

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH Edna Dieman

CONDUCTED BY Roby Kesler

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Miss Edna Dieman was born in Cedar Rapids in the early part of this century. It was her older sister's experience that gave Miss Dieman her interest in dance, along with her mother's great influence to understand the arts.

Miss Dieman shares her philosophy of dance and gives the background of Dieman-Bennett Dance of the Hemispheres that made it what it is today. Memories of great dancers abound from her studies in London, Paris, and Spain and highlight the years she taught and learned in New York. Miss Julia Bennett also gives some background into the Midwest's involvement with the Regional Ballet Association and the Dieman-Bennett archival collection of costumes, artifacts, and historical material concerning dance around the world.

INTERVIEW TOPICS
CEDAR RAPIDS: THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1--When were you born? Where?
- 1,12--How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
 - What are your parents' names?
- 1--Where did you go to school?
 - Are you married or single?
 - Did you raise a family? How big?
- 7,12,19,25-26--What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?
30-36

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

1. Transportation

- Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
- 8 --Trolleys (the Interurban)
 - Horses and First Automobiles
 - Mud roads and the seedling mile
 - Hunter Airport and the first planes
 - Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- 10-34 --Newspapers
 - Radios
 - Advertising
 - Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

- 4 --Motion Pictures Majestic Theatre
 - Cedar Rapids Parks
 - Dances
 - Carnival Week
 - Chautauqua
- 11--Community Theater
- 11--Little Gallery
- 10--Symphony Orchestra
 - Circus

Dieman-Bennett Studio & Dance of the
Hemispheres--25-26, 30-31, 32, 35-36

- 2,3--Greene's Opera House
 - Amusement Parks (Alamo)
 - Camps

19--Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)

13--Paramount Theatre

2. Famous Characters

- Cherry Sisters
- 10-25 --Grant Wood
- 24 --Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
 - Marvin Cone
- 23-24--Isadore Duncan
- 23-24--Bill Shirer
- 4-5--Pavlova
- 11--Ruth St. Dennis

3. Lifestyle
 - Life before air conditioning
 - Winter Activities
 - 2--Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
 - 2,3--Clothing
 - Toys
 - Saloons/Taverns
 - Farm Life
 4. Family Life
 - Household Help
 - Women's Roles
 - 2,3,5,13--Childrens' Activities/Behavior
 - Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)
 5. Ethnic/Minority Life
 - Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
 - Indians
 - Segregation of Blacks
 - Jobs Available
- C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community
1. Education 16,17,28
 - 1,2-3 --Cedar Rapids Schools
 - 6,8,9,26 --Coe College
 - Mount Mercy College
 - Cornell College
 2. Government
 - City Services
 - Streets/Roads
 - Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)
 3. Medical 1,5
 - Hospitals
 - Patient-Doctor Relationship
 - Broken Bones
 - Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
 - House Calls
 - Home Delivery of Babies
 - 32--Regional Ballet Association
 - 35--Museum of Art

- 4. Business and Economy
 - Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
 - Local Brewing Companies
 - Retail Businesses /Department Stores
 - Professions
 - Banking and Finance
 - Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
 - 20 --Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses) Montrose Hotel
 - Farmers Market
 - Mills on Cedar River
 - 12 --Buildings Erected
 - Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
 - Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)
 - 6 --Dance classes in home no longer in existence
- 5. Attitudes/Values 14, 30-31, 35-36
 - Children/Discipline
 - Sex/Petting
 - Charity
 - Divorce
 - Work
 - Working women, Voting Rights for Women
 - Patriotism (World War I)

D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community

- 1. Catastrophic Events
 - Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
 - Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
 - Bank Closings (1933)
 - Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
 - Public Library Murder(1921)
- 2. National Historic Events
 - Womens' Suffrage
 - World War I
 - Roaring 20's
 - Prohibition
 - Great Depression
 - 21 -- WWII

Interview with Edna Dieman
Date of Interview: 26 June 1985
Interviewer: Roby Kesler
Transcriber: Hazel Storm

RK: This is an interview with Miss Edna Dieman on June 26, 1985. I am Roby Kesler, who has the privilege of interviewing her, Miss Dieman, who has given so much to this community culturally and given it such vitality.

And we're going to start and find out quite a bit about her. For instance, Miss Dieman, let's go back to when you were born, and where, and where did you live, and tell me about your parents.

Dieman: I was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and my parents--my father was born in Milwaukee and came to Cedar Rapids. My mother came from Germany--my mother and aunt came from Germany. It was quite different at that time as I remember my childhood--Madison School, and I think that's where the police station is now, it's in that area.

And the interest that I had in dance--I had an older sister who was very tall, and the doctor recommended dance. And, of course, she went to dance, which is quite different than what it is now.

RK: That's just what we want to hear, about how different it is now. Did you have more than the one sister?

Dieman: I had two sisters, an older sister and a younger sister.

RK: But, really, it was the younger sister who was responsible for this great interest?

Dieman: The older sister.

RK: Miss Dieman, before we talk about the dance, because we are going to talk about the dance a great deal this afternoon, let's go back to where you lived in Cedar Rapids, your address. Do you remember that?

Dieman: Yes, yes. B Avenue, N.W., and there was a small triangular park in front of our area, and the 4th of July really was spent with neighborhood celebrations, rather than the vast celebrations that we have now.

RK: Did you have your own firecrackers and your own punk?

Dieman: Yes, yes.

RK: Did you sit on the curb as I did and light your firecrackers and throw them into the street?

Dieman: Well, we did that on our front porches.

RK: On your front porches, um hmm. When you said that Madison School was very different then, can you tell me what you wore to school for instance? Like, you probably wore long black socks--stockings?

Dieman: Yes, and rather the style of middy blouses and pleated skirts.

RK: Oh, yes, navy blue.

Dieman: Navy blue, and white for very special.

RK: And would you remember recess and all that at Madison and some teachers that had an influence on you?

Dieman: Strange, I recall only one teacher; and I must bring this in at this time because the Shakespeare Players from England came to Cedar Rapids and appeared at the Green's Opera House. And my mother also asked that all of us be excused--the three of us be excused--to attend. This caused some opposition.

RK: In the school?

Dieman: In the school. But this one teacher said she felt that it was very, very right with my mother's background, that we have an understanding of the arts; and she was very, very happy to introduce us into that phase of, shall we say, school excuses.

RK: This tells quite a bit about your mother. She was a great catalyst for your interest in all the arts.

Dieman: Definitely--my mother and aunt both.

RK: And was your mother musical when she - ?

Dieman: She appreciated music. She hadn't had a strong musical background, but she spoke to us of the many times that she and my aunt would walk miles in Germany to hear a Bach concert.

