand it any longer, so I said I just couldn't stay there. I just couldn't cope with it.

In the meantime, Mrs. Atherton had heard about Elizabeth Duncan bringing these eight girls from Germany to escape the war. A friend of hers told her about the school and that it was going to be established in Croton-on-the-Hudson.

Leider: I see. You did not attend the school when it was in Europe.

Dickey: No, I didn't. No, I attended another one.

Leider: I see.

Dickey: No, I didn't even know about it then.

Leider: The school had been in existence for some years before they moved it to the United States?

Dickey: Yes. Well, Isadora and Elizabeth had pupils, were teaching dancing, but the school itself was finally established in Darmstadt and the building was built by the then grand duke of
Dickey: Hessejt. Isadora took the six girls that they had trained together, took them on tour with her, and those are the girls who kept touring with her until her demise. Then Elizabeth got eight other girls gradually that she trained in the school in Darmstadt and those were the girls that she brought to this country when the war started. The reason she was able to bring them was that she still had her American citizenship and the children were all underage.

Leider: Did Isadora, do you know? Was she still an American citizen?

Dickey: I think so, yes. I'm pretty sure she was. I don't think she ever relinquished it until she went to Russia.

Leider: And the girls spoke which languages, the other students?

Dickey: German. Of course, I had learned French when I was in the school in Switzerland, and when I came to the Duncan School in this country and no one spoke anything but German, I learned German pretty fast. [laughter]

Leider: Well, it was your grandmother Mrs. Atherton who decided that the place for you was the Duncan School.

Dickey: Right.

Leider: Why do you think she made this choice?

Dickey: Well, maybe she saw something in me that I hadn't seen myself. [chuckles] I don't know. But I was so miserable in the convent that it was—you know, I was just miserable! I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, I couldn't study, I was just floundering, and so maybe she decided that that was what I needed.

Leider: Yes. Well, had she seen Isadora dance before this, do you think?
Dickey: I doubt it. She may have in Europe, but I never heard her mention it. I really don't know for certain.

Leider: Do you think it was a fortunate choice?

Dickey: Very, very, yes. I was never so happy as I was in that school. Of course, it was very liberal and in those days it was considered—but some people thought that it was far too liberal.

Leider: What kind of academic instruction did you receive?

Dickey: [laughter] That was the joke! It was not very [pauses]—well, I should say, not very strict or not very routine.

Leider: Not formalized?

Dickey: Not formalized—that's the word—because at first, you see, there were only—well, there were only seven of the girls that were actually in school. The oldest one helped teach us physical education, that sort of thing, but she was not one of the school pupils. So I was the only American, as I said, and the first pupil, and we had one teacher who taught us everything—reading, writing, arithmetic.

Leider: Who was that?

Dickey: Her name was Miss Howe. (I don't know how) I remember.

Leider: Had she come over from Germany?

Dickey: No.

Leider: She was hired here?

Dickey: She was hired in this country and I don't know where they got her. I really don't know because I was so little then that it didn't make any difference.
Dickey: Then there was a German that she must have picked up in this country because he didn't come over with her, by the name of Hans Mueller, who gave us nature studies. And the school being situated in Croton—I don't know if anyone knows Croton, but it's a beautiful, beautiful spot.

Leider: In Westchester, is it?

Dickey: Yes, it's in Westchester County. It's on the Hudson. It's just above Harmon, and Harmon was the point in the railroad system where they changed engines. They changed the steam engine to the electric engine or whatever—diesel, I guess it was—that went into New York because they didn't want these big heavy engines going into the city. So Harmon was the point where they changed engines and Croton was right next to Harmon.

Leider: Did somebody donate the space for the school?

Dickey: Yes. Mr. Harmon, Clifford Harmon, whom the town was named after, was at that time of the Port Authority on Ellis Island, and Miss Duncan had to bring the girls through Ellis Island because they were foreigners, and they kept them there for several days, as far as I understand. While they were there, Miss Duncan made friends with Mr. Harmon. She didn't know where she was going to take these children, but she was one of those who knew that it would happen.

He had his own house as well as two smaller houses on his property that he used to rent to people in the summer for summer cottages. So he lent those two smaller houses to Miss Duncan to use for the school until they could find something larger. So we stayed there about a year.
Leider: What kind of instruction did she give you, Elizabeth Duncan?

Dickey: You mean dancing instruction?

Leider: Yes.

Dickey: Well, the general public doesn't know that Elizabeth Duncan had a fall when she was very small and injured her hip, so she never was able to dance herself, but I felt that she was to be very much admired because she taught all of the students from a semi-lying position on a chaise longue. So everything that the girls did was created through her instruction, but by words, not demonstration.

Leider: Did Isadora herself ever visit the school?

Dickey: Yes, she did. Yes, she used to come fairly often, whenever she was in the United States. Of course, as you know, she was all over the place.

Leider: Yes. And the school was in a way her dream too.

Dickey: Yes, right, absolutely. They had both always wanted to have a school and, as you know, it's not easy to establish a school unless you have a benefactor.

Leider: Did you always have live piano music for your classes?

Dickey: Yes. Oh, yes. Well, of course, there were victrolas in those days, but there was no such thing as tapes or anything of that sort. So we had a woman whom the Duncans had known in San Francisco. Her name was Elizabeth Mead. They had her go to New York when they came back to this country and she played the piano. She was not a very good pianist, but she was good enough for our mechanical work, our exercises and things like that.
Then later on a man who had been with the school in Germany, Max Mertz [spells last name], came over, and I think they arranged for him to come to the United States through Sweden. That was before we were in the war, but even so it was risky for a German to come to the United States. He was a pianist and a very good one, and he also taught us theory of the music, how to keep time and all that sort of thing. I learned whatever I've learned of the fundamentals of music through him.

Were you encouraged to do improvisations?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But they had to be okayed by Miss Duncan. I mean she wouldn't let us just go wild. You know what I mean. If it was what she thought was in keeping, yes, and she encouraged us.

What kind of performing did you do while you were a student at the school?

Well, at that time any children underage were not allowed in theaters without special permits. If a child wanted to play in a play, for instance, in a theatrical performance, they had to get special permission and could only work—

[end tape 1, side A; begin tape 1, side B]

[You were] saying that children were not ordinarily allowed to perform in New York theaters unless they had special permits.

Right.
Leider: Nonetheless you did do some performing with the school.

Dickey: Right. We performed at the Aeolian Hall [spells name] on 42nd Street, which was an intimate musical theater. We performed there and then we also—

Leider: Before the public, as the Duncan Dancers?

Dickey: Oh, yes, yes, absolutely, with a regular audience. And also at Carnegie Hall, which, of course, is still in existence, and the Town Hall, which I think was way downtown, if I can remember it.

Leider: Town Hall is in the 42nd Street area.

Dickey: Is it? I don't remember exactly. But anyway, those are the only three places that we were allowed to perform because it was not like regular theater, and the reason for the performances primarily was that Miss Duncan was always trying to raise money for the school, and that was the only way that she had to put the children before the general public to show what she was doing. Of course, we did have people come to visit the school and we would perform for them, but naturally we couldn't have as many that way as we could in the theater.

Leider: What was Mabel Dodge doing visiting the school? I know she used to spend time there.

Dickey: Yes, she did. She visited when we were in Tarbytown-on-the Hudson, when the school moved to Tarbytown, which was a beautiful estate built by a man by the name of Dulilea, and Frank Vanderlin, then a very prominent citizen in that area, who lived not very far from there up the river, bought the school, the building, the property, and lent it to Miss Duncan.
When the Duncan School was situated in Tarrytown-on-the-Hudson and after the U.S. had entered World War I, I was contacted by the son of a friend of my grandmother who was in the Secret Service branch of the U.S. Navy. I met him at my mother's apartment in New York City for an interview.

Our government had been tipped off that some U.S. secrets were leaking to Germany through someone in our school who was corresponding through Sweden. This Lieutenant wanted me to try to overhear conversations at dinners etc. and also try to intercept this man's mail. It just happened that our mail was delivered about the time we had our morning recess. On several occasions I sneaked down the hill to the mail box at the entrance to our property. Three different times I found letters addressed to this man and hid them in the lining of my suitcase until the next time I went home for a weekend.

Finally one day this man, who by the way was our music instructor, said he hadn't been feeling well and was going to New Mexico for a rest, which I found out later was a concentration camp where he stayed for the duration of the war.

I felt very proud that I had been able to serve my country in war time!

[Note: Mrs. Dickey enclosed this page containing "what I consider an interesting episode, which I neglected to include in the original interview." ]
Dickey: It was at that school, when we were there, that Mabel Dodge came to visit.

Now, how Miss Duncan met Mabel Dodge, I really don't know, but they apparently became very good friends. Later Mabel Dodge moved to Taos, New Mexico, and Miss Duncan went there to visit her. I had always said I wanted to go there someday, but I never made it until about two years ago. But in the meantime, poor Mabel Dodge (then Luhan) had died and so had her husband. So I never got to see her there, but I knew her when she was in the school.

Leider: And her son you knew also.

Dickey: Yes. As a matter of fact, when we first met Mabel Dodge, that's right, we were in Croton and she brought her son to the school there. [He] was then probably about fourteen, fifteen, something like that.

