

ISABEL DANIELS PAOLINI
Interviewed by AMY HAHN
Wednesday, January 13, 2016
Clara House, Harmony, Minnesota

Isabel's Biography

Isabel Flavia Daniels Paolini was born in Fillmore County on December 16, 1921, the fifth child of Herbert Daniels (b. 12-3-1863, Minn.; d. 12-21-1936, Harmony) and Auyse Gurine Harstad Daniels (b. 9-9-1890, Minn.; d. 10-2-1975, Harmony) of Harmony. Herbert and Auyse were married on 8-4-1914 in Fillmore County. Her siblings: Shirley Daniels Olsen (b. 11-16-1914, L.A., Calif.; d. 12-16-2009, Cobb County, Georgia), Bayonne Daniels (b. 10-8-1916, Fillmore County; d. 3-9-2003, Olmsted County), Alma Jean Daniels (b. 7-16-1918, L.A., Calif.; d. 2-1-2002, Cedar Rapids, Iowa), Marjorie Daniels (b. 3-11-1920, L.A., Calif.; d. 5-9-1922, Harmony) and Roderick Daniels.

Isabel's paternal grandfather was Alonzo Daniels (b. 7-13-1832, New York; d. 5-31-1912, Fillmore County) and her paternal grandmother was Flavia Merrick Daniels (b. 12-13-1828, New York; d. 6-6-1900, Fillmore County). They were married in 1857. Her

maternal grandfather was Aanond Harstad (b. 6-13-1862, McHenry County, Illinois; d. 9-16-1945, Harmony) and her maternal mother was Isabelle Brokken Harstad (b. 11-16-1960, Harmony; d. 11-30-1939, Harmony). They were married on 3-10-1886, Harmony.

Isabel graduated from Harmony High School in 1938 and was vice president and valedictorian of her class. After graduating from high school, Isabel traveled to Chicago to attend business school where she earned a diploma in stenography. It was while she was working as a stenographer that she met her husband, Attilio "Otto" Paolini (b. 7-31,-1908, Chicago, Illinois; d. 11-19-2002, Harmony), an insurance salesman. Otto and Isabel were married on 2-15-1940 in Chicago. Isabel and Otto had one son, Armand Roderick Paolini (Kathleen) and two grandchildren.

Isabel and Otto moved back to Harmony in 1996.

Abstract: In this oral history, Isabel Flavia Daniels Paolini shares her recollections on several topics such as attending school (the different school buildings), going to church (although Methodist the family went to the Lutheran church since it was the easiest to get to and, of course, the largest with the Norwegian population), City Park (now known as Selvig), the special Memorial Day Service to remember WWI veterans, visiting and purchasing items at The Toggery, the beginnings of the Harmony library and mention of the Resting Room (on Saturdays the library became what was known as the Resting Room where farmer's wives could relax in chairs and visit while their husband's did business), childhood games and town entertainment (theater, opera house).

Format: Olympus Digital Voice Recorder WS-822. Digitally downloaded onto iMac computer and saved onto CD. Total interview time: 1 hour.

Transcript: Transcribed by Amy Hahn. Twenty pages.

Harmony Area Historical Society Oral History Project
Memories of Harmony
Harmony Area Historical Society
Harmony, Minnesota

Transcript of interview conducted January 13, 2016 with:

ISABEL DANIELS PAOLINI, Harmony, Minnesota

By: AMY HAHN

AH – Amy Hahn, interviewer

IDP – Isabel Daniels Paolini, interviewee

[Introduction/setup]

AH: The date is January 13, 2016. The interview is being conducted by me, Amy Hahn, for the Harmony Area Historical Society. The interviewee is Isabel Daniels Paolini. The interview is being done in Harmony and it is an oral history interview.

AH: Okay, so one of the topics was the Harmony Schools and so I just wanted to know some of your memories of your experience there. So, I know there were different schools...

