

## MISS FRANCES, THE BELLE OF EDUCATIONAL TV

By Marya Smith

Long before *Dora the Explorer*, *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers*, there was *Ding Dong School* — and Miss Frances. Television was in its infancy when the late Frances Rappaport Horwich (PhD42) pioneered quality programming for the preschool set.

Horwich became the legendary Miss Frances in 1952 when her show first aired from a small Chicago studio, capturing its audience — and industry applause — almost immediately. After only six weeks, with millions of Baby Boomers tuning in, *Ding Dong School* went national on NBC-TV, and ran until 1964. The groundbreaking show also won a prestigious George Foster Peabody Award its first year.

Five days a week, Miss Frances rang an old-fashioned school bell to open her 30-minute program, which she also produced. She effectively set the standard for channeling TV's potential into a learning tool for kids.



Photo From NBC - TV

No special effects were required to keep viewers in thrall, thanks to her signature approach: Miss Frances talked directly to the children who were watching in their living rooms, speaking in a warm, low-key manner. Her show was interactive, with Miss Frances leading her young audience in creative activities using materials at hand such as pipe cleaners and sweet potatoes. She even offered gentle advice, including on hanging up coats and setting the table.

Miss Frances also devoted quality time to parents. For the last segment of every program, she invited parents to the TV set for a conference, speaking to them as partners so they could make the most of the show's activities with their children.

The former grade school teacher and head of Roosevelt University's education department was a lifelong advocate for parent-teacher cooperation. In fact, parent education was the topic of her Northwestern doctoral dissertation: a full decade before ringing in *Ding Dong School* she wrote, "There is a real need for teachers to understand more adequately the relationship between parents and their children."

With her TV presence, Miss Frances put her beliefs into action. She not only thought outside of the box, but she also turned America's ubiquitous television set into an enjoyable, successful learning center for families across the country.