Leider: John Evans was his name?

Dickey: John Evans. He was by a former marriage. Of course, all the girls ohed and ahed because he was the only male around. [laughter] Everybody fell for him. But he was a very nice young man and he didn't stay in the school too long. How long, I can't really remember, but he was a very nice young man. I understand he died not too long ago.

Leider: That's right.

Dickey: But I never saw him after that.

Leider: And what are your images lingering of Mabel Dodge? What was she like?
Dickey: Well, she was a very, very strong person and she liked the public eye. She wanted to be in the public eye. Now, just what she was doing then, I don't know. Do you know what she was doing in those days? Have you ever read anything of what she was--

Leider: Well, she had a famous salon in New York and she was doing a lot of gala entertaining of interesting people, radicals and artists.

Dickey: That's right, yes.

Leider: She also had a romance going with an artist who was in some way connected with the school.

Dickey: That was Maurice Sterne, and he was living at the school at the time, and that's probably the reason she came there. Of course, at that time I didn't think about things like that! [laughter]

Leider: And I think she may also have been a benefactor of the school.

Dickey: Oh, yes, yes.

Leider: She was giving money.

Dickey: Yes, I'm sure she was. I'm sure she was. Of course, she was very well off and that's undoubtedly--but she stayed in a room right across the hall from where my room was.

Leider: Did you maintain friendships with any of your fellow students at the Duncan School?

Dickey: Well, one in particular. She was an Austrian, the only Austrian; the others were all German. Her name was Josephina Mostler and she lived in New York. As a matter of fact, when the school went back to Germany after the war, she came back to the United States and she went on the stage for a while. She was with Ziegfeld Follies for a while. Then she hurt herself and had to stop
Dickey: dancing, so she got a job. She worked for dePinna's for years and years, and every summer she would come out and visit us, and she died just two years ago.

Then there's another one, Anne, who lives in West Stockbridge.

Leider: Massachusetts?

Dickey: Massachusetts, yes. And she's the only one that I've kept in touch with aside from Josephina.

Leider: Did you go as a group, as a school, to watch some of Isadora's performances when she was in New York?

Dickey: Yes. Whenever she was in New York, we were given a box and everyone wasn't always able to go every time. So naturally we tried to be on our good behavior whenever we could [chuckles] to be sure that we were going, but we always had a box. It was usually at the Metropolitan Opera House.

Leider: And on one occasion you brought your grandmother with you to see Isadora dance?

Dickey: Yes, yes, yes. She went. I don't remember which performance it was, but she was dancing the "Marseillaise" at that time, which was quite spectacular.

Leider: What was her response?

Dickey: Well, she thought she was a very fine dancer, but she thought she went too far because she started to tear her clothes off during that performance and, of course, in those days that was--I mean you didn't go topless. [laughter]

Leider: But Isadora did. [chuckles]

Dickey: Yes, right. [laughter]
Leider: Well, was the rest of the audience scandalized, or was it just Mrs. Atherton?

Dickey: Well, I think some people were, yes, but I don't say the majority, no. But, of course, it was written up in the paper, naturally, and I'm quite sure that's why Isadora did it, because she wanted the publicity.

Leider: Carl Van Vechten was a great champion of Isadora, and he wrote a lot about her, and he was also a great friend of Mrs. Atherton. Did you meet him at this time?

Dickey: Yes, I did. Mrs. Atherton had a salon in New York every first Thursday of the month for several years. How long, I don't remember, but she had many celebrities at those salons, including Carl Van Vechten, yes. I do remember him. And H.L. Mencken. I have a list of names here somewhere, but I don't want to stop you. Go ahead. [searches for list]

Dear, oh, dear. I don't know where I have that.

Leider: That's okay. The salon was basically just an occasion for people of note to be brought together.

Dickey: Right. Literary people, artists, artistic people—people of interest, as my grandmother used to say.

Leider: And your mother was doing all the work on these occasions.

Dickey: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. She was behind the scenes and, well, she was also out in front, but I mean she was there to prepare for everything, to see that everything went right. Of course, in those days it wasn't a cocktail party. It was tea and sandwiches and that's about it, you know, cookies and things of that sort, but no hard liquor.
Leider: Well, Mrs. Atherton, your grandmother, was in print very critical of the "domestic woman," the "maternal woman," yet her own daughter became just such a woman, and she became the direct beneficiary of her domestic talents. How did she reconcile this conflict, or did nobody ever ask her? [laughter]

Dickey: No one ever asked her that I know of, but I'm sure it was something that she just pushed aside. She must have realized that it was essential for some people to have that job in the world and so she just accepted it, but she never made any comments one way or the other.

Leider: Was she respectful and admiring of her daughter?

Dickey: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, she was, and very considerate. Yes, she really was.

Leider: Your mother was a quiet and unassuming person.

Dickey: Yes, she was.

Leider: And her mother dominated her. Is that right?

Dickey: Oh, yes, very definitely, very definitely. That's the truth.

Leider: Was she bookish, your mother? Was she literary?

Dickey: Yes, she read a great deal. Yes, she did and, of course, Mrs. Atherton supplied her with everything available. But the thing was that I was not allowed to read most of Mrs. Atherton's books until after I was grown.

Leider: Why?

Dickey: This was my mother's direction. She considered that they were too worldly or too sophisticated, I guess you'd say.
Leider: This was her Catholicism probably.

Dickey: Yes, her upbringing. So it took me many years to catch up on reading Mrs. Atherton's books.

Leider: Did you read some books on the sly without your mother's knowledge and consent?

Dickey: Yes, yes, I did. Of course, the main one that I wanted to read was *A Daughter of the Vine* because that was considered so very far out, as we'd say today.

Leider: Yes. And that one you weren't allowed to read until you came of age and nobody was watching.

Dickey: [laughter] That's right, yes.

Leider: Well, you once told me that you felt that as you developed, your grandmother identified with you. Was that because of your rebellious streak?

Dickey: Could be, could be, yes, because I was definitely a nonconformist, and the Duncan School didn't discourage that side of me.

Leider: Yes. Was she afraid that it maybe had done too good a job and she wanted you to be a little more conventional and straight-laced?

Dickey: I don't know whether it was she or my mother, because when the Duncan School went back to Europe after the war was over and my family brought my brother and my sister and *back* to San Francisco, I was put in Miss Burke's School, which was--

Leider: The opposite extreme.

Dickey: Completely the opposite extreme! I hadn't had any, you know, regular grade-school education, so I floundered. I mean I was a senior in French and I hadn't finished arithmetic yet, so I
Dickey: was really between the devil and the deep blue sea! I stood that for just one term, from January to June, when I was just seventeen, and then I said to my mother and my grandmother that I couldn't go on to school that way anymore because all of my age contemporaries were way ahead of me in most subjects in school, and it's very frustrating for a child to feel, you know, you're way down here.

Leider: Yes. So that was the end of your formal education.

Dickey: That was the end of my formal education! [laughter] And I went to Miss Burke--the elder Miss Burke was still living--and I told her that I was going on the stage and that I wasn't going to finish school, but that it wasn't that I didn't like her school or her, but I just felt that the time had come. And she was very sympathetic; she really was.

Leider: When did you first know Senator James Phelan?

Dickey: Well, the first recollection I have of him was when we were in Belvedere, before we went to Europe. He used to come over occasionally to visit.

Leider: With Mrs. Atherton?

Dickey: Yes, with Mrs. Atherton. I think probably always with her. I don't ever remember his coming without her, but there were others there also, and it would be usually some sort of a party.

Leider: What was the nature of their friendship, as far as you could determine?
Dickey: Well, of course, when they came to Belvedere I was so little; I was only eight, nine, ten years old. I never thought anything about their relationship. As a matter of fact, I never thought anything about their relationship until [pauses to think] after I was married, I guess, because—and when we used to go down and visit them—

Leider: In Montalvo?

Dickey: Yes, to visit Senator Phelan in Montalvo, and my grandmother had her own suite of rooms there that they always saved for her whenever she came down. So then I began to wonder, but everyone always says, "No, there was never anything between them." So I really don't know, but there was a deep friendship, a very deep friendship. But beyond that—far be it from me to say.

Leider: Did you visit him when he was a Senator in Washington?

Dickey: Yes. That was the last year that we were in New York. He was Senator in Washington and he had a lovely house. I've forgotten the name of the street it was on, but not very far from the Capitol, and he entertained all the dignitaries. Mrs. Atherton took me down for a visit.

Leider: Did she herself go frequently, so far as you know?

Dickey: Well, she went several times, yes. How many times, I really don't know, but this time she took me. I don't really know why, whether I'd shown any interest or whether she thought it would be interesting for me, which it was, very interesting, because I met a great many—I mean Senators and the people. I didn't meet any—I don't even remember who was president in 1919.
Leider: Woodrow Wilson was president during the war.

Dickey: Yes, yes, I know. But was he still president in 1919? I guess he was.

Leider: Yes.

Dickey: But I didn't meet him.