IDP: Well, there was only the school I went to was the old, first school that was built here [in Harmony] and it was on the south side of town and it was painted gray but there was a new high school built on the other side of the lot and so sometimes [later in school years] we would have to go back and forth between the schools. That was the brick school and it had been built quite recently but the other school had been there – it was the first school – in fact, I think my mother also went to that school and then she went to what they called Normal School and that's where they trained teachers and she went to that. She was a teacher [graduating from the Harmony Normal School] and she got assigned a school down in Iowa and the people she stayed with were Catholic. Well, you know in Harmony everybody was Lutheran. But she said that they were really nice people, she liked them and they would say their prayers at night and she would even be part of it, just listen you know. She just said how nice they all were and she had kind of been brought up, well, to not even know about Catholics you know because they [Harmony] had the big Lutheran Church. You know the first people here built that [Lutheran Church] and they didn't have much money or anything but that was important to them to have a church and they had a big church and there was a little tiny Catholic church but they didn't even deal with Catholics very much and there weren't too many here. Catholics were mostly down in Canton and they had a pretty nice Catholic Church.

AH: Tell me about what you remember about going to Church in Harmony.

IDP: My sisters were older and had gotten to know people at the other church [Methodist]. We all went to the Methodist Church and they had a nice minister who really liked children and he was so nice and his wife was nice too. I could hardly remember going there because I was so small, just little [1927, 1928, 1929] but my sisters always took me with them [when they went to church]. And, you know, my mother wasn't that much about what church you went to. She always got us up [out of bed] and ready to go, and she never took us the Sunday paper because she said we would just look at the funnies and not go to church. She always sent us and it was a long way down, well, it wasn't so far [but] it was up on the north side [of town] and we liked it so much because the minister and his wife were both young people and they, you know, they told nice stories about religion. I didn't understand very much from it but they were so nice, you know, I liked it. We'd sit in the classroom and sat in a circle and, uh, they always, along with the religious stories they always told like a little funny story to us so everybody liked him [the minister]. Both he and his wife taught.

[We took a break because Isabel was not feeling well but she soon started to talk about her mother and memories of how educated her mother was from attending the Harmony Normal School and being a teacher. I clicked record as she was speaking. Her mother was one of the organizers of the Harmony Women's Club which launched The Harmony Public Library and raised money for Selvig Park (then called City Park)]

IDP: She [my mother] could remember everything (she learned). She knew all kinds of poetry. When she, you know we had our kitchen sink was right in front of two windows up there and she was working at the sink, you know, doing dishes, or whatever she would always recite poetry. And she loved Longfellow because, you know, he wrote about, well, he had children and he recited poetry to them and he wrote about the Indians who lived here and she always liked that so much, you know that she learned all that. And she would stand at the kitchen washing the dishes or whatever and she would recite and I just loved to listen and she could remember it all. I can't remember it all but I know it started "By the Shores of Gitchie Gumme". Do you ever read that? Oh, she loved that, "On the shores of Gitche Gumee, □Of the shining Big-Sea-Water, Lives a Little Hiawatha, Grandson to the old Nokomis" and then he described [?], when the branches on the tree move. He described the sounds of everything and she never forgot it (the whole thing) and she could recite. She went to the teacher's college and even at that time which I think was unusual they studied latin and she remembered that.

AH: Where did she go to Normal School, the teacher's school?

IDP: They had it in Harmony. That was held in the wooden school [gray/white school frame school] I told you about [the first one built before the brick school for the high school]. That was across from the high school [after 1910], which had just been built about that time [when my mom attended Harmony Normal School]. It had the date on it but I don't remember. Then they had the high school and there were a lot rooms in there

because they didn't use all because of the other school; they had two rooms in there that were used for, well, they called it normal school. I don't know why they called it that. If you graduated from high school you could go to normal school and that's what she did [circa 1910/1911].

IDP: I guess she told be about it [her experience at the Harmony Normal School] because she, oh, she had so many good friends there and she loved school and she learned, she could recite in Latin and, yeah, she had a lot of friends at the school there, both boys and girls. They all got along so well. Because they all wanted to learn how to be teachers, you know, what else could they do in a little town that was, well, you know there really wasn't anything else to do [after graduating highs school].

AH: Now I know you liked school too so what did you like best about going to school?