RK: And you benefited from this?

Dieman: Definitely.

RK: Do you remember Green's Opera House?

Dieman: Oh, yes.

RK: Tell us about it. Everyone wants to know about Green's Opera House.

Dieman: There's a very good picture of Green's Opera House in the Paramount Theater in the Artists' Room. And it had red plush seats, and I graduated from high school there.

RK: So did I.

Dieman: Did you, too?

RK: Yes.

Dieman: It was a very wonderful occasion.

RK: Oh, of course, it was. And you wore a white dress.

Dieman: Oh, definitely, white, um hmm. No flowered dress--it was a white--it must be white.

RK: And did you go to any other performances there besides this?

Dieman: Oh, any performances that were given in the classics, we always attended. And then I don't know how many remember that many years ago we had a Majestic--I think it was called Majestic Theater--in Cedar Rapids. And that's where I saw Pavlova.

RK: Oh, you did.

Dieman: Absolutely. I saw Pavlova in the Majestic Theater [possibly 1914].

RK: Tell us about it. That's exciting.

Dieman: That was one of the most exciting things! I remember my parents telling us that we were to see a very, very great performance. And we anticipated this for weeks, and I shall never forget it.

RK: How old were you, Miss Dieman?

Dieman: I must have been about, I would say, in the eighth grade, apparently, about that time, I think. When I think back of what has transpired, I think it must have been about eighth grade.

RK: Did your whole family go?

Dieman: Oh, yes.

RK: Your father?

Dieman: Oh, yes, we all attended with great anticipation and great love.

RK: And did you sit in the balcony? Do you remember where you sat?

Dieman: I'm trying to remember. I think there was a dress circle--I think there was a dress circle.

RK: A dress circle?

Dieman: You know the balcony which - if you went to the Metropolitan now, you'd sit in the loge. And it had a proper little stage in it. Yes, but we were very close, we could see--the advantage of seeing was very good.

RK: That was really your first great dancer, then, that you had ever seen. It would be, wouldn't it? Cedar Rapids was fortunate to have had Pavlova come.

Dieman: Yes. Many, many times before in vaudeville, we did have good exposure to dance, but not on a classic basis.

RK: Oh. Your mother put the emphasis on the classics, didn't she?

Dieman: Definitely.

RK: Oh, I'm so glad you told us this. Now, do you have any other memories like this? Because this is exactly what we want to hear about.

This background, Miss Dieman, about your mother, explains a great deal about you. Now, you had this wonderful support of your mother and her interest in the classics. Not every child has this privilege and opportunity. Did you say the other side of the family wondered about girls having lessons? Tell about that.

Dieman: Many times the family members felt that the emphasis on the arts was a little, as they said, a little overemphasized. But my mother and aunt said, no, it was very, very important that we have a good basis in the arts. And she chose our instructors with great care.

RK: Did you have any regular dance lessons--other than going back to your sister--the doctor recommending the dance for your sister because she was tall and it was for her posture?

Dieman: Yes, and these classes were held in a beautiful home that was situated between now where the Masonic Library is and the Ausadie Apartments. In that area was a beautiful white home, and we had our dressing rooms on the second floor, and on the third floor was a large ballroom.

RK: Whose home was it, do you remember?

Dieman: I don't remember. It's strange; I was trying to recall. I may be wrong in thinking it was Jackson. But she would be dressed in diaphanous black robes, and she would saunter around the outskirts of the room, greeting people who would come in to visit while those of us who were dancing would waltz and do our little dance steps. I remember that very clearly.

RK: How old were you when you went there and had your first lessons?

Dieman: If I can recall, it must be around six or seven--very young.

RK: And your sister was with you?

Dieman: Yes, and she was about nine.

RK: And this was - what kind of dancing was it?

Dieman: It was rather an aesthetic quality, with no emphasis on technique--purely rhythmic enjoyment of the rhythms, which is very important. We're beginning to realize that more now in our dancing--go back to basic rhythms. And then my sister noted that a young teacher at Coe, in the Physical Education Department, I think her name was Florence Roe, would give classes on Saturday afternoon to those interested in dance. So that was my next exposure.

RK: Do you remember the teacher's name there on First Avenue?

Dieman: I'm trying to recall. It may be - Jack... Jackson comes to my mind. I may be wrong. Maybe a little later on it will come.

RK: You went on Saturday afternoons?

Dieman: Saturday afternoon at Coe College, and we had these lovely classes. That was mostly interpretive, again.

RK: It wasn't Mabel Lee, was it? Was that at the time of Mabel Lee - ? She taught dance.

Dieman: I know she did. Maybe it was someone under her that we had. Because, the teacher was only there, I think, two or three years, and then she went on. And then I read about Bonnie Fisher, who had opened up a class, and Bonnie Fisher had just returned from Chicago where she studied with the Pavley-Oukransky School. Now, this may be of interest to some in Cedar Rapids who also remember those classes. And she was the first one who began to install in us the feeling of a correct - or, an academic - I shouldn't say correct - but an academic basis for dance. And I worked with her, and I became her assistant throughout the years.

RK: Was this when you were in high school?

Dieman: High school, yes, and also in college. So, I worked with her, I taught with her. I worked with her and going during the summer to Chicago, and later going to New York in the winter for further study.

RK: When you went to New York in the winter, that must have been when you were out...

Dieman: I'm sorry, that was my fault. That was during the summer - my summers were spent in Chicago.

RK: I think I have the spelling of that in one of your citations of awards. I think I have the spelling of that in Chicago. Isn't it K-r - Would you like to spell it?

Dieman: McRae - McRae, yes.

RK: I thought you said Kratzke.

Dieman: Now, when I went to New York, that's when I studied with-- first I studied with the Dalcroze (Eurythmics), because it was fundamentally solid in music, and at the same time, I studied with Traasoff, and the Traasoffs were Russian dancers who came and taught, not as a school, but you enrolled for academic classes. We didn't have our first academic school until around the 1930's in New York. And then I also studied with the Denishawn.

RK: Yes, I know. I want to go into that a lot, but let's not skip your high school and college.

Dieman: I must state, too, in this that Dukransky - Bonnie Fisher worked with Pavley and Dukransky in Chicago, and they had come from Russia.

RK: My, you had a great - good, rich experience.

Dieman: A very rich, yes, very solid - very solid.

RK: And then when you were in college, you were still dancing - you were still going into Chicago. You must have been the star of Coe's May Fetes.

Dieman: No, I don't think I was, but I appeared every summer, and they were lovely. Ethel Ryan was in charge then, and I loved the performances out of doors; it was a lovely experience.