But he [Senator Phelan] took us to the Senate building—it was not in session because it was in the summertime—and showed us all of the places of interest in the capital and then drove us around. It was a very, very hot session, I remember, and, of course, that was before there was any air conditioning. He took us in his limousine through Rock Creek Park and recited poetry to us to cool us off, as he said. [chuckles]

Leider: Would he be doing the driving while reciting?

Dickey: No, no, no. He had a chauffeur.

Leider: I see.

Dickey: No, no. In those days, people of that caliber, if you'd call it that, didn't drive their own cars; they always had chauffeurs. I don't think he even knew how to drive. My father-in-law, I know, never learned how to drive.

Leider: He had a driver?

Dickey: Yes.

Leider: Well, when you came back to San Francisco after all these years of Europe and New York, did you feel very much a stranger here?

Dickey: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. Everyone was very nice to me and I met a lot of relatives that I'd never met before and a lot of family I'd never met before.
Leider: Athertons and--?

Dickey: Yes. And Macondrays.

Leider: At that time you were meeting them for the first time?

Dickey: Yes. And Horns. My cousin Constance Horn, who was Mrs. Atherton's half-brother's daughter. Her brother, William Horn, had a daughter Constance, and she was about two years younger than I, and I met her for the first time.

Leider: What was the reason for becoming connected then? Do you know? Did they look you up, or did you look them up, or what was it?

Dickey: Well, I guess, my mother--probably people heard that we had come back, and when we left, you see, we children were so little that maybe I had met some of them, but it didn't register really, you know. I would never have known them if I hadn't been reintroduced to them.

So I met the Eyres, the Ted Eyres and the Atherton Eyres, and Jack Maillard. I do remember him because he lived near us in Belvedere and I remember that Maillard family when I was little, their children, but a great many of them I had never met before.

Leider: And you decided not to continue on as a student but to become an actress.

Dickey: That was my ambition, yes.

Leider: How did you go about pursuing this goal?

Dickey: Well, I discussed it with Mrs. Atherton. One time Margaret Anglin was in San Francisco in a play, and I don't remember what the play was, and my mother had her for dinner one night. Mrs. Atherton was there, and I was there, and I was introduced
Dickey: to her, naturally. So she gave me an entree to the Alcazar Theater, which was then run by one of the Elcos. I think it was Henry; I think he owned it. I don't know whether he owned it or leased it, but he was operating it anyway, and I was in one performance there.

Then, very shortly after that, Mrs. Atherton had gone to Hollywood to write for the movies. She had been put under contract by the then Goldwyn Studio.

Leider: She was one of the "Eminent Writers."

Dickey: That's right. She was one of the "Eminent Writers." She came up to San Francisco with Gouverneur Morris and Clayton Hamilton, I think it was, to visit, and she decided that maybe I would like to go in the movies. Well, of course, I had seen movies and at that time they were all silent, naturally.

Leider: Had any films been made of her books?

Dickey: By that time? No. This was in the beginning of the time that she--she was just working on them.

So she took me back with her and introduced me to the Goldwyn Studio. And Irene Rich I remember very well. Probably people today don't remember her, but she was a very well-known actress at that time, and she took me under her wing and showed me how to use makeup and a few things like that. But no one had any training in those days. You just kind of went into it, and the director told you what to do, and that was it.

Leider: Did you stay at the Hollywood Hotel?

Dickey: Yes, with Mrs. Atherton. Not in the same room. On the same floor with her.
Dickey: She would write every morning from about seven o'clock until noon and then that was her day; I mean as far as writing was concerned. She just wrote in the morning. But then when she was writing for the studio—part of the time she wrote over at the studios, I remember, because she bought me a Model T Ford so that I could transport her back and forth. I mean that wasn't the only reason, but that was one of the reasons.

Leider: You had already learned how to drive?

Dickey: I learned how to drive when I was in San Francisco, yes, and my cousin's car, I remember. In those days, you had to be eighteen to have a license and you also had to have your parents' permission. Mrs. Atherton said, "Oh, well, let's dispense with that." [laughter] So she said, "Just put down that you're eighteen. Nobody's ever going to check on it." So I did. For years I was a year older than I really was. [laughter]

Leider: [laughter] I see! She was concerned about her age, but not about yours!

Dickey: That's right! That's right! [laughter] So I used to drive her to the studio in the morning and then I'd stay over. I was in just this one picture that she wrote, which was originally entitled "Noblesse Oblige" and later changed to "Don't Neglect Your Wife."

Leider: She wasn't too happy about that change.

Dickey: No, no, she wasn't. Well, I don't blame her. It was a pretty awful title. And I don't even remember the picture. I don't remember the story. Someday I'm going to dig it up.
Leider: Did you get other offers to appear in other films?

Dickey: Yes. I was in several other films, just in very small parts, just to keep busy, because it was very difficult to get in, you know. I hadn't had any training. I was just a babe in arms. I didn't sing and, of course, the dancing that I did was not the kind of dancing that they wanted in the movies. So when Mrs. Atherton decided to leave Hollywood, when she got disgusted with it—

Leider: Why did she get disgusted?

Dickey: Because she would write a story and then they would just tear it to pieces when they finally produced it. She just got disgusted with their motives—not motives, but tactics—so she came back to San Francisco.

Leider: And she never was a lover of southern California anyhow.

Dickey: No! She couldn't stand the climate. There were some very nice people down there that she had entree to, like the Hancock-Bannings. You know, there's an old, old family down there, there's a park called Banning Park, and they had a place down in San Pedro also, which we would go down to for parties and so forth.

She did know a lot of interesting people down there, but that wasn't enough to satisfy her, and there weren't enough literary people. Most of the people who were writing for the movies—of course, Rupert Hughes and some of those were very well known—but they were not established there in Los Angeles. They just lived in temporary quarters. So it wasn't like New York or San Francisco.
Leider: Was Mary Roberts Reinhart somebody that you knew?

Dickey: Yes.

Leider: Were they friends?

Dickey: Yes, they were. She was one of the "Eminent Writers."

Leider: I know. And Elinor Glyn was writing for another studio, but she was there.

Dickey: Yes. She was writing—[pauses to think]

Leider: For Lasky?

Dickey: Yes, Lasky. And she also stayed at the Hollywood Hotel. Mrs. Atherton had known Elinor Glyn in England before she came to Hollywood, so they picked up a friendship, if you would call it that. I don't think they were intimate friends because they were entirely different types of people.

But Elinor Glyn used to have salons in her apartment at the hotel, and everybody went because she was such a character, and everyone had their tongue in their cheek when they would talk with her, you know.

Leider: Did she still have her red hair?

Dickey: Oh, yes. It was flaming. It was about this color. [indicates color]

Have you ever heard the story about Elinor Glyn? "Would you rather sin like Elinor Glyn on a tiger skin, or would you prefer to err upon some other kind of fur?"

Leider: Who was the author of this? [chuckles]

Dickey: I don't know! I never did hear. But she wrote—you know, she was right in the swing of that type of movie; I mean sensational sort of things. She had already written a book called Three
Dickey: Weeks, which made a tremendous hit in England, but it was very scandalous, or considered such. Then she wrote a story for the movies, which she entitled "Seven Days," and then the next one was "The Great Moment."*  

Leider: I see. [chuckles] Getting shorter and shorter.  

Dickey: [laughter] Yes.  

Leider: Do you have any recollections of Somerset Maugham at that time? I know he was there and that your grandmother knew him.  

Dickey: Yes, yes. I do remember him and I remember his companion, Gerald David-- 

Leider: Haxton.  

Dickey: Haxton, yes. I remember them both there as well as in San Francisco because they came to San Francisco to visit when I was up here for some reason; I don't remember why. But I remember him. Well, that was considerably later. Yes, I remember them there, and also Rupert Hughes I remember.  

Leider: He eventually wrote the screenplay for one of the adaptations of one of your grandmother's novels; I think Perch of the Devil.  

Dickey: You may be right. That I'm not sure of because I didn't keep track of that.  

Leider: Yes. Well, what were you doing besides acting these bit parts while you were in Hollywood?  

Dickey: Well, as I started to say, when Mrs. Atherton left Hollywood I moved in an apartment with two sisters who were friends of friends of mine in San Francisco. The oldest girl, Katherine-- Katherine Murphy her name was. They came from Spokane,
Dickey: Washington, and they had known Harold Lloyd. He came from up there also and they had an entree into Hollywood through him. So I moved in with these two sisters. The one sister was not an aspiring actress, but the older sister was, and so we took an apartment together and we would go job hunting together and became very good friends. So I stayed with them.

Leider: Well, you told me that you were driving some people around during Prohibition because you were too young to drink and they found you convenient.

Dickey: [laughter] This was when I was living at the Hollywood Hotel with Mrs. Atherton. That's right. Mrs. Atherton decided that she was too busy and not interested in seeing the sights, as it were, of Hollywood. Of course, this was during Prohibition, and there was a lot of nightlife going on, and Mrs. Atherton wasn't interested.

So she put me in the hands of three men whom she called "The Three Musketeers." One of them was Cedric Gibbons, who was the set designer for Goldwyn Studios at the time. The other one was Louie [Lewis] Sherwin, who had been a newspaper correspondent in New York, and he had come out and he was helping Mrs. Atherton with her scenarios. Then the third one was Joseph Cohn [spells last name], who was the business manager for Goldwyn. The two first ones, Cedric Gibbons and Louie Sherwin, were living at the Hollywood Hotel, and Joe Cohn lived somewhere else. I never did find out where he lived.