IDP: Oh, yes, I did, once I got used to being away from home I did. But all my sisters went, you know. I just remember so well sitting at the breakfast table one morning and all my sisters came out and they were not dressed up in the clothes they wear around the house they had nice dresses on and everything. And they came out of the bedroom all dressed up. I said: "Where are they going?" My mother said, "They are going to school." And I said, I remember: "I want to go to school" and she says, "Oh, no, you are not old enough to go to school. You have to stay home with mother." And so, I think I was crying and everything. I wanted to go to every place they did and they didn't want to take me because, you know, like this they started to have a movie in Harmony and they went to the movies. They were [the movies], I think, with cowboys and horses, and every time

they went I would be crying “I want to go to.” My oldest sister, you know, Shirley, she was the one who, well, she was more bossy, not that my mother was but my mother if I thought I had something that my mother might not approve of, you know, ah, my sister would scold me. My mother never scolded me, just my sister because she was like in charge mostly of me because I was the smallest.

AH: So when did you get to go to the movies? When did you finally get to go? Do you remember?

IDP: My mother persuaded them to take me cause it was, I think, it was a cowboy movie. And when they had the cowboy movies they had a piano player and she would just, we sat right in the front row, uh, and she would play, you know, when the horses were galloping and I thought that was so wonderful, you know. And I before very long she was hardly through with the first song - she didn't play a song she played like with the cowboys she'd play real fast [to indicate their galloping run] music, you know, and if it was a sad part she'd play real slow. She was a very good player, but I always went to sleep. I guess the music put me to sleep. So then at the end of the movie the lights would go on and they would all be sitting there hoping there would be more and I was sound asleep of course. And then my oldest sister - she didn't exactly get mad but she was a little disgusted and she said, “I knew you would go to sleep!” And so they walked out and

I really was asleep. They took me [with them] and walked down the street and I walked down the street but I was really asleep and I just kind of wandered home.

AH: Do you remember when they had the first talkie movie in town?

IDP: Yes, but I was pretty old then. I [?], girls in my class, we all went to the movies then and then my sister had gone to Minneapolis [by then] to work and my other sisters had other friends so they went with each other. They went with their friends and I didn't care to go with them so much [when I was older].

AH: Did you go to the movies often with your friends?

IDP: Well, they went every Saturday night then, but then I didn't go as much after my sister went to Minneapolis and she would've have been in school. Oh, I don't know, I didn't care to do so much with the others [as with my sisters], ah, and I don't know when they started to have talkies [after 1927 probably]. And then they started to have comedies. They didn't have, well, they still had cowboy movies too. But we liked the comedies and so the other girl who'd take me was, ah, was [?], but, you know, everybody at the movie would be laughing cause they'd have comedies. I remember one was W.C. Fields [The Golf Specialist, 1930] – I remember him – because he, well, everyone would be laughing. I was still sitting in the front row with my sisters and W.C. Fields was playing golf and, you know, he was supposed to be funny but I felt sorry for him because he was sticking that golf club up in the air and hitting at something at the crowd but he never hit the golf

ball. And, you know, everyone was just laughing and I was sitting there so sorry for him because he was having so much trouble hitting the golf ball. And everybody just laughed. I didn't think that was right to laugh at somebody.

AH: Speaking of entertainment, what other types of entertainment were in town when you were growing up, when you were a teenager? What other things did you do for fun?

IDP: Well, in our neighborhood, we had fun all the time because there were kids next door. And, uh, kids a couple doors down the other way. And every night, well, during the day we had jobs to do and everyone just went ahead and did their jobs and didn't complain about it. And then after supper, well, we girls had to do the dishes and I kind of liked that, uh, I felt I was grown up like they were [my sisters]. They didn't let me wash the dishes but they let me dry them and put them away. And then we went outside and the neighbors were outside and we would play games all over the neighborhood like, uh, Hide 'n Seek and we'd just go over the whole neighborhood and hide. And then we played Run Sheep Run. That's the one – did you ever play that – see Run Sheep Run you could go over the whole neighborhood and the person who was it had to go and find you and chase you back – we had a tree and that was the goal, that was it, and you had to try to run back to the tree and the she [the person who was it] tried to catch you. And, oh, we just went all over the whole neighborhood and, uh, we liked to play that. We'd play until it'd get dark and then we had to go in. That's what we did a lot. Sometimes they played baseball but they said I was too small and so I didn't do that. I just watched them. We just played until it was dark and then we knew we had to go in was when the mosquitoes

started. And we would just sit there and finally we would run into the house [when the mosquitoes came out].

