

Mary Frances Thompson was a pioneer of the Arkansas Choral Directors Association. She began her teaching career in the 1930s at Parham Elementary School in the Little Rock School District. She would remain with the district for 38 years. She began working as an assistant choir director at Little Rock Central High in the 1940s, becoming the head choir director in 1948. She supervised a choral program that grew to involve 350 students in grades 10-12. Students were assigned to various choirs according to their ability to sight-read music, vocal ability, scholastic rank, and recommendations of faculty members. Mrs. Thompson was stressing sight reading as an important skill long before ArkCDA even existed.

Community involvement was an important aspect of Mrs. Thompson's choirs. In 1950 alone, performances were held for the Rotarians, the Kiwanis Club, the Lion's Club, The Pulaski County Medical Auxiliary, various church programs, The State PTA convention, the PTA City Council, the State Hospital, various junior high and elementary schools, as well as their own concerts at home. The choir also presented "H.M.S. Pinafore" during the spring semester. They were "assisted" by the drama department, but it was clearly a choir project!

In 1957 the Little Rock School District opened a brand new high school, and Mrs. Thompson left Central to be the first choir director at Hall High. Within a very short time period, she had established a choral program that was as strong as the one she left at Central. At Hall, she sponsored city wide choral festivals for the junior and senior highs, even composing songs herself for those performances.

ArkCDA was created in 1967. She played a vital part helping organize the association. In 1970 she helped compile a "Selected Music List" for use at choral festivals. (The list had a copyright and member schools had to pay \$2.00 for a copy.) She was elected president of ArkCDA in 1969. This was a time when it was still rare for women to be selected for educational leadership positions. Indeed, it would be 25 years before another woman would be elected ArkCDA president. She retired from teaching in 1972.

Mrs. Thompson was universally known as "Miss Pinky" because of her love for all things pink. She and her husband Dewey owned Arkansas Optical in Little Rock for many years. She died in 2005 at the age of 92. Robert Duffy, a former student, wrote this tribute to her - "Miss Pinky was the genuine article. When I think of the adventurous repertory she introduced us to -- Kodaly, Ein Deutsches Requiem and her own compositions -- I am astonished. Although I came into her chorus room loving serious music I believe she brought me to a greater appreciation of it, a more sophisticated appreciation of it, by having us produce it. Good old Miss Pinky."