But anyway, Cedric Gibbons had a locomobile, and every night they went out on the town to various speakeasys and movie people's houses and all over Hollywood, just for fun, and so
Dickey: they decided to take me along. I didn't smoke or drink, and so they nicknamed me "The Virgin of Hollywood," and for short they'd always call me "Virgie." [chuckles] I was so innocent, I didn't fully realize what they meant, except they thought that I was a Roman Catholic and a good girl and that was about it. [laughter]

Leider: Were you still practicing Catholicism?

Dickey: Not very hard. Not very hard. No, I must say I wasn't. You know, when children leave the nest, as it were, and are on their own, very often religion is pushed in the background for the time being and then it comes back later.

Leider: Yes.

Dickey: But that's the way it was when I was in Hollywood.

Leider: Well, she didn't stay in Hollywood very long, but you stayed on.

Dickey: Yes.

Leider: Now, when did you get this part in the Douglas Fairbanks [Sr.] movie?

Dickey: That was [pauses to remember year] 1921?

Leider: I don't know.

Dickey: Yes, I think it was 1921. No.

Leider: What was the name of the film?

Dickey: "The Three Musketeers." This was made at Douglas Fairbanks' own studio in Hollywood. I've forgotten the name of the street, but anyway, he had his own studio. This girl that I was living with also had a part in this film. The part wasn't very large—I was just a lady-in-waiting to the queen—but it was pretty good for those days. It took quite a while to produce it.
Dickey: Adolphe Menjou was in the play also and he had a dressing room right across the hall from me. I was still able to speak a little French then, so we used to have fun speaking French back and forth. [chuckles]

I think that film took, oh, at least two months to make; I mean the parts that we were in. Of course, we weren't in the whole film. But I think it was about two months, and that was during the time that Mary Pickford was making "Little Lord Fauntleroy" in the studio right across the road from Douglas Fairbanks' studio, and they were married very shortly after that.

Leider: Did you get to know either of them?

Dickey: Well, I got to know him better than her. I did meet her, yes, but he was very, very friendly and exceedingly nice. As I think I mentioned to you once before, I ran into him at someone's party in Burlingame several years later and I went up and introduced myself to him. He said, "Of course, I remember you," and I was so flattered, you know, because all the people that he met. But he was very gracious.

Leider: And did it lead to other things for you careerwise?

Dickey: Well, I frankly was pretty disappointed or disillusioned or whatever you want to call it with the movies because there was no continuity to them, as far as I was concerned. You'd play a scene here, and then a week later you'd play a scene somewhere else, and then you'd play it back again in the first place, and you'd have to remember that your hair was just exactly the way it
Dickey: was the first time, even though there were people who kept track of all those things. But to me there was no continuity, plus the fact that there was no audience response, and to me that is the greatest, the most gratifying thing about the stage. Whether it's dancing or acting, you get a response from the audience, and sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not good, but--

[end tape 1, side B; end Interview #1]
Leider: It is June 17, 1981. Florence Dickey and Emily Leider are talking in San Francisco about Florence Dickey's life. We're picking up during the years when she was a starlet in Hollywood around 1919, 1920, and she had been talking about why she prefers live performance to movies. Despite your preference, you were still getting some movie parts?

Dickey: Yes, but I was almost at the end of that, about [pauses to remember year] 1921.

Leider: And when you were eighteen you married.

Dickey: That's right. I did. It was in August of 1921.

Leider: Whom did you marry?

Dickey: I married a writer by the name of Philip Dutton Hurn. He was a script writer for the movies, about nine years older than I.

So I went to San Francisco to tell my mother and family, and they had me stay there until it was time for the wedding, which was about a month later, and then we had the wedding in my mother's apartment in San Francisco.

From there we, Phil and I, went back to Hollywood to where he was working, and I wasn't in the movies at all then. In fact, I never went back to the movies after that.
Leider: Why?

Dickey: Well, in the first place, I became pregnant.

Leider: That's a good reason.

Dickey: [laughter] Then after my first child, Jane, was born the following year, I had her to take care of, so I became domestic for a while during that period.

We stayed in Hollywood for a couple of years and then--no, the year after that--then we went to Pasadena and rented a house there. I became interested again in my Duncan dancing; it kind of came back to me. Someone--I don't remember who it was--heard that I had been a dancer and asked me to put on a performance at the Maryland Hotel for [pauses to remember name]--oh, what was the name of that?--for charity. [tape off briefly]

Leider: You did this performance at the Maryland Hotel?

Dickey: That's right, and it was a history of the dance for a charity ball.

Leider: And you were the show, or you had a whole troupe?

Dickey: Well, yes, I had some others that I taught to be the background, as it were, and then there were other performances, and then I did a tango with someone. It was sort of a variety thing.

Leider: And you did Duncan dances that you remembered from when you were at the school?

Dickey: Yes, yes, I did. It was the first time I had done any since I had left the school.

Leider: And you taught the other dancers?

Dickey: Yes, yes. Of course, it was very short notice as far as what they were taught was concerned.
While we were living in Pasadena, it was during the time right after the murder of William Desmond Taylor, who was a famous actor in those days. He had been associated with Mabel Norman, who was also a famous actress. During that period, he was murdered and it was never discovered who murdered him. In fact, I don't think to this day they ever found who the murderer was.

Mabel Norman was suspected, of course, and another person who was suspected was Mary Miles Minter, who at that time was in the movies, and her mother was promoting her to be a second Mary Pickford without too much success, but some. Her mother was very anxious to hide Mary because she was a suspect in this murder case.

Hide so that nobody would know where she was?

That's right. So a friend of hers and ours, Lewis Sherwin, whom I mentioned earlier, a man who was considerably older than she but took an interest in her, had asked Phil and me if we would be willing to take her in to stay with us to keep her from being observed, or questioned, I should say.

This house that we had was on a fairly decent-sized piece of property. There was an orange orchard attached to it; I mean, part of the property.

It was discovered by some newspaper person that Mary was living with us.

Did you have any idea how?

No. You know how newspaper people can [chuckles] dig things out!
Leider: How long had she been living with you already when this was discovered?

Dickey: Not very long. Maybe a couple of months. They would come to the door and ask if Mary Miles Minter was there, and I would say, "No, she [doesn't] live here," and they'd hide out in the orchard to see if, you know, she would come out. So she just buried herself in the house for weeks at a time, and they finally got tired of it, but I was very, very tired of it! The only advantage [chuckles] that she was to us was that when we went out she would babysit for our little girl. [laughter]

But she was completely irresponsible, had never been taught to do anything. Her mother deliberately wanted to keep her a baby as much as possible. She was twenty-one years of age at that time, we found out later, but as far as the public was concerned she was only eighteen or nineteen or something like that.

Leider: Do you think she was innocent?

Dickey: I think she had something to do with—I didn't mention that the reason that William Desmond Taylor was murdered was because he was supposedly involved in a dope racket at that time. We found, after Mary left staying with us—we had a bookcase in the living room, built in, and we pulled out some of the books to read, and behind the books were vials of dope that we certainly hadn't put there.

Leider: Heroin?

Dickey: Yes.
Leider: Oh!

Dickey: So I think she must have been taking it, or hiding it for someone, or what—I don't know. I was so young at the time that "dope" to me was just a great, big, horrible word, you know. I didn't realize what it involved. I mean, I just thought of it as simply medication. That's enough of that.

Leider: Why did she leave? Do you know?

Dickey: Well, her mother wanted her to go back into the movies, and the scare had worn off. I mean, the excitement and the notoriety had sort of worn off.

Leider: And were you pursuing your stage career?

Dickey: Not in Pasadena. We all—Phil particularly wanted to go back to New York because he thought he'd have a better chance publishing what he was writing.

Leider: Which was screen scenarios?

Dickey: No, he was also writing short stories.

Leider: And did Mrs. Atherton ever read any of his work?

Dickey: Yes, she did.

Leider: Did she take any interest in it?

Dickey: Not especially, because she wasn't too fond of him. He didn't strike a note with her, as it were. She was nice to him, but that was about as far as it went.

As I say, he wanted to go back to New York, but, of course, we didn't have enough money at that time. Consequently, we were trying everything we could think of to make money. There was a magazine at that time called Life, which was just a little small
magazine, and they had a picture in it to be named, and there was going to be a prize for this, whoever named this picture correctly.

A drawing? An illustration?

Yes. It was a drawing of a man standing in the middle of a room with one woman on one side and another woman on the other side. I don't know where the idea ever came to me, but I sent in the title, "East or west, which is best?" And we got a notice that we had won $400. Of course, that was the most exciting--$400 in 1923 seemed like $4,000 to us, really.

So with that money we went to New York and stayed there for a while, and that was when I wanted to go back on the stage.

What kind of roles were you able to get?

Ingenue, nothing.(better.)

Do you remember some of the plays?

Yes. There was one play that was written by J.P. McElroy, who also wrote comic strips. I don't know whether you have ever heard of any of them or not. Anyway, he wrote one called "The Potters," which was a typical midwestern American family scene, and I had a small part in that, and it became very, very popular. As a matter of fact, it ran for nine months, which was marvelous.