RK: May Fetes were held at Coe on the front lawn in front of the Chapel, and I remember hearing that the streetcars, when they went by, the motormen and conductors would want to stop to watch these girls in flimsy chiffon going around the yard right inside the lawn on campus. Can you remember--what were some of the dances or how you danced? How would you describe the dances you did there?

Dieman: It was most interpretive. It would be difficult to do formal dance on an uneven ground, just as it is today, you see. We'd have to have a special stage built for performances. Mostly that, and I remember we did wear tutus, because Miss Ryan asked my teacher to come and show a tutu so that we could look at it and develop it into one of the dances on the campus. Now, these were the romantic tutus; these are the tutus that come about to the mid-calf of the leg--those were the romantic tutus.

RK: Make of tulle?

Dieman: Tarlatan; the tarlatan at that time was a little rougher weave than we have now. Ours are much softer. But it was a rougher weave, rather stiff.

RK: There are many listening to this tape, or who will listen to this tape, who will appreciate hearing about the May Fete, because I was in that, too, in a sundry sort of way.

Dieman: It was fun.

RK: Oh, I loved it, yes. It was fun. But you were probably in it all four years.

Dieman: I think I must have been.

RK: You must have been. You were majoring in music.

Dieman: Yes.

RK: Tell us about that.

Dieman: My music instructor was Grace Swab, a very, very fine instructor; and, at that time, if you were a music major you prepared a concert during the four years. And at the end of the four years you had a graduation concert. My oldest sister, who graduated, of course, before I did, was a music major; and she presented a concerto with the Cedar Rapids Orchestra. At that time we had an orchestra, and made of many professional people--Dr. Lynn Crawford was one of the - I think he played the cello.

RK: Oh, yes. They needed an oboe, and didn't he go into Chicago to learn the oboe.

Dieman: I don't know, but wasn't it fantastic. It was lovely.

RK: Surgeon - Dr. Lynn Crawford was a great teller in the orchestra.

Dieman: His sister, Louise Crawford, was in charge of the theory at Coe. And it is very interesting to note that when Edward Ruan came to Cedar Rapids, he was sent to Cedar Rapids for the arts--I don't recall whether it was solely for the arts or to support the arts, but he was here, I think, about three years. And he took ballet classes in the studio.

RK: Is that right.

Dieman: He arranged the Beaux Arts Ball at the Country Club, and he had a notice in The Cedar Rapids Gazette one year. And my records, of course, during the time I was in New York, all those records

are lost. But he had a notice in The Gazette mentioning three great strengths: Louise Crawford, for music; Grant Wood, for art; and Edna Dieman, for dance.

RK: How nice. How nice to hear that.

Dieman: I think that's lovely; I appreciate it more now of course than then.

RK: Of course, wasn't he an act? He was quite an act. I remember him.

Dieman: Wasn't he wonderful?

RK: And the Art Gallery at that time was in a home on First Avenue about where the Ausadie Apartments are now, maybe where you took your first dancing--near there.

Dieman: It could be. And then didn't they move to between - on Third Street between Third and Fourth Avenues. There was a small building, and I remember that Ruth St. Dennis appeared here. And she was brought - he brought her to the Gallery to talk about dance and had interviews. And that was in that little building.

RK: Did you talk with him, Miss Dieman?

Dieman: No, I just supported her in her concert. She gave a concert at Iowa Theater--what is Iowa Theater now.

RK: Or was. Community Theater now. Well, you see, Cedar Rapids, as you've maintained, is encouraging to the arts, wouldn't you say?

Dieman: I felt that that was perhaps the golden age, a golden age of the classic arts. I remember, see, in the lovely Shrine Temple. Now the Joos Ballet came here many years ago, and the

Joos Ballet, of course, did the fantastic "Green Table" that is seen so often now in major ballet companies and that was a political ballet during the time of the German problems - politically.

RK: During the Thirties?

Dieman: It must have been in the Thirties, yes. And it was a beautiful auditorium, and the Denishawns appeared there. I gave my programs there. My programs were given there, and George Cervinka was the director of the orchestra.

RK: When you gave your programs then, Miss Dieman, you were out of college and had not gone to New York yet, so you had your own school. Tell us about that, that you started after you graduated.

Dieman: The Don Cook building was now where the Brenton Bank is. It was perhaps four stories or three stories, and I taught on the third story--a corner front room, and the - this was not television, this is radio - the radio station was also on the same floor. So the radio station and my dance, and a writer by the name of Duncan--it must have been fourth floor, I think he lived above us--was also there. It was a very small area. And then in the Thirties, I moved to my next studio, which was the Chandler Building, which was called the Granby Building. And my studio was right on the corner of Armstrong's--the little corner that faces Killian's.

RK: Third Avenue?

Dieman: Yes, and Second Street.

RK: Yes, and that was your studio then?

Dieman: Yes, and then I went to New York for a month - and I stayed for ten years.

RK: When you were - to go back to Cedar Rapids - what type of dancing were you teaching then?

Dieman: I was teaching classic ballet. Before I left?

RK: Yes.

Dieman: Yes, I was teaching classic ballet.

RK: I was thinking of all the students you have had. You haven't any idea of the number, do you?

Dieman: No, I haven't. And it is very interesting that when the Paramount was first built it was the Capitol Theater [1928], and it was a stage show, and they employed eight of my girls to open and close every show and to form - when any specialty came in, they would notify me two weeks before, and the specialty that they had would be augmented by an arrangement of dance that fit in with their specialty. We had that for two years.

RK: What a nice contribution that was.

Dieman: That was lovely - we loved it. It was very - in every way it was very productive.

RK: When you were teaching there in the old Granby Building, tell me just the ages that you would recommend that a child start-- whether that has changed in your recommendations. Did they start at five?

Dieman: We still feel that a child should start about six. Five is acceptable; six is a very good age; and then they should study it purely from the standpoint of how a child's body should be developing - no force - everything should be developed

according to the qualities necessary. And then when the child develops more of an interest, then that includes more classes a week. And then when he or she is about ten years of age, then they should start becoming more serious. And not as a dancer-- not as a dancer, but wholly as a development - as a personal development. That's how the arts should be studied.

RK: Now, this is what we wanted to get into--how the arts should be studied.

Dieman: I think the arts should be introduced to the children very young. And I hope that soon in Cedar Rapids we can begin to introduce these children at this very early age to a performance that is a qualified performance, so they begin to become aware of quality already as a young child. And I think it should be introduced.

RK: I think they are exposed to that, of course, with the "Nutcracker."

Dieman: We hope so. (Laughter)

RK: Well, since you've given so many "Nutcrackers" and so many children have seen that, but your emphasis and your hope is for the quality that you want the children exposed to.