AH: Now when you got older what else did you do? Did you ever go to the Opera House?

IDP: Yes. Well, when I was about 12 and I had a neighbor girl [friend]. She and I were best friends and I would go up to her house a lot because she was the only child and she had the say, as we would call it, the say of everything, you know, and at my house if I took any, their [sisters'] dolls to play with – they had nice dolls – and I just had an old, kind of raggedy doll and, you know, I wanted a nice doll too so I'd go to her house and she knew all kinds of things to do. She'd, she'd from her mother get a big cardboard box and she'd make a dollhouse out of it. And she would make a dollhouse out of it and she would even, they had rolls of wallpaper that they had used and had them come and paper their walls and what was leftover they gave to her to play with and she knew how to do everything. She'd get the big cardboard box and she'd make windows in it and, oh, she'd go and if they had a little wallpaper left and she knew how to make paste and I didn't know how to do that. She'd make paste and paste on the wallpaper. Her name was Evelyn. I can't remember [her last name] right away but I will it. Her father (James) was a milkman. You know he picked up milk in the country and he had a big truck he would go, the farmers would put out the big milk cans. They'd put them out, usually by the mailbox and he would go through the whole country [farms around Harmony] and pick up the milk and take it to the creamery. That was his job. And, uh, we just, oh, when we played at the house we played with the dolls. She had dolls and she let me play with them

too. Well, she was older than I was so she kind of told me what to do which I didn't mind because, well, she was a lot nicer [than my sisters]. Yeah. I always call them they were bossy and I didn't even know what that meant but they were bossy. Yeah. And they had all kinds of toys that they had had and they wouldn't let me play with them. And they had even doll dishes that were really, really nice but they wouldn't let me play with the good ones. They had some that weren't so nice and they let me play with them. But I always wanted to play with the good ones. They said those good ones were real china – cause they had everything really nice, you know, and I just got the old things that they had thrown away. They didn't even want it anymore.

AH: Last time when I was here we talked a little bit about businesses in town. You mentioned the Toggery and you talked about your memories of that. Could you share that with us?

IDP: That was when I was a little older and I knew how to go downtown. My mother canned most of our food. We had a big garden and she just had everything in the garden but some things we had to go to the store to buy. But then later on she'd sometimes call up the store [the Toggery] and order it [a product] and they'd have it. They had a pickup truck, you know, and they would come and deliver it but sometimes there would be something she forgot or something else that she needed because she did a lot of baking and canning. She had all kinds of big pots to do the canning in. And we had apple trees and plum trees. The apple trees she would make applesauce and she would do all that in the kitchen. And she canned things, you know, she had big jars. [The Toggery's deliveries] was when I first saw pickup trucks. You know, it had a seat for the driver in

front and room in back where they put all the groceries they delivered and they knew people who had the store and their son [Harold] delivered and my mother would always talk to him [when he delivered the groceries]. She loved to talk to people. And he would come in that pickup truck and he'd always have something funny to say and she'd always laugh at him and, uh, so if it was anything big I didn't go to the store because I couldn't carry it. We had a big shopping basket but I didn't like to take that because, you know, there were a lot of people downtown. The farmers would come in and their wives would come in and shop and if I took that big basket everybody would say "What a big basket for such a little girl." And, you know, I didn't like to be noticed like that. I just wanted to do my shopping and they could do theirs. The farmers would come to town and sometimes their wives would come with them. Their wives would bring eggs, you know, they had chickens and they'd take the eggs and they always took them to the Toggery [to sell]. The people [S.B. & Ida Johnson] had the Toggery for years [1917-1939]. Mr. and Mrs. Sam Johnson. They were man and wife and young and they had a nice store in the front and then in back they built a grocery store and their son, Harold, ran that. So sometimes, well, my mother didn't buy much from there because she baked everything but sometimes if they had something special if she called Harold – Harold was his name – and he was kind of a good salesman and he'd say "Well, we just got some cookies in or we just got some pickles in" and, oh, she didn't always buy it but, ah, sometimes she did. Well, of course, that was too heavy for me [the pickles in a heavy jar] so I didn't take that but sometimes he'd say they had cookies and my mother made really good cookies but she only made certain kinds – I think ones she thought were good for us. You know how they always did things that were good for the children.