Also, a very amusing episode happened while I was playing in that play. I was only in the first and second acts, and there were three acts to the play. Well, one night one of the young men had forgotten to bring his tuxedo tie, which he wore in the last act. There was a little men's shop down the street which
stayed open in the evenings sometimes; I think particularly Saturday nights. So he asked me if I'd mind going to the store to buy him a tie, which I did, and when I got back to the theater I discovered that I'd lost my purse. I left it in the shop.

So I didn't know how I was going to get home. So I went—the subway station was at 42nd Street and Broadway, where I was to take the subway to go home. I lived on 163rd Street at that time. So I went up to a policeman in the middle of Times Square and asked him if he would lend me carfare to get home and told him my plight, and he was very nice. I said, "All I want is a nickel," because that's what the fare was in those days. He said, "Oh, no, you might need more, since you lost one purse," so he gave me 25¢, which I gratefully took.

The next day was Sunday, and theaters at that time didn't play on Sundays, so I had to wait till Monday to reimburse him. So when I went back to the theater for the play on Monday night that same officer was there, and I went up and held up traffic [laughter] to go in the middle of Times Square to pay him back his quarter. And he put his arms around me! [laughter] And really that was a highlight in my life because I thought, imagine, when I look back on it, going up to a strange policeman in the middle of Times Square! If I hadn't been as young as I was, I'm sure I would never have had the nerve to do it.

Well, what were your choices?

I didn't have any.

Walking home?
Dickey: That would have been too far. [chuckles]

Then after that I was in another play that was written by John Kirkpatrick called Charm. That also happened to be at the same theater, which was a coincidence because it had nothing to do with the first one.

Leider: What theater was it?

Dickey: It was the Plymouth Theater on 45th Street, just off Broadway.

I had a small part in that play, and I was also given the opportunity to understudy the lead, which was very exciting.

Leider: Under the name Jane Atherton?

Dickey: Oh, yes, yes. I kept my Jane Atherton name for the stage.

Leider: What we didn't talk about before, this reminds me, was why you had taken that name in the first place.

Dickey: Oh, yes. The reason I took the name of Jane Atherton was my grandmother Gertrude Atherton's idea when she took me to Hollywood in the first place, because she figured that the name Florence Russell was not very attractive to the public, which is true. So she--

Leider: Well, Lillian Russell didn't do too badly.

Dickey: No, she didn't. That's right. [laughter] But anyway, she thought it would be best for me, and also she felt, I think, that it would be helpful to me to have her last name as far as, you know, advancement was concerned. So she gave me the name of Jane Atherton and also introduced me as her niece rather than her granddaughter because, as we all have known in the past, she did not like to be reminded of her age. So I went all through my career as Gertrude Atherton's niece. So that was very amusing.
Did you ever get to play the lead in *Charm*?

Yes. I've forgotten how long it ran in New York, but it ran for quite a while, and then it went on the road to Chicago. The girl who was playing the lead in New York left the company, and they gave me the opportunity to play the lead. So I went to Chicago with the company and played the lead there for—I think it ran about three months in Chicago, and that was when my uncle Ashton Stevens came to see me.

He was the theater critic for one of the Chicago papers.

Yes, he was the dramatic critic for the *Chicago Tribune* for many, many years.

And he was married to Gertrude Atherton's half sister, Alise.

That's correct.

Alise Bwell Horn was her name originally.

That's correct, yes. She had died, and Ashton had remarried a girl, Katherine Krug, whose family were the ones who founded the Krug champagne, quite a bit younger than he, but a very, very nice girl. They had a son, young Ashton, because he didn't have any children by his first wife.

Yes. He always seems like such a witty man. Some of his reviews were—

Oh, he was very—he had a marvelous sense of humor! He had been a drunkard at one time, as well as his wife, his first wife. They both took what was then called the Keela Cure, which was head-quartered in Chicago, or somewhere near there, and he was cured. This was—when I was playing in Chicago, it was during Prohibition, and several people said to me, "Oh, you're married to that Ashton Stevens, who's a drunk!" And I said, "Maybe he was, but he is no longer!"
Leider: [They said,] "You're married..." or "You're related..."?

Dickey: Related. I said "married." I beg your pardon. Related. I said, "He certainly isn't." This person said, "Well, I was at a party not long ago, and Ashton was there, and he had a big flask in his pocket, and he was just having a high old time."

I said, "You know that he was a perfect gentleman," and whenever he went to a party during Prohibition, he did carry his flask for his friends, but he never used it himself. People thought that he was intoxicated because he was always the life of the party, but he was perfectly sober.

Leider: And he had been originally a drama critic for the San Francisco Examiner, I believe, at the time he married Alice. Alice

Dickey: That's correct. That's correct. Yes, he was.

Leider: So he wrote a review saying what? He wrote about Charm and said, "I can't say anything good about this young woman because she's my niece." Something like that?

Dickey: Yes. And [he said,] "If I condemn her, they'll say that I'm prejudiced." [chuckles] But he was very nice, and he sent a lot of his friends to the theater to me, and he was very pleasant.

Leider: I know that he and his wife had been friends with Mrs. Fiske. Way back when, did you ever see her perform or--?

Dickey: I met her one time. I met Mrs. Fiske, but I don't think that I ever saw her perform. I'll be perfectly honest. I wish I could say I had, but I'm sure I would have remembered it if I had.

Leider: This was Minnie Ma^ern, who was a very famous actress.
Yes. A very famous actress, yes. Mrs. Atherton had some pictures of her somewhere. I don't know whether—did I ever show you any? I'm not sure.

I've seen photographs, but not yours.

What about Ina Clare? She was also a friend of Ashton, wasn't she?

Yes, yes, she was. She was a friend of Ashton's, and she was a friend of Mrs. Atherton's too. Mrs. Atherton admired her very much.

Yes. But this was later on, when she was living in San Francisco, or was it at the time when you were—?

No, it was in New York that Mrs. Atherton knew Ina Clare, yes. Of course, she's still living in San Francisco.

I know.

I haven't seen her. I've never tried to look her up. I should sometime.

Now, you were living in New York in the mid-'20s.

Right.

And Mrs. Atherton was sometimes living there as well.

Yes, yes, she was. Oh, yes.

Now, this was after Black Oxen, her sensational novel about rejuvenation, had been published and a film was made from it.

Yes. Correct.

Let's talk a little bit about what was behind Black Oxen. What was the Steinach treatment, so far as you understand it?

It was a series of injections in women.

Hormone?
Dickey: Hormone. And in men it was a transplantation of glands, which was quite a different treatment from the women's treatment.

Leider: Was that the so-called monkey gland?

Dickey: Well, that's what they called it, yes, but I don't know what they were. Some people say they were pigs, and some say they were monkeys, but I don't really know what they were.

Leider: Did you know at the time that there was an autobiographical basis for Mrs. Atherton's novel, that she was writing from her own experience with this treatment, because she herself had undergone the Steinach treatment?

Dickey: Yes, but she never admitted to the public that she had undergone the Steinach treatment. No, she never, never--

Leider: Until later. In her autobiography she does.

Dickey: That's right. Oh, yes, yes. But even at the time that Black Oxen was published she didn't admit that she had taken it herself. I don't know why she didn't, but she wanted to keep that a secret for a while anyway.

Leider: Did you notice any difference in her as a result of the treatment?

Dickey: No, I didn't really because she was always so prolific and always so interested in everything that was going on that I don't think it made any difference in her appearance because she was always very youthful looking anyway. I would see her spasmodically, you know, but she always had a lot of interesting people around her, and she was always concerned about what was going on in the world as well, in the literary world as well as the world in general. So I can't say that I really noticed any difference in her.
Leider: Did you ever meet her publisher at that time, Horace Liveright?

Dickey: Yes, I met him. I'm pretty sure he was at one of her receptions that she used to have the first Thursday of every month when she lived on 116th Street, and he was there. I'm sure I've met him, yes.

Leider: Did you meet Dr. [Harry] Benjamin, the doctor who had administered the Steinach treatment to her?

Dickey: Oh, yes.

Leider: At that time?

Dickey: Yes. Oh, yes, I did. I met him. Now, let me think. It wasn't when she was on 116th Street. That was after we moved back to San Francisco and then when I moved back to New York the second time, after I was married, when I met Dr. Benjamin, because it just so happened that at that time Phil and I were living on 83rd Street just off Central Park West, and Dr. Benjamin was living just two or three blocks from us. He had just come over to the United States with his wife, Gretchen, and we used to go there and see him. My husband, Phil, was fascinated with him. Of course, his treatments were then so very, very new and controversial.

Leider: Yes. And he was an endocrinologist?

Dickey: Correct. Yes, he was.

Leider: And he was particularly interested in sex-related subjects?

Dickey: Yes.

Leider: I know he later did transsexual research.

Dickey: Yes, yes, he did. He was interested in transvestites. I know whenever he'd come to San Francisco years later he would always
ask my brother, George, to take him to Finocchio's because he was fascinated by the men who played the women's parts, and he'd stay there for hours and hours and watch them, and he met several of them.