Dieman: Yes, that should be established in the beginning--quality. And it's very difficult in this day and age because there are so many problems that become involved to maintain a quality that that child may grow--that child should grow in a direction of an awareness because he or she will live with that quality all of his life. We have students who are all over the world now, and some of the letters they write to us are very beautiful.

RK: Oh, they must be! I knew you had them all over the world. Many, many. And they are very appreciative, aren't they?

Dieman: Yes, they are.

RK: That early.

Dieman: And when they are young for instance, when we did our concert in May, the four young ladies who really carried the concert in ballet, Spanish and Indian, were the four girls who had gone with us to Maine where they were exposed to dance in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening we either studied pointe or we studied historical. We took them to one concert a week. So many of the artists from New York have summer residencies in Maine, and so we established a concert evening, and they went to a concert once a week; and the director said he was delighted with our young people--how well they took the concerts and exposed themselves to it, and how informative they were. They have a very good repertory theater; they were there once a week to that. And they were exposed to all of the arts. And when we came home we had a little concert here in the studio so their parents could see what they had done. So, one of the relatives said to the group, "What did you most gain from this summer?" And this one little girl said, "The environment was different." She said, "Our environment." And she was 14 at the time. And they - after that summer, they began to work quite differently--they took it seriously. One is going to a very special school in the East now--oh, Mt. Holyoke, I think she is going there; one has a full scholarship this summer in an outside school; and the other two are studying all summer

here. So, you see, they built that over the years; and they didn't build it overnight. They didn't build it overnight; they built it over years. And you must be dedicated, and they are lovely young people. And they also excel in school--they are Grade A students, most of them.

RK: They are so highly motivated. I would think that you would feel a wonderful sense of satisfaction when you go to sleep at night knowing that you have changed and influenced many - how to step up.

Dieman: Well, we hope we have. Now, largely responsible is Julia Bennett for that.

RK: Well, we're going to New York now, and then -

RK: Miss Dieman, what decided you to go to New York and give up your school here in Cedar Rapids?

Dieman: It was very interesting. In - I think it was the 1940, thereabouts, La Meri, the great ethnic dancer, appeared at the Paramount. And I recall very, very well that when she first came out in the dance that was so foreign, there was a great deal of chatter and noise in the audience. I was very disturbed. The curtain closed, the manager came out and explained to the audience about the background of this concert and of the dances, because the first dance was a religious dance. And I was sitting with friends, and I said, "You know, for many, many years I have felt that the dance of the West," with my study in the dance of the West, "was so beautiful and so lovely, but it didn't give me the depth that I wanted, and I had to find something that gave me that depth." And I found that that night.

RK: That made a difference.

Dieman: So, then that summer I went to... that was the summer I think my mother passed away... and then I went to New York to take a month's classes. And I became intrigued, so I stayed a year.

RK: You were intrigued with the ethnic part of it?

Dieman: Yes, because as Walter Terry, the great, great critic said, "You must find the seed of movement in dance." And that's where you found the seed, in the first number that was (invocational) Bharata Natyan, a severely classical--Indian--that dates back three thousand years ago. Their culture is so far advanced of ours. I felt that was something I thought I wanted, because up to this time my exposure had been greatly in music, which I loved - the music, and anything that had the flavor of the Oriental dance intrigued me. We didn't have Ravi Shankar on records then, but anyway, anything that gave me the flavor was intriguing to me. So, then I became more serious. And it was very interesting--there was no school. There was no school; so the director said, "Well, if you want you can come into the classroom and work around with us and do as much as you can--we won't stop." So, the hand gestures - of course, the hand gestures are very, very vital; and I think I followed them for about two hours and learned one hand gesture and thought, "Well, this is something. I'll practice on this and I'll come back tomorrow." And that's how I started to build.

RK: Your interest in ethnic dance extends beyond India, too.

Dieman: Yes.

RK: It extends to Spain.

Dieman: Yes, Spain, and India. And both Julia and I study every summer in London, historical dance. We're at present working on baroque. And the dances that we did at Shakespeare Gardens, those were all from that basis of historical dance.

RK: My, how fortunate Cedar Rapids is to have you.

Dieman: We love to give - when you're given a great, great development and a great possibility, I think that should be given out.

RK: But you see, it's all - you are pioneers, really, aren't you?

Dieman: I think we are.

RK: Yes, you are plowing new soil in the Middle West, culturally. You met Miss Bennett in 1945?

Dieman: Yes, in New York.

RK: And you were dancing? Tell us about how you met.

Dieman: Well, I had just returned from Cedar Rapids, and every time I came home for a couple of weeks' vacation, I gave a little guest course. When I came back to New York, my first day at the Ethnologic Dance Center, I was introduced to Miss Bennett by her cousin. And we both felt we spoke the same language. Remember, she was from India, and that fascinated me--the fact that someone had spent all those years in India and was so knowledgeable and understood it from all standpoints, that fascinated me.

RK: Of course, it did. You were studying the gestures.

Dieman: Yes. (Laughter)

RK: And she knew. So that's when you kind of joined forces.

Dieman: Yes.

RK: In 1945?

Dieman: Well, she was... in her concert, Miss Bennett was... in 1945 and 1946 was doing concerts in New York, voice concerts - she appeared at Town Hall and was very, very busy in her field. And then I was asked to come in 1949 or 1950 to give some of the chorus; and I had three weeks' vacation, and it was a good time for me to break, in what I was doing there, to move into another area.

RK: You were asked to do it where?

Dieman: Here, here in Cedar Rapids. So, I asked - I said, "Julia, would you like to come with me?" And she said, "Yes, I'd like to, I'd like to see that part of the country." (Laughter)

RK: She hadn't traveled west of New York.

Dieman: And so, we came and she was amazed at, she felt, the talent that was developed here. And I think one of the deciding points, when we left we gave our class lists, and she should really help with this interview. When we gave our last lesson, we had a lovely young dancer about 15 who had been working with another teacher in Cedar Rapids, who was teaching--a very fine young teacher who gave from her home activities enough time to give some classes, but not as an academic school--without the time you involved. And this young girl who had so much to give, she cried and said, "It's all right for you to go back to New York, but people leave us with nothing." And so, Julia said, "You know, that told me something." So we started to think about that. And then for family reasons--we went back to New York--for family reasons, my older sister asked if I could

come back for a year; and I did, and we had no intention of staying beyond the year.