AH: So what was in the store. There's the back end that had groceries but what was in the store in the front?

IDP: Oh, she [Mrs. Johnson] had everything in the front. She had dresses and shoes and they had a lot of money, uh, I don't know because they had a big house. Did you ever see it? Oh, I think it was the biggest house and she had help to come in and do the laundry. And she was kind of bossy. And would let me [look around] because she knew I wouldn't touch anything but sometimes kids from the country came in and they had never seen toys like that [those in the store] and they would pick them up and she didn't like that. She always had glasses on and she'd stand behind the big counter and she kind of said it real nice but firm "Well, young men, I think you'd better go out now" and she never said that to me. Of course, I was a girl so she wouldn't say 'young men' but she always told me if they had something new in the store and, uh, they had all kinds of yard goods and [?] and I a lady came to make dresses for me so sometimes she [Mrs. Ida Johnson] would say to me "Oh, we've got some new [what kind of clothe it was]. I remember one was dotted Swiss and that was really pretty and my mother bought that for me and a lady came and made a dress out of that and I liked that so then I would kind of look at the yard goods and see, and they had a lot of things I just like to look at everything. Like they had a little cabinet that had all spools of thread in it. But a lot of the ladies sewed their own dresses and they would come and look at the thread but – it was in a cabinet – and I don't think they were supposed to open it. They were Johnsons and he [Mr. Sam Johnson] would always make a little joke and sometimes he'd give me a little

candy. They had everything in that store. At the other stores [in town] they didn't have many things to choose from. [Harmony] had three stores [mercantile/grocery type] and then another store came in, a new one, and so they had four. And then, MacGee's owned the new store [the fourth store] that they built and they had a son, Billy, who was really tall. I liked to go there because he'd always make a joke, you know, and he'd deliver [items from his store]. They [MacGee's] were the first ones that had a pickup truck to deliver. People came [to Harmony] from the country and I guess from other towns around here too [to shop at the stores].

AH: Now one time you told me, when I was here last time, that there was a place called the Resting Room where women (farmer's wives) would come in? Can you explain that a little bit – the Resting Room – what that was?

IDP: Well, it was the library but the library was only open on Saturday morning and you had to have a card [to check out books]. My sisters all had cards and all the shelves were full of books and then I think at that time you could only take two (books) but later on you could take [more because] they got more books and you could take all you wanted. So my sisters would take me to the library. There was a ladies club [Women's Club] and my mom was a member of the club and that was one of the things they did was start the library. And another thing they did was really, oh, they had to work so hard to and they had to try to raise the money because they needed something [for the community]. They started the park [Selvig] and it had a drinking fountain in the center and now they took that out. I don't know why. We'd go to school through the park and it had all gravel paths and we kids kind of liked to walk on the gravel because it would crunch, you know, and

we liked that. Uh, and then you had to go up a little hill to get to the school. A lot of people didn't like [the name change from City Park to Selvig Park] because they said Selvigs didn't have anything to do with the park, the ladies club built it. It [the park] was [beautiful]. They [Harmony] always had a Fourth of July in Harmony, a big celebration, and they would have a parade and [other entertainment at the park].

AH: Tell me a little more about the library. Did you enjoy going to the library?

IDP: Well, when I was little [under the age of 5] my sisters would take me but they wouldn't let me get any books because I said I didn't know how to read. So every time I'd go I'd just take a book and open it and try to make out what it said. Of course, I didn't go to school yet. I couldn't read. What I remember is that they moved it [the library] several times because, well, because they got more books for one thing. I don't know why else [they moved it around]. First they had it in what they called the Rest Room, but that was only open when people came to town [Saturday mornings]. The [farm] ladies could come in and rest with their groceries [while their husbands did business in town]. I got books even before I could read and my sisters would make fun of me [because I liked to look at books even though I couldn't read] so I'd pretend I was reading. The ladies club did a lot of things [in addition to opening the library] and, uh, I don't remember all they were because I was younger. They had readings at night. But I know one thing, if they got books for the library there would be a couple ladies who would read those books first to see if they were suitable and they hardly ever found one that was suitable and they had their attics filled with books that they said weren't suitable. Yeah. And they were good books because they had to be recommended by the library board and I don't know

what they ever did [with all those books]. They [the ladies who made those decisions] didn't approve anything.