And I think he did perform surgery eventually.

Yes.

I was told he performed surgery on Christine Jorgensen.

Oh, he did?

Yes.

Yes, I had heard that. You're right. That's right. He did.

Yes, he did.

Well, he was a very, very interesting man and he, as far as we know, should be—what did I tell you?—ninety-six by now. I think last January was his ninety-sixth birthday.

And Mrs. Atherton became very attached to him, quite dependent on him.

Oh, very! Very! Oh, very! Yes.

She wrote to him constantly.

Yes, yes, absolutely. Whenever he came to California—he used to come. Until the last three or four years—four or five years, I guess—he came to San Francisco every summer because he had an office in San Francisco. He didn't like the New York summer climate, so he had an apartment here in San Francisco. In the beginning his wife used to come with him, but toward the end she didn't. She had an ailing mother and she didn't like to leave her, so he would come by himself.
So we **always** saw him, no matter where we were. When we lived in the country, we'd come in to the city and pick him up and take him out for lunch to our place in the country. And he **still**—I mean, I talked to him on the telephone as recently as last winter. He's a very fine man, and he was loved by every member of our family.

Yes, I can see why, having met him.

Oh, you met him?

Yes. Now, during these years that you were living in New York, you took a **vacation** in Bermuda?

Right. My husband then, Phil, wanted to go to Bermuda to do some writing. So we had an opportunity to rent our apartment in New York. We were then living on 57th Street East. So we took our little girl to Bermuda. I think we were gone about three months. It was in the wintertime, from about January or February, March, April, May—somewhere around in there.

We knew someone who was a purser on the ship that went to Bermuda. I don't even remember the name of the ship, but that doesn't matter. If a child was four years or older, they had to pay half fare, but if they were under four, they didn't have to pay any fare. So the purser suggested to us, "Well, just say she's three instead of four." So we did. She was very small for her age anyway and didn't eat much, but it was kind of a cheating thing to do. However, it was suggested to us; it wasn't our idea.

One morning after breakfast, Phil and I left the table, and she hadn't finished her breakfast yet, so we left her there for a few minutes, and then we were going to come back and pick her up.
Dickey: When we came back, there was a man sitting at the next table who'd gotten talked into conversation with Jane, and with a perfectly straight face he said, "Hmm. Your daughter just told me a very interesting story." I said, "What was that?" He said, "I asked her how old she was, and she said she was three, but she said, 'You know, the funny thing is, I was three once before.'" [laughter] She couldn't resist, because she knew she was four and she wanted everybody else to know it. [laughter] But this man--. I nearly sank through the floor, I was so embarrassed. I said, "Well, she hasn't been four very long," and I passed it off with that, but he got a big laugh out of it. [chuckles]

Leider: And while you were in Bermuda was when you met Eugene O'Neill.

Dickey: Yes. Eugene O'Neill at that time had bought a beautiful old castle right on the water, with a moat around it, which he used for his studio, and he lived in another building that was adjoining this place. Apparently this building had a lot of history to it. I don't remember what it was, but it was in the days of pirates and all that sort of thing.

He was then married to the woman who was the mother of his two children, Shane and Oona, who later became Mrs. Charlie Chaplin.

At that time, Eugene O'Neill was on the wagon. You know, he was a very famous drunkard, if you want to call it famous [chuckles], and he would periodically go on the wagon, because Oona was then three, and when she was born, right there in the house where they lived, he was on one of his drunks, and he didn't know that Oona
was born until two weeks later. He had locked himself up in his room with a case of liquor, or more, and didn't even know the child was born until

Leider: Who told you this?

Dickey: Maybe Mrs. O'Neill. She probably told me. I don't remember.

Leider: Did you get to know her fairly well?

Dickey: Yes, yes, I did. She was a very nice person, very nice.

We had a New Year's Eve party while we were there, so we were there from January--December, I guess. Anyway, we had a New Year's Eve party, and he said he would come provided we didn't serve any liquor, which was quite a request.

Leider: Yes, for a New Year's Eve party. [chuckles]

Dickey: For a New Year's Eve party. So we decided—he said—because he'd leave right after New Year's Eve. So we had a big punch bowl with nonalcoholic punch in it, and everybody--

Leider: Oh! Did you have any guests?

Dickey: Yes. Well, I was going to say, the only reason that everybody came was because they wanted to meet Eugene O'Neill, the people who hadn't already met him, I'm sure!

Well, promptly, five minutes past midnight, Eugene and his wife left the party and went home, and the rest of us decided to go into town because our house was, you know, around in the residential section. I don't think it's true still, but at that time the only means of transportation was bicycles. So we all got
on our bicycles in evening clothes and rode to the Hamilton Hotel and spent the rest of the night on the town, making up for the time that we didn't have anything to drink [chuckles], and came home at daylight. But that was all on account of Eugene O'Neill.

Leider: Famous New Year's Eve party. [chuckles]

Dickey: Yes. Okay. I guess that's about all about that.

Leider: Okay. You were divorced from Philip Hurn in--

Dickey: Not from New York. Then we came back to Hollywood.

Leider: [surprisedly] Oh! Why?

Dickey: Well, Phil wanted to come back to get into the swing again, so we came back to Hollywood in about 1926, I guess it was. [pauses to reconsider year] Twenty-seven, I guess it was. Yes. We came back to Hollywood, and Hollywood was still the same ratrace as it had been before, and I didn't want to go back into the movies because I had never really liked them anyway. It was just too much of a ratrace for me to take.

It reminded me of the story that Mrs. Atherton told me one time, which was so true, that the reaction to people in Hollywood is like going through the wine caves in Italy, and when you come out you become intoxicated from the fumes. That's what Hollywood did to a great many people, including myself. I behaved very badly when I was living in Hollywood because everybody else was. It was just an artificial atmosphere. And my husband behaved badly. And everyone we knew behaved badly.

Leider: You mean wild?
Dickey: Yes. I just couldn't stand it. It was during Prohibition, of course, and everybody was drinking this horrible denatured alcohol, and it just was a terrible atmosphere. It finally struck me that I just couldn't stand it any longer, so I wrote to my mother and asked her if I could come to visit with her for a while and bring my daughter, which I did, and I never went back.

Leider: Had she known about your life style while you were back in Hollywood?

Dickey: I don't think so. No, I don't think so.

[end tape 2, side A; begin tape 2, side B]

Leider: You left your husband, left the Los Angeles area, Hollywood, and with your daughter you came back to San Francisco, and you tried to get jobs back on the stage immediately?

Dickey: Yes, I did. I went to see—well, it was, as a matter of fact, through Mrs. Atherton. Margaret Anglin was visiting her at the time, visiting San Francisco, and she had her for dinner one night, and I met her. She knew Henry Duffy—that was how it happened—and told him that I was anxious to go back on the stage, and at that time he was in charge of the Alcazar [Theater].

Leider: Hadn't Margaret Anglin helped you get your initial roles several years earlier?
Dickey: Yes, yes, she did. Yes, that's right, when Henry Miller had the Alcazar. That's correct.

So I went to see Henry Duffy, who was a very, very nice man, and he told me that as soon as an opening came he'd let me know.

So in the meantime I wanted to do something. So Senator Phelan very kindly introduced me to A. Gump, the original owner, who was blind.

Leider: Had he always been?

Dickey: Well, for many years he was blind. He walked around the store with a cane, but he knew the store so well that he could tell whether you were there or whether you weren't there. [laughter]

Leider: Each piece of jewelry, he could tell?

Dickey: Yes, he knew all of it. So I got a job in the jewelry department, which fascinated me, and I learned a great deal about jade, but unfortunately I didn't have enough money to buy any at that time. I wish I had!

Leider: Didn't you get special discounts?

Dickey: Yes, you did, but jade, you know, was never reasonable.

Leider: Yes.

Dickey: But I learned a great deal, and it was a very interesting experience. I told Mr. Gump at the time that I was hoping to go back on the stage and that when I had the opportunity, when the opportunity came along, I would leave. He said he understood; that was perfectly all right. Well, at the end of however [many] months it was, and I got the call from the Duffy Players—
Leider: Where was that theater?

Dickey: The Alcazar.

Leider: Where was it?

Dickey: It was on--what's a block down? McAllister? One block from Geary Street. Or is that O'Farrell?

Leider: O'Farrell?

Dickey: O'Farrell. It was right around the corner from the Geary and the Curran, between Powell and Mason. Then later Henry Duffy moved to the Geary Theater.

But anyway, when I got this call to go to be interviewed, I did it during my lunch hour from Gump's. Mr. Duffy said to me that they were going to put on a play with Post called The Masquerade the next week, and this was, say--I think this was a Friday, and he wanted me to start immediately on Monday. So, of course, here I was, you know; I had to give Gump's notice, or felt I should.

Anyway, I was so excited over this, naturally, that the rest of the afternoon just kind of disappeared, and my aunt, Mrs. Macondray Moore, had invited me to a cocktail party that afternoon, that Friday afternoon.

Leider: How was she your aunt?