RK: Where did you go - where did you teach then? You taught for a year before you -

Dieman: Yes - YWCA. We had the second floor, and then we felt that we needed more of a private room so we could have a private - records and our records could be saved. So, we rented the third floor, the top of the third floor--the expanse that faces the park. So, we rented that, and we were very, very happy there. We always could have more room; even with this, now, we could have more room. And then the "Y" began to expand and could no longer rent to those who were renting it, including us and others, so we said, "Now is the time for us to go back to New York." And one of our fathers said, "I have the building on..." Oh, we couldn't find a place to teach. We asked all over, and when I called one place I said, "Now we have children." It makes no difference. "We are here late at night." No difference. And when Mrs. Lenz started to play, he said, "You have music!" I said, "Yes." "Oh," he said, "we can't have that." So you see, we had difficulties. So the father asked if we would take a look at his building, and that's the building that is opposite now--let's see--where the Montrose Hotel is, the part facing Third Street, it's right on the other side by the - the Gas Company, I think, is there now. But our building was right as you left the Montrose. And we liked it very much; however, it was not large enough for us, and then this became available in 1964.

RK: 1964. Now, we'll go back to New York a bit. I think it would be fun if I gave you the name of a dancer and you described him a bit, that good memory you have. For instance, if I said Ted Shawn, what could you tell me about him?

Dieman: Ted Shawn was remarkable. He founded the "Jacob's Pillow"; and, in fact, in 1964 Miss Bennett and I took our company there and we appeared in our "Swan Lake" for one solid week. Mr. Shawn had tremendous vitality, and his classes were held with Ruth St. Dennis in Carnegie Hall. And we would have a technique class in the morning, and then she would take us for classes. And then he would take us for classes. A very fine person, very enthusiastic. And we can really accredit a great deal of the interest in male dancing to Mr. Shawn. When he took a group of six men and toured, he appeared at the World Theater downtown--it was not the World Theater then, it was another theater--with his dances. He went to the University of Iowa and challenged the athletes there to give -- (Laughter) - to give the same amount of energy that the dancers gave. They're doing it now; we hear about it all the time, but Mr. Shawn started this many years ago, yes. Very wonderful person! And he had to work under great difficulties during the years of the war in the 1940's. Our New York company was there in residency in 1945, all through the summer, and he had great difficulties getting enough food. And many of the dancers in the "Jacob's Pillow" were former dancers who, because of the war, had to serve their country. So they had to leave their profession and serve the country. When they came back, they were given a

government fee to continue dance; and many of these young men came to "Jacob's Pillow" and were enrolled in classes to begin bringing up again to the stamina and the artistic development that would be necessary for them to continue their work. And he found it very difficult to get food--the right type of food. I remember we had cheese instead of butter all the time. He went through many, many difficulties to hold it together.

RK: You were in New York then all during the war, weren't you?

Dieman: Yes.

RK: You were there during all the brownouts and blackouts. My! What about Ruth St. Dennis?

Dieman: She was utterly charming. She had a very great glowing quality and she emphasized so often the development of the person within herself for dance, to develop dance and to include dance. She was dedicated; nothing could interfere. There was nothing in one's life that would interfere with her development, and she started, you know, under very great difficulties. She even went into vaudeville for a time to find the money to keep the little group together. She was a great person. And she - when in New York, in our little company, she would love to come to our theater. Our theater was small and very, very good. We had the former Isadora Duncan's theater in New York. That was fantastic!

RK: When you say "we," Miss Dieman, tell me about who the "we" is. Is this your...

Dieman: This is my New York with LeMeri and the group, there were four of us who worked very closely with her. And she had--and her

sister, also, is closely involved--many, many dancers like Ruth St. Dennis would come and have concerts. And all of her concerts were sold out. All of her concerts were sold out! She'd say, "Don't worry, you know why they're coming. They're coming because they want to see me for the last time." She had a gre-a-at sense of humor, and nothing was too much for her to develop. One day she was about to leave for the West Coast, and I said, "Oh, Miss Ruth (she was always called Miss Ruth), I'm so sorry that you didn't find time to talk to the dancers." This is the school of dancers, not the company but the school. "Oh," she said, "indeed I will." So she said, "You just give me a half hour." And so in a half hour she came back, from her traveling clothes, and she was in her lovely formal teaching clothes, and she sat down and she talked to the dancers. And it was marvelous how she gave them the inspiration. And to think of her as a development of what we very often have in this country. We sometimes forget that these--Ted Shawn or Ruth St. Dennis--instilled a theater in dance before we had the theaters we have now, as far as academic schools. And very often she would be asked to go after a concert to a special estate for a reception. So she said to her manager, "Well, you tell them I will arrive; they are to give me a room and a quiet one-half hour, and then I'll entertain their guests."

(Laughter) Wonderful!

RK: Her dedication reminds me of you.

Dieman: Thank you.

RK: Let's think about other great dancers--this was so interesting of Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Dennis--that you studied under. Did you ever meet Isadora Duncan?

Dieman: No, I never did, unfortunately. My piano teacher had seen her concert in Boston...

END OF SIDE ONE - BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

RK: Miss Dieman was just talking about Isadora Duncan, so she'll continue about her.

Dieman: Miss Grace Swab had seen a performance in Boston and revealed that it was the most thrilling experience to hear a concerto by the symphony interpreted by the one solo dancer, Isadora Duncan. She was no doubt an unusual person.

RK: Then Cedar Rapids interested, I think, Bill Shirer, in his new book - no, in his first book, The Journey to the 20th Century, has quite a bit about Isadora Duncan - to bring Cedar Rapids into this picture--Bill Shirer, whom we are very proud of and who was at Coe when you were.

Dieman: He was at Coe, yes, definitely. I wanted to mention one thing more, that we have - Miss Bennett and I have - quite a collection of Arnold Genthe's photographs of famous people and among them is Isadora Duncan. How did we get them?

RK: It's a wonderful thing to have.

Dieman: Well, we have them and very often we display them--when we give concerts we display them. They are not mounted professionally, but we use them very often. We did for--I think Kirkwood founded the centennial a few years ago, and they asked us to do

the one on dance; and so we did the one on Isadora Duncan because it was during that time that the centennial was promoted, and we took for her research from her book - we did the research on her book and her friends, and it was a delightful 20 minutes; we gave at Kirkwood's Little Theater. And Miss Bennett did the narration; and as she narrated it, we had some of these slides of Isadora Duncan shown in panels, and then the dancers depicted it. We still have it in our repertoire.

RK: In your collection of famous people, do you have any photographs taken by Carl Van Vechten?

Dieman: No, none of his. But I think that was his centennial that they celebrated.

RK: Oh, yes, that's why you were at Kirkwood.

Dieman: Yes.

RK: Did you ever meet him?

Dieman: No, I never did--not that I recall.

RK: Do you have any stories about Grant Wood? Just to vary, before we get back to the "Dance of the Hemispheres."