AH: You graduated from high school in 1938. You were valedictorian of your class and vice president as well. What type of activities were you involved in in high school?

IDP: Uh, well, they had speaking contests and they had a couple and I would always be in that. They wouldn't let the girls play basketball then but I probably would've have gotten into that because I was so small and really wasn't good, but we had some girls who were always trying to get a basketball team. But you know they had a school board and they had to approve everything and they didn't think it was suitable for girls so they wouldn't let them have a basketball team. But we went the [boys] basketball games. They were over in the, well that building, it's down by the school, it's, I think, the American Legion [is in it now; old Opera House]. You know that used to be a theater [as well] and they used to have a group of theater people, I guess they were from Rochester and every summer they would come and give plays there. Yes, I went, I loved theater [at the Opera House] and they had a piano player. Before they'd start the play he'd come out and, you know, it was like an introduction and, oh, he was from Rochester and, oh, he was so good looking. We girls, all us girls, sat right in the front row [to see him better]. I'd rather go the [live theater than the movies]. The live theater I liked a lot. And you had to go to the store, which I went to [often] anyway and get they'd give you a little ticket, and then with that ticket – 10 cents – you could get into the theater. You could get it [the ticket] at any store in town because the stores all paid something for those tickets [for the performances

to come to Harmony]. I liked live theater much better than the movies. I thought the movies were kind of silly, you know.

AH: So, in high school, you graduated in 1938, so which building did you graduate from? Any traditions?

IDP: We had the new [high] school and we graduated from the new school that was built. There were, I think, 30 people. We all knew each other we all got along. Just the sports [for traditions]. [Baseball] was at the end of the year so people [high schoolers] never got that enthusiastic about it because, you know, you have a different feeling when school was at the end of the year [about ready to end for summer, at the end of the school year than you do during the school year]. At the end of the year we'd always go on a picnic. When we were little we'd just go to the park [for the picnic] and we each brought something from home. And when we were seniors we went down to Luther College in Decorah [for the picnic] and that was really special. I pretty much liked them [teachers] all. Ms. Selvig, I really liked her. I had her in fifth grade. She was the sister of the Selvig who was on the school board but she had taught for years and, uh, she stayed at Miss Seams house, you know, Miss Seams house was across the street here [from the Clara House assisted living]. And Miss Seams gave piano lessons too. I took piano lessons from her but, you know, they thought I'd be good like my older sister was but I wasn't. I kept at it; I liked it. I liked it because every week when I had the lesson she'd give me a picture of the composer and his name and then she'd ask me questions about it and I always knew all the answer because I had read in my sisters' books about him. So, she gave, I had a solo to play at the end of her [piano] school year. She had a program and all

the students played a song. So, I got to play my song at that and all the mothers came so I liked that.

AH: Were you in plays at school?

IDP: Yes, I was. I was in, well, it was a high school play and they needed little children. It was about gypsies and you could imagine I was a gypsy. I don't look like a gypsy, but that was what they said. I even had a line to say. Oh, the gypsy man was from high school and he was, I thought he was good looking, you know, and everyone liked him and he was a good singer too. They had different plays every year. I don't remember the others because I wasn't in them. But I remember this one because I was in it. I thought it was fun to be a gypsy.

AH: You mentioned at our meeting before that there was a Memorial Day Service to honor WWI veterans when you were young. Could you talk about that?

IDP: They had a parade on Memorial Day because there were quite a few, you know, the soldiers that were drafted, were from the farm country and a lot of the farm boys from around here had been soldiers and they had the American Legion and they were members of the American Legion. And then they would have, I think about six of us – I was real little then – and you had to wear a white [organza] dress and when they shot the gun – it makes me cry - and you'd put a wreath on the cross. And they were always, the soldiers that died [it was sad] and it was the American Legion [that did the service]. And they played taps at the end. You know how sad that is. I think they still do [have a service] and play taps. They had little crosses and we each stood by a cross [and put on a wreath].