Dickey: She was my cousin really. Her brother was Atherton Macondray, whose mother was--[tape off briefly]

Leider: Mrs. Macondray Moore recommended you for--

Dickey: No, she had a cocktail party for a cousin, Atherton Macondray, who was in the navy. He had just graduated from Annapolis, and he was going to be married; he was going east. So she, Mrs. Macondray
Dickey: Moore, had this party for him for a going-away party and invited me to go to the party.

Well, the party was in her apartment house on the corner of Fillmore and Broadway. My mother at that time lived on Green Street between Steiner and Fillmore. Up at the top of the hill of Broadway and Fillmore was where that cable car, that steep cable car, went down the hill to the Marina, and the number three Sutter street car came up, and you'd transfer from the number three Sutter street car to the Fillmore cable car to go down the hill to where my mother lived. That's the way I went home every night, and this was the transfer place.

I was so excited and so tired, I didn't know whether I wanted to go to the party or not. So I said to myself, "If the cable car is waiting when I get off the number three, I'll go home to my mother's, but if it's not there I'll go to my aunt's cocktail party." So I went to my aunt's cocktail party, and that was where I met my future husband, William Duval Dickey.

Leider: That was destiny.

Dickey: That was destiny. Oh, yes, absolutely!

Leider: And he's also related to the Macondrays.

Dickey: Well, his sister, Alice, was married to young Fred Macondray, who was this Mrs. Macondray Moore's nephew.

Leider: And was he living in San Francisco, your future husband, Mr. Dickey?

Dickey: Yes, he was living in San Francisco. He had been married previously in the East, but he and his wife came to California to live, and they had a daughter who was just four months younger than my
daughter by my first husband. He had been divorced for about a year and a half at that time, when I met him, and he gave me a big rush. [laughter] We had to wait a year before we could be married because I had just gotten my first decree two weeks before this. [brief interruption as telephone rings]

Leider: What kind of work was he doing?

Dickey: His father had been in the meter business in Baltimore, Maryland, and he had founded the American Meter Company for gas meters, and he decided that California needed some of these meters that they manufactured because they were different. They manufactured meters out of tin, and most of them had been made out of cast iron that were used by other people. So he came to California and established a west coast branch of the American Meter Company called the Pacific Meter Works. My father-in-law, my future father-in-law at that time, was the president of the company, and when he retired shortly after we were married, my husband was put in charge of the west coast office.

Leider: And by that time he was your husband?

Dickey: By that time he was my husband, yes.

Leider: So what happened to your stage aspirations this time?

Dickey: Well, they sort of evaporated. I did play in that play with Guy Bates Post and in one other called The Big Pond, which was another very light ingenue sort of a story. I played in those two plays in San Francisco at the Alcazar. Then after I became engaged to Bill, or at that time--and I still do at home always call him Duval; in fact, all the family called him Duvall. The reason I
Dickey: call him Bill now is because in business he prefers to be
called Bill because Duvall is a little confusing to remember.

But then I became interested in something that I never
thought I would, and that was the Children's Theater Associa-
tion in San Francisco. I was interested in it not just from an
acting point of view, but for what they were doing for children,
teaching them to understand the theater, and it was for that
willing reason that I was/to play, because I'd always said I'd never,
never play in amateur plays [chuckles] because they are quite
different from professional. However, I played in several plays
that they put on that year. I can't remember the names. Oh,
there was Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and The Secret Garden, and
several of them. I also helped with production as well. It was
interesting, and it kept me occupied. Then after we were married
I did play in some of those also for a while.

Leider: Did you visit Montalvo from time to time?

Dickey: Oh, yes. Senator Phelan was always so gracious and loved to
entertain. Mrs. Atherton used to go down there quite frequently,
and he also invited my husband, Bill, and me on many occasions to
go down there for lunch parties. He'd have, oh, Helen Wills
and the Charlie [Charles] Fays and the Downey Harveys and Noel
Sullivan.

Leider: Noel Sullivan was his nephew.

Dickey: Yes, that's right. He was.

He really had very entertaining parties, and he did do one
amusing thing one time. I'll go back just for a minute. When
I was living in Hollywood the second time, he came to visit my
first husband and me unexpectedly one day. The door bell rang
and there he was. I nearly fainted because--of all places to
see him without notice! [chuckles] So he came in, and we
offered him a drink, and he said yes, surely, he'd like to have one.

Well, this was again during Prohibition, and all we had in
the house was straight alcohol which we had not made into gin.
We had to disguise it. I had some prune juice--I'll never
forget--in the refrigerator. I used prune juice and lemon juice
and the white of an egg, and shook it up--you know, we used to
make cocktails in cocktail shakers--and shook it up in the cock-
tail shaker to disguise the flavor of the alcohol. Of all
people to serve anything like that to! [laughter]

[laughter] How did he respond?

Oh, he thought it was delicious! In fact, the reason I wanted to
tell that story was that later on, after I was married to William
Duval Dickey, we went to a party one time and spent the weekend
at Montalvo. Before the cocktail hour, Senator Phelan took me
aside and he said, "Florence, I want you to show my butler how you
made that cocktail when I was visiting you in Hollywood."
[laughter] I'd never told him, of course, what was in it.

So I went out in the kitchen. He'd had the same butler for
a long time, and I knew him, you know, quite well, and he was
a jolly soul. So I went out in the kitchen, and I told him the
whole story because I thought he'd be amused, and I said, "See
what you can do to make it taste something like that!" I told
him about the prune juice, and he had ingredients in the kitchen
that he could, you know, fake.
So for the whole gathering of people—oh, he must have had fifteen or twenty people for dinner that night—he served these cocktails, and he went on and expounded [chuckles] about how I'd taught him how to make [them]! Of course, I never told the guests! [laughter] It would spoil the whole story!

Well, was this his permanent address at this time, ?

No. Well, he lived there a good deal of the time, but he had—his sister, Miss Phelan, lived on—was it Washington Street or was it Jackson?—facing Lafayette Park. [pauses to remember street name] Washington Street. [She lived] in a large house, a yellow brick house. I don't remember the address, but it faced Lafayette Park. His sister lived there, and he also lived there when he was in town. I think that was his only residence in the city. His sister never married.

There used to be many parties there. In fact, I showed you some pictures that were taken at Christmas parties they had. Oh, you never saw so many people! [They] entertained very lavishly and very beautifully. I don't know what's ever happened to that house. I'll have to go by sometime.

Who was Mrs. Downey Harvey? She spent a lot of time at Montalvo.

Yes, yes. Well, she was sort of the official hostess for him.

Even though she had a husband and a house elsewhere?

Oh, yes. That's right. She lived in an apartment in San Francisco; I can't remember just where. Her husband, Downey Harvey, was one of the old-timers in San Francisco, and his family had something to do with building the early railroads, as I remember.
Dickey: Mrs. Harvey was a very independent woman, and she went her way and her husband went his, although they were perfectly friendly. But they didn't always like to do the same things.

So Mrs. Harvey—well, I think you could call her unofficial hostess because whenever he'd have parties he would call on her to arrange the number of people that were going to be there and what menus to have and that sort of thing. She enjoyed doing it, and she enjoyed his company, and she was a very intelligent woman.

Leider: What was Mrs. Atherton's relationship to her? Could you discern?

Dickey: They were very good friends, very good friends. In fact, people used to say that Mrs. Atherton and Mrs. Harvey were his two girl friends. [chuckles] But Mrs. Harvey was usually there, if she was in San Francisco, whenever there was any entertainment going on.

Leider: Yes. Did she have a room there the way Mrs. Atherton did?

Dickey: Yes, yes, she did. She had her own quarters there. Sometimes Downey Harvey, her husband, went down, but not too often. I don't remember him being around very much. He spent most of his time at the Bohemian Club.

Leider: As I understand it, your mother was living in the house on Green Street, which had been given to her by Mrs. Atherton.

Dickey: Right, right.

Leider: And she lived there with her son, your brother, George.

Dickey: Right. And my sister.

Leider: And Dominga, your sister.

Dickey: Yes.
Leider: And when did Mrs. Atherton move into that house?

Dickey: Well, she didn't move into that house until about a year before she died.

Leider: I see. Not until the very end.

Dickey: No, not until the very end. It was very difficult to get her to move out of the apartment because she wanted her independence, but she had fallen and broken her hip, and it was very, very difficult for her to get around. So my mother gave her her room, which was on the second floor. My brother's room was in the front on the second floor, and my mother's had been in the back, a large room overlooking the bay, a very pretty view. So she moved Mrs. Atherton in there, and then my mother went upstairs on the third floor and took the room that my sister had had, because by that time my sister was in the convent.

Leider: Your sister had become a teaching nun. Is that correct?

Dickey: Correct, yes, yes. She had gone there to school from—

Leider: To Dominican.

Dickey: Yes, to Dominican Convent in San Rafael. She had gone there to school and graduated and then went on to take a teachers' course at the convent, but just before she took her final vows she developed a tumor on her brain.

Leider: Oh! She was in her twenties still?

Dickey: Yes, she was still in her twenties. She couldn't have been more than about twenty-four, I guess. Very, very tragic. Yes, it was, because there had never been any symptoms before that I knew of anyway. So then that ended her career, and she spent the rest of her life in the hospital at St. Joseph's in Stockton, where she died.
Leider: What was your brother doing, George?