Dieman: I remember Grant Wood as a very, very warm rather retiring person, strangely. Grace Boston, really she was like an entrepreneur many years ago, and she had the - at Stone City for about two or three years she had the festival on Sunday afternoon and we always danced on that festival. I thought that was lovely.

RK: Where did she have this?

Dieman: It was right on the grounds. They had the ice wagons, and then our girls would just come from the ice wagons - where they changed - and would go right out and dance on the lawn--right

near the mansion. And one time one of our young dancers did a lovely dance with a veil. It was a scarf, really; a long scarf. And when she finished the dance, she took the scarf like this and instead of it going down on the floor, the breeze caught it and it went over the fields into the next - and it was Grant Wood who retrieved it and brought it back. Wasn't that lovely.

RK: He'd get a kick out of that, too. Shall we go now to when you and Miss Bennett decided to stay here, in 1951, I think it was?

Dieman: Yes, I think so, 1951.

RK: And it was then the dance - what was the name of - The Dieman Bennett Academy?

Dieman: We called it "Studio" at that time.

RK: Because the "Hemispheres" came in ten years later, is that right?

Dieman: I don't...

RK: I have 1961 down.

Dieman: Oh, I know. Mr. Shawn came and launched our company in 1961. He came here personally.

RK: Oh, he did!

Dieman: He came here personally and launched it in the worst possible blizzard of the year. He launched it at Coe in the Coe Chapel, and it was such a--the lights were all out in the entire area for a long time; and the reception after--nothing worked for the reception, and just before he was to speak everything came on again. But he launched it, and he launched the company in

1961; and we had a performance on Friday night, we had a matinee on Saturday, and he spoke on Saturday night; and we had another performance on Sunday. We had a three-day festival, and he launched the company at that time. And we did what was called the "Digit of the Moon." It's an Indian Ballet, and he wrote in his letter that goes throughout the world, "More should be done as Dieman-Bennett do in bringing other countries into the focus of dance so we have a better understanding through the arts." He brought that in in his letter that went round-robin in 1961. But he launched it. That's how it was launched in 1961.

RK: How did you choose the name?

Dieman: Because we deal with both hemispheres. We deal with the dances of the West and the East, and Spain because Spain is the bridge between the East and the West in dance. It partakes of the qualities of both.

RK: Tell us more about that; that's fascinating to think about. Is it religious in a way?

Dieman: In India all dance is based on religion--all dance, whether it is a folk, or an epic, or a great theme of the classical. It is all based on religion. And when we think of the history of how the families came over, really across Europe into Spain, we know now why some of the arms that they have are definitely from India--some of the "port de bras"--we call it--arms, some of the songs. When you hear a song, very often you think, "This is India," and it's gypsy. It's fascinating--the background of all this is so fascinating.

RK: And when you would go to Spain to study, how would you - would enroll in a school - or who would you study?

Dieman: No, we knew--when we were at "Jacob's Pillow," Xinenez and Vargas from Spain were appearing at the same time we were, and so we grew to know them very well. So, when we went to Madrid we spoke to Mr. Xinenez, and he said, "Fine." So he gave us lessons that would be like private classes. He would - the dancing was taught - you have to understand - I must digress-- before that we went to Spain and we went to study with the Pelicets.

Now, the Pelicet family is a family that goes way back, and over in the musician's corner is a cabinet, and in the cabinet are all the castanets that were used for generations back. This is taught family to family to family. And we couldn't find the address; it's in Old Madrid. But we finally heard in the area - in the area that we were told to go, we heard castanets, so we said this must be it. So we tried places. And finally on the second floor of a building we came to a tremendous door, brass and heavily guarded, and the door opened and this huge dog came out. And so we stood, we didn't move. So Madame Pelicet didn't come, but a young girl came out and she said - we told her who we were. Madame Pelicet said, "I have no interest in foreigners." She had had an upset with some foreigners before not understanding, and someone who was taking advantage. And she spoke in Spanish - "I have no interest because they come, they do not understand, and they misrepresent my country. I do not want anyone." So the young

girl came back and we said, "Well, here are our castanets. And our castanets are professional castanets, handmade professional castanets." And she said, "Well, Professora, their castanets are very good." She said, "Well, tell them to come back tomorrow." We came back three days. The fourth day, she said, "Tell them to come in."

So she rattled this, and then we rattled that, and she did a castanet rhythm. She did the Taconeo (heelbeat) and we did that. "All right, come back this afternoon." And from that time on we had two lessons a day.

RK: Two lessons a day! And you were speaking Spanish?

Dieman: Well, just a little. Julie speaks several languages very well because of her voice - her voice training. We spoke enough, and Professora spoke enough. And the last day, it was lovely. We were there 13 weeks. And the last day she had her--some of the boards in the studio went down; if you had your heel in one, it went down. You learned to adjust. And we saw them come in for our class, we saw people sitting all around, beautifully dressed in their silks, and beautifully coiffed, and I said, "There must be something wrong, maybe we're on the wrong day." And she said, "Oh, no. No, no, no, no." So we would be dancing, and then she'd bring in someone--former dancers, her dancers from the company--to come up and dance with us, like sevillanas couple dances, dance with us, and she'd bring in someone else to dance with us. And that went on for the entire class. And then all the rest of them sat and sipped this marvelous coffee that they had. And then we were

told afterwards that was our last day and that was a special day. So we were given that privilege. Wasn't that lovely! Oh! And we were so pleased. And those are the wonderful incidents we remember when things become difficult.

RK: My! Think of what you've learned there that you've shared.
My!

Dieman: It's amazing, isn't it? I forget myself, so many times. You don't recall much but what you do, and, of course, every year when we go away to study, we study more detail and more developments and understanding of people in their countries and how dance was developed. It was developed really from the Dark Ages; our classic dance was developed right from the Dark Ages. Of course, we know dance developed from the beginnings, but when you come into the Western classic dance, if you go back three thousand years ago, that's when Indian dance was already fully developed.

RK: My, this is fascinating! Of course, I can see that had a religious base, and you said all dances have a religious base.

Dieman: And during the years right before Pavlova traveled, they began to--because of invasions--they began to not appreciate their dances as much as they should. And then when Anna Pavlova appeared--she danced with Shankar, they're wonderful dancers--then she turned to them and she said, "Now, where is your dance? And where is your dance?" Then they realized - Where is your dance?

And we've had many occasions when one of their very wonderful dancers came to Chicago many years ago. She had in the

audience so few who understood. The review was bad; she was sent as a cultural exchange. With the exception of Chicago and New York and one other place, everyone canceled her concerts. So that caused a great, great rift in cultural exchange. And she's a very fine dancer. She came ten years after, and the country was all...

RK: ...ready!

Dieman: Yes. Do you see how long it takes sometimes. And that's why we have to think of dance - we must keep on - we must introduce it and must keep developing it on such a standard so those who receive it, receive it on that standard and learn to grow to want that standard and quality.

RK: I imagine it's a temptation among dance instructors today to lower the standards, because it would be easier.

Dieman: Financially, it's easier. And it's easier in many ways. But we find that the students who really are aware want it. Very often it's the parent who understands and looks for it, just as my mother did. And sometimes a child herself will observe and say, this is what I want; and that is, for us, very rewarding.

RK: Miss Dieman, as you've been talking, I've been impressed--as we are in Cedar Rapids who know about Dieman-Bennett--with the quality and the depth of your teaching, which you cannot find very often, especially in the Middle West. Tell us a little bit about who these wonderful dancers are that you have, that you are teaching.

Dieman: These wonderful dancers are dancers who are as dedicated as we are. They happen to be in Cedar Rapids because their husbands

are involved in business either in Cedar Rapids or in areas around. The young group--the very young teenage group that's developing so strongly--would be compared with the apprentice group of any major ballet company in this country.

RK: Cedar Rapids is the beneficiary of all of this because you've raised our sights very high in the arts. Miss Dieman and Miss Bennett have had so many hundreds of students over the years, and now they're having daughters who are taking lessons and dancing, and once in a while a granddaughter.

Before we end this interview, Miss Dieman, which I hate to do because it's been such fun for me, I would like to get a little bit more of your philosophy. You and Miss Bennett are so generous in this community, and I would just like to ask you a little bit more of your basic beliefs. Could you do that?

Dieman: Well, I'll be glad to try. One--when one receives so much richness, as I feel I have received, that must be given out. That must be given out so someone else benefits. That is a thought, and our religion teaches us that. And by having all this wealth of information and beauty and knowledge that we have gathered over all these years, it should be given out for those who are anxious to receive it and who have the depth and awareness to receive it.

RK: You will share - what you have and are sharing. And I hope you realize that Cedar Rapids is appreciative of it.

Dieman: Oh, thank you, thank you.

RK: It wouldn't be complete at all to talk to Miss Dieman and not hear Miss Bennett's voice. After all, it is the Dieman-Bennett

Dance of the Hemispheres. Miss Bennett has lived in many countries all over the world and has brought to Cedar Rapids and the Middle West a great deal of understanding of other cultures. So, here's Miss Bennett. And, Miss Bennett, you were coordinator of the ballet for the Middle West for several years. Will you tell us about that?

Bennett: That was a very interesting job. The Midwest was the last region to join the Regional Ballet Association, and we were really one of the first companies--and we are a charter company. After two years, I was asked to be Coordinator. Now, Coordinator means that you are the sort of conduit for the information going between the Mid States and the national association and also a conduit with all the other companies. So, what I would do, I would attend, of course, all the board meetings for the Mid States Regional Ballet Association, and I would get their ideas down and what they wished to convey to the national association; and then I would go to New York and attend all the board meetings of the national association, where I would meet members of the Southeast Regional Ballet Companies, the members of the Northeast and the Southwest, and the Northwest. And I'd find it a wonderful experience--a very exhilarating experience to know that all these people were working in the wonderful art of dance, for which we don't serve it just to exploit ourselves--it's a wonderful art to serve. And they had the same idea, that it is a wonderful art to serve and we wanted to bring the best that we possibly had to our different communities. And it was my job just to keep everybody informed.

RK: That's one reason why the Dieman-Bennett Dance of the Hemispheres is so well known--one of the many reasons, I think. Miss Dieman has mentioned your archives, which are most extensive and most valuable. And you have an idea about those. Would you tell us about the extensive archives that you have collected over the years - and why they are so important? I know a very fundamental basic reason why these archives are so important.

Bennett: Well, I have in mind - I think it's very, very important for us to understand other peoples through their arts and sciences. You cannot understand them through just a book. If you listen to the music of India or if you dance the dances of India, you begin to see how they feel. And not only that, you can't possibly study the dances and music of India without studying their religion. And you can't study it without studying the history that goes back four thousand years. I thought it was very interesting; they were a little upset in India because they had this big exhibition brought to Chicago, which cost a great deal of money, and to the Smithsonian, and the Indians said, "Well, why should we try and persuade other people about our country which is four thousand years old, when other countries perhaps are only about four or five hundred years old? So, you see, I think we have to understand, and I think--especially, in Cedar Rapids, I think, where we want to have a trade center, where we, I know, for instance, when I first came back to Cedar Rapids, we gave a ballet called "The Digit of the Moon." Well, the Gazette was very kind to us; they gave us a

full page of photographs in costume. It was a lovely ballet; and there happened to be the director of the All-India Radio here, and he was so amazed that there was Indian dance right here in the Midwest. In fact, he was so amazed, he asked us to have a curry dinner with him, which he made for us. So, there, you see, we were exporting things all over the world but we don't understand how they feel.

RK: I think right now, when we're in such a turmoil in the world, and we do not, in America, understand other countries, as was brought out in an editorial in the Gazette yesterday by James Reston--we're very naive. I think you've hit on a point where you would get to know the people through their dance, through their religion, through their mores, and it's been a fascinating thought to me.

To go back to the archives that you and Miss Dieman have--very valuable collections--you have an idea about them.

Bennett: Well, I do. What I would like to see--this work that we have started, we--Miss Dieman and I have known each other for over forty years. We came back to Cedar Rapids in 1935, and we have collected during the last 35 years, archives of historical dance from the Dark Ages through the Renaissance, the Baroque, through the Romanticism of the nineteenth century to the present twentieth century. We have dances--the classic dances of India, both of the Mogul period and of the South Indian Bharata Natyan. We have dances and bases of the techniques of Spain--Spanish dancing--the four different types of Spanish dancing and, of course, the modern jazz and tap. Now, we have archives

for all this. We have notes, we have films, we have costumes through all the different periods and all the different countries, we have recordings, we have the music, we have the historical background, we have the artifacts from these countries; and I think this would be wonderful, to have this established, what I would feel, in the new Museum of Art. If we could have a space there to carry on, not only to keep all these archives but to carry on the work of the Dance Theatre of the Hemispheres, for people to understand other countries through dance. I think it would be a wonderful, valuable thing not only for the people in this area but I think it would be a wonderful, valuable thing to have as resources for universities and colleges for dance departments, for opera departments. This is - all can be used in the arts in the various fields.

RK: I would like to have all of that stay in Cedar Rapids and not go to New York. And you have students who understand all of this, who can come back and help with it, don't you?