Dickey: My brother was in real estate. He had done several things earlier in life, but then he became interested in real estate, and he was in an office on Union Street with Hill & Company for a while, for a good while, as a matter of fact. He did quite well in real estate.

Leider: And he would drive your grandmother home every night after dinner?

Dickey: Well, Mrs. Atherton didn't like to go out to dinner parties. She'd go to lunch parties and teas, but she wouldn't go out at night toward the end of her latter days. So my mother had dinner for her every night, and my brother went over to Mrs. Atherton's apartment on California Street, picked her up, and drove her to my mother's house, and then after dinner took her home again, every night, every night for I don't know how long, several years.

Leider: And your grandmother was the president of the San Francisco branch of P.E.N.

Dickey: Right.

Leider: An organization for poets, editors, and novelists.

Dickey: Right.

Leider: But the parties would be given by your mother at Green Street.

Dickey: Right.

Leider: Did you attend any of these?

Dickey: Oh, yes, yes, I did, several of them, and one in particular when I remember—well, I don't think that was a P.E.N. party, though, when Gertrude Stein was there.

Leider: It was.
Dickey: That was a P.E.N.?

Leider: Yes.

Dickey: I wasn't sure whether that--she and Alice Toklas. She also took Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas over to the convent to visit my sister when she was over there. I'm sure that must have created a furor! [laughter]

Leider: Yes. Well, it impressed Gertrude Stein because she wrote about it in her autobiography.

Dickey: I haven't read her autobiography. I must read it.

Leider: In the second volume.

Dickey: Yes, I'm sure it's good. [chuckles]

Leider: So you remember this kind of entertaining, literary parties.

Dickey: Yes.

Leider: And your brother would be the bartender.

Dickey: That's right, that's right.

Leider: Janet Lewis, the novelist, told me that she attended a party there.

Dickey: Yes, yes, she did. I vaguely remember meeting her.

    Well, she had several of those parties, but they were always at my mother's house because Mrs. Atherton's apartment wasn't large enough in the first place.

Leider: Do you remember Dobie?


Leider: He was a close friend of the family.

Dickey: Very close. Yes, he was. He was a very fine man. Yes, I haven't thought about him lately.
Leider: He was a writer of historical books about San Francisco.

Dickey: Yes, that's right. That's right. I have several of them.

Leider: And I think he wrote short stories.

Dickey: Yes, he did. Yes, he did. He never married, not to my knowledge. I don't know whether he ever had been a ways back, but he never married. He was a very fine man.

Leider: I think we should say something about your other two daughters.

When were they born?

Dickey: Bill's and my oldest daughter was born in October of 1933.

Leider: This is Araminta.

Dickey: Her name is Araminta Duvall Dickey, and she's now married and has three children and lives in Rio Vista.

Then four years later we had a second daughter, Barbara Lee Dickey. The "Lee" is after Bill's family because they were related [to] General Light from Henry Clay's "The Declaration of Independence", descended from Robert E. Lee. She is the youngest and is married and also has two children.

Leider: And she is a painter.

Dickey: Yes, she is an artist, which is just beginning to come out to the fore now.

Leider: Yes. And her professional name is her married name.

Dickey: Yes. Barbara Jacobsen. Her husband is a very fine artist. Well, she was married before and divorced, and now she's married to this artist, who has done a great deal to help promote her or bring her talent to the fore, I should say.

Leider: Yes. And when did you move to Santa Rosa?

Dickey: We moved to Santa Rosa—well, first we moved to Walnut Creek in the latter part of 1948. We moved there because my husband and
Dickey: our youngest daughter, Barbara, had very bad sinus conditions from the fog in San Francisco. So the doctor suggested that we move to a drier climate, which we did. We went to Walnut Creek first, and Bill (or Duval) commuted to San Francisco, continued to commute to the city for a while. Then, after that, we moved over to Brentwood.

Leider: Where's that?

Dickey: Way in the eastern part of Contra Costa County. It's a farm community. Then he became interested in real estate while we were over there, and that's when he started doing that.

Our children, our two youngest, went to school over there. Araminta was in high school, had just graduated from grammar school; that was it. The first two years of high school we sent her to the Bishop School in La Jolla, and then the second two years she finished at the high school in Brentwood and graduated from there.

Barbara went to a grammar school in Knightsen, which was a little town just outside of Brentwood, where we were living. She graduated from that school there, the eighth grade, in Knightsen, which was a fascinating little school. There was a woman who was a dedicated teacher, just absolutely dedicated. She was the principal and taught the seventh and eighth grades. The children were from all walks of life—farmers' children, Okies, Arkies, all mixtures—which was quite a contrast for our children, but it was very good for them to mix with these different type of children.
Dickey: I spoke to one of the mothers of the children one day. We were talking about nationalities, and I said to her, "Well, on my mother's side I'm part Spanish." This woman turned to me, and with a whisper she said, "No one would ever know it." I said, "I'm proud of it!" Well, she was thinking of the Mexican laborers who worked in that area as, you know, as farm-hands and so forth, but I wouldn't be [chuckles] downed by that. It was really amusing.

Then Barbara went to the Bishop School herself for two years and then came back and graduated in Antioch, where we moved later.

Leider: And you started selling real estate yourself.

Dickey: Yes. After Barbara graduated from high school and went to the University of California, where Araminta had also gone, I wanted something to do. So Bill talked me into getting a real estate license, which I didn't think I could ever do because I'd been out of school too many years, but in those days it was much easier than it is today. I don't think I could pass an exam today. So I dabbled in it and kept busy in his office.

Leider: I want you to tell the story about the attempt to have a multi-generation portrait of you and your daughter and her--

Dickey: Son.

Leider: --son and Mrs. Atherton.

Dickey: Yes.

Leider: What happened with that?

Dickey: Well, we had always wanted to have a five-generation picture because my oldest daughter was married while we were still living in San Francisco to the son of some old friends of ours. His grandfather was Jack Maillard, and we'd known the family for a long time.
Anyway, her husband had enlisted in the army, and he went overseas to Korea, and she became pregnant while he—well, before he left, I should say. [chuckles] She had her first child while her husband was still overseas, and it was a boy; Grendel Temple Bridgman, Jr.—he was. When he was about two years old, we all decided that since he was the first child of the fifth generation of the family living, it would be nice to have a photograph of all five generations, including my grandmother, my mother, myself, my daughter, and my grandson.

Well, my mother broached the subject to my grandmother, and she hit the ceiling. She was still vain enough that she did not want anyone to know how old she was, which was sort of ridiculous, but she had this stigma, and we couldn't talk her out of it.

So what we did [was] we had a nephew of my husband's who was working for Moulin at the time, the photographer, take a picture of the four generations. Then we found a picture of my grandmother which had been taken very recently, and he superimposed that picture in with the rest of the four of us. Mrs. Atherton never knew that we had that picture, but if we hadn't done that we never would have had one!

Yes. So she was vain about her appearance and about her age.

Oh, very! She didn't mind being photographed singly, but she would not be associated with—

All those generations.

Not as far as the public was concerned. I mean, the family, yes, but not as far as the public was concerned.

Do you remember what kind of service there was when she died?
Yes. She died, and she had said she never wanted to have an open coffin. My mother and the rest of us went over to the mortuary the night before to say some prayers, and they had the coffin open. My mother was furious, and so were the rest of us, but there was nothing we could do about it; it was too late. There was a procession of people who came in to view the coffin afterwards, and when I walked past it I wouldn't look because I just do not like open coffins because the people never look like themselves anyway, and I wanted to remember her the way I had remembered her.

Do you remember who spoke at her funeral? Was it a minister or a priest?

Yes, it was a minister, but I don't even remember who it was. It was not a church ceremony. It was in the mortuary, and I don't remember. I think it was Gray, if I'm not mistaken. Then she was buried down at Forest Lawn and cremated.

Which had been her specified—

Yes, that was her wish. My mother and the immediate family went down there, and there was a little service in that chapel, as I remember now, but I don't know who conducted it. I don't remember.

And she was ninety, close to ninety-one.

Yes. She died in her ninety-first year, in June, and she would have been ninety-one the following October.

I remember reading in a letter—after Senator Phelan died in 1930, eighteen years before she died--she was in New York when he died, and she was so upset that she said she would never come back to California.
Dickey: I know it did upset her because he was California to her.
Leider: Yes.

Dickey: And his funeral was something, a procession up—what's the street that St. Ignatius is on, St. Ignatius Church?
Leider: Masonic?

Dickey: Masonic? I guess it is. Well, there was a procession up Masonic Avenue. I remember so well. It was absolutely tremendous. It looked as if all of San Francisco was there.

Leider: But she wasn't.

Dickey: No, she wasn't. No, she wasn't. She didn't come for it. Well, she didn't like funerals either.

Leider: I know. It was a taboo.

Dickey: Yes. Well, I don't like funerals myself. I never go to them unless I absolutely have to. I think it's for the people who are left; it's not for the person who died.

Leider: Definitely.

Dickey: And I think most of them are archaic, tearjerkers, trying to upset people or get their emotions all stirred up.

Leider: Well, I think we can bring this to a close. Thank you very much.

Dickey: You're very welcome, and I hope it turns out all right.

[end tape 2, side B; end of Interview #2]