Bennett: That's right. We have trained very, very fine students in Spanish and Indian, in modern and in classic ballet; and these young people are out in the world, they are proving themselves in dance, they are in the professional dance field, and it would be nice if they could come back here and bring all that back to us here instead of having it always going out all the time. Because, you know, Iowa is a beautiful place to live. I don't think we really appreciate ourselves; I don't think we really appreciate Iowa and what it has. And I think - and the wonderful people, these young people - they're wonderful. But

they have to go out because there's nowhere for them to go. And I think I'd like them to come back and to continue on this work and delve deeper.

RK: So would the Chamber of Commerce at this point. My, I hope you push on with that idea--to keep those archives in Cedar Rapids. It's a very valuable thing, your collections of, I just know the costumes, your Elizabethan costumes, in themselves are so great. Miss Bennett, would you like to add anything more to our interview with Miss Dieman--the Dance of the Hemispheres?

Bennett: It's been a great deal of hard work, and there have been many ups and downs, as you know, as we all have those ups and downs; but those are things, I suppose, they say make you grow, and I'm sure they do. And when you do develop higher in the arts, it's something that's part of you--you can't help it. But I want to say it's been a wonderful, wonderful privilege to have worked with Edna Dieman.

RK: Oh, yes. And she feels the same way about you. We've talked about it.

Bennett: Yes, oh. Well, it has been a wonderful privilege.

RK: Thank you, Miss Bennett. Miss Dieman, do you want to say good-bye on this tape?

END OF INTERVIEW



Edna Dieman: She had standards

By Catherine Payvandi

OCT 21 1999

GAZ

Understanding Edna Dieman's methods as a teacher is perhaps the best way of honoring her memory.

She was bewildered by the confusion that seemed to exist in public education between forces of excellence and those of mediocrity. Unlike mainstream educators, Miss Dieman believed there was only one standard by which one measured success, and from that elevated point of reference, students learned dance and developed their minds, bodies and characters.

Edna Dieman lived to be 95 and spent at least 50 years of her life in Cedar Rapids as a teacher of classical dance.

In her early years, she studied music at Coe College and then moved to New York, where she pursued a professional career in classical, historical and ethnic dance. On tour with various dance companies, Miss Dieman continued to study classical ballet, music, art, philosophy, religion and theater, thus expanding her knowledge of both the text and context of dance.

By the time she returned to Cedar Rapids to open her own ballet school, she had a wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as a classical consciousness that became the foundation of her teaching. Her absolute faith in excellence and in the artistic process defined her singularity and set the standard by which she worked and lived.

AS A TEACHER and artist, Miss

Dieman never diluted her subject or methods to satisfy public tastes or accommodate social change. Skill levels were clearly defined and linked to each student's physical and artistic development.

In theory and in practice, Miss Dieman's teaching was remarkable. The ambience of the studio/classroom was defined by a sense of authority, concentration and grace. While generations of children filled the dressing rooms with laughter, friendships and warm rivalries, once they entered the studio and grasped the barre, they were magically transformed into dancers. Miss Dieman always took her place at the barre and demonstrated each step and explained its dynamic.

Rarely did she repeat a direction. Concentration was fixed and focused. Even if there was a slight distraction, a single glance from her was enough to crush a small rebellion. Class sessions were clearly structured into a training regimen — technique at the barre was always followed by the allegro, the adagio, variations and then point work.

Curriculum content grew out of Miss Dieman's sense of student readiness and clearly reflected her knowledge of each dancer's growth and mental efforts.

Learning was rigorous. Even the youngest dancers were expected to assimilate a new language by combining French words with English concepts, to understand Mozart and Chopin, to count and measure music and movement, to project expression and mood and to make the body conform to difficult positions.



Cedar Rapids Public Library
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Edna Dieman, who died Sept. 22, taught classical dance for more than 50 years.

Gazette file photo

Classes were never easy. Students worked hard, bodies developed slowly and repetitions seemed endless, but rarely did a student exit the studio without feeling the momentary thrill of being both the dancer and the dance.

Instruction was built on classical models of teaching and prepared dancers for performance. Miss Dieman's achievements in staging productions were stunning. Classics such as "Sleeping Beauty," "The Nutcracker" and "Hansel and Gretel" became seasonal traditions in Eastern Iowa, while smaller productions featuring historical period dance were frequently staged. The magnificent Hindu version of "Swan Lake" received national recognition, while Spanish flamenco dancing always complemented the ballet, modern and jazz components of performances and recitals.

Workshops, exhibitions, television and touring experience and dance seminars gave students enriching opportunities to practice their art before live audiences and connect with the great traditions of ballet and dance history.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from Dance Theater history is that these stunning productions gifted to the community by Edna Dieman and her

life-long colleague, Julia Bennett, grew out of a "school" that had no sponsorships, corporate gifts or support guilds.

Choreographing, producing, directing and costuming such an incredible repertoire of ballet and ethnic dance productions without such support was an extraordinary feat. These were never money-making ventures and no doubt, sustaining these performance expectations was a difficult and often impossible ordeal.

OVER A 50-YEAR period, the dance studio was housed in the Granby Building the YWCA, then in a room over the gas company. It made its last home over the downtown bagel shop. These settings offered no comforts or modern conveniences. These were just rooms in buildings that no one much cared about. Facilities included only two dressing rooms, one bare studio with three mirrors and two portable barres. Office space amounted to a small corner with a typewriter and a single file cabinet and stacks of choreography and sheet music.

Visitors may have noticed the old floor chipped paint, and noisy pipes that clanged during the winter. Maintenance was poor and nothing ever changed. There were no extra funds for facility upgrades, repair, remodeling and grants were unpredictable.

If any donations or support dollars did come in, they were used to bring guest artists to Cedar Rapids or help fund productions. But within this very minimalist and often gloomy setting, Miss Dieman's dynamics as a teacher and artist charge the atmosphere with creative energies that ignited the mind and body of each dancer, giving all those who passed through the studio, a sense of imaginative flight.

Stunning productions gifted to the community by Edna Dieman and her life-long colleague, Julia Bennett, grew out of a "school" that had no sponsorships, corporate gifts or support guilds.

AS WE consider our community without Miss Dieman, we should remember that over 50 years, her standards were unwavering and her work exemplary. She gave much as a teacher and artist. In return, she expected only discipline, dedication and endeavor. Relying on neither wealth, technology nor institutional partnerships, her strength was in her knowledge, her methods and her commitment to an artistic ideal.

Now her time has passed, but her legacy remains for us to guard and cherish.

Catherine Payvandi lives in Cedar Rapids. She was a student of Edna Dieman as a child, as were both her mother and daughter.