

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

South High School

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1769

OLIVER P. CASH

Interviewed

On

November 10, 1995

By

Lea Mollman

Oliver P. Cash

Oliver P. Cash was born in Independence, Ohio in 1912. After being graduated From Independence High School, he attended Wesleyan Methodist University for one year before moving on to Miami University from which he received his Bachelor of Science degree in 1934. He later received a Masters degree from Ohio State University.

Mr. Cash taught music, singing, and band at Beaver and Poland High Schools Before coming to South High School in 1942. He earned a wonderful reputation, especially as a director of choral music, until his retirement in 1973.

Oliver Cash was married for fifty-eight years and has one daughter who is in education. He is an active member of the Poland, Ohio Kiwanis Club where he continues to work with young people.

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INTERVIEWEE: OLIVER P. CASH

INTERVIEWER: Lea Mollman

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M: When did you start at South?

C: 1942.

M: 1942? How old were you then?

C: 30. I had taught five years in Poland, and three years in southern Ohio before that.

M: Okay, I wondered because Mr. Beach said that when he came in 1942 that a lot of the coaches had left.

C: Well that was the beginning of the war years and if you were a teacher you received a notice like say 1-A and so on and they would hold off on sending you to the army or wherever they were going to send you until the school year was finished. So you had the male teachers moving in and out, most of them.

M: But you didn't move out?

C: I was there the whole time, I was a 1-A, they sent me up to Cleveland for induction but then they changed the age and sent me back home, and I actually received a notice twice and each time some change was made and so on and they increased the age or decreased it, I never did go in.

M: You taught music?

C: I taught music.

M: You directed the choirs?

C: I had vocal music, and then for several years I had the whole thing. I had the band, both the instrumental and the vocal music.

M: I've always thought that being a band director would require a lot because you have to know so much.

C: You have to spend a lot of time and you always have to figure out how to get extra money because you always need instrument repair and buying instruments. Not all the kids can go out and buy a sousaphone, so the school has to buy them in order to have a balanced program.

M: There are a lot of clarinets and flutes?

C: The smaller instruments you can use in ensembles and so on. Other than the school's music they usually own themselves. Then you have to buy uniforms and all of the band equipment. You have to be a bit sincere as well, programs always to raise money.

C: Yes

M: How did South High do?

C: We used to enter in to them and sometimes we would get an excellent, and sometimes we would get a superior, and you sent young people in as soloists also, both instrumental and vocal.

M: Was there a pep band, a band that played at games?

C: Well out of the regular band I had a small group that I would send to basketball games and things of that type where a large band would be unsuitable.

M: Did you have a marching band?

C: Yes, and at that time the band director, if he wanted to look good they practiced a lot. We had a regular period during the day and we didn't practice outside, we just practiced the music. And then they would come and practice outside before school started. For all of this the band director received nothing except for his regular salary. Today it is entirely different, not too many teachers today would raise a finger without being paid for it, which I don't know whether that is good or bad. You had a group of very dedicated teachers. You had teachers that with those students, especially those who were going to college, or were going to be assigned to West Point or Annapolis, were having trouble with the math or physics and so on there was someone who would come in on

Saturday morning and they would have a special class and they received no compensation for it and that is hard to find today, anywhere. So, I was there for thirty-two years. When I first went there we had about 1800 students in three grades and you had a teacher who handled the absentee people and they usually had a couple of reliable students to help them. And the first period of the day, the period was sixty minutes long and we had six of them. In less than one period they would call of the homes and check on those who were absent, to see if they had a legit reason for being out, and that the parents knew about it. A lot of these kids would head off for school and then never show up at the school and the parents thought they were at school. It took them a half hour maybe forty-five minutes to check on eighteen hundred. And when I left they worked all day, usually two faculty members would work all the time, and several students and they had a, well we used to call them truant officers and they call them now, they call them attendance officers. Between Wilson and South each one had a full time attendance officer, and then one that went from school to school to help out because they just couldn't handle it. So the attendance at school changed dramatically, and when everything such as attendance at school changes dramatically, other things such as grade levels, accomplishments, failures increased in the same proportion. Plus it got to the point that half the time you couldn't even get a hold of anyone in the home. So it changed a great deal.

M: So do you think it began to change after World War II?

C: It changed after World War II. When the young men and women came back from the service they did not come back to Youngstown, their parents were in Youngstown and they were getting up in years. And most of them moved out into the suburbs, Austintown, Boardman, Canfield, and Poland. Then there was a great change too when people moved all over the country to work different jobs, they moved where the jobs were. Of course at that time the steel mills were still going strong, and so a lot of them came back here and stayed. But they didn't settle in the cities they moved out. Then as the older generations that were in these homes died off, you had a whole new "floating generation" who moved in, and they did not have the stable homes that the previous people had. So consequently all of your problems increased, attendance, failures, discipline and it just kept changing. The schools that we hear so much about, the schools that are having so much trouble and so on, those are in your large cities mostly. I'm not saying that you don't have problems elsewhere, you do everywhere. But you have small country schools today that are doing a remarkable job. Because they have pretty much the same atmosphere, home connections, responsibilities, and work ethics that they had, say fifty years ago. You did not have the drug problems and all that that you have today. And you did not have examples set on television for them to follow like you do today.

M: You were born in 1911?

C: 1912.

M: 1912.

C: That makes me 83.

M: I was thinking that my father was born in 1901 and we had talked about the changes that he saw. You mentioned television and it seems to me that it has really changed.

C: Television has been a source of entertainment. Television as far as setting standards of conduct and examples and so on has deteriorated a great deal since its first inception. I would say that about 1950 is when television started to take hold of people and they started to buy television sets. They had them before that except it was very limited, because the broadcasting facilities were very limited. The first television I had was in 1950 and the only stations I could pick up was Cleveland, and the picture quality was very poor, very poor. And it wasn't until they had more stations with strength and broadcasting that things changed. Young people are very affected; in my day they were, except in my day it was radio and movies. The big thing then was smoking; everybody on the radio and in the movies seemed to smoke. Of course on radio you couldn't see it, but they mentioned it in their conversations and so on. And the only thing they said was bad with smoking then was that it made you short of breath. Now the whole thing has changed.

M: When you were a teacher at South in the forties, did the teachers routinely go to the dances and the social events?

C: What?

M: Did the teachers usually go to the dances and social events?

C: Oh what they did was at the different things, class advisors and all that. Each year they appointed teachers to those jobs. If you were senior class advisor you were in charge of the yearbook. I was in charge of all the music for graduation and things of that type, and assemblies. You were assigned these different jobs, like class advisors. Each year they went around to different people so if you were class advisor this year maybe you would not be a class advisor again for six or eight years.

M: How big was the staff? About how many teachers were there?

C: Actual teachers, of course you had well you had a principal, head of the school, and then you had a dean of girls and a dean of boys and they handled the discipline and the problems with the kids. And then it changed because the state required that they have councilors. The students they would go in and they would help them with making out schedules and what they wished to do and so on. Then they had, they called it the dean of boys and the dean of girls they didn't have to do all of that. But it's because they had more problems that brought that about. When I first started an administration in a city like Youngstown, it was only a small number in comparison to what they have today. But every time they had a riot or a minority group protested they would hire someone else to handle it. When I was hired the superintendent of schools interviewed me and talked to me, now not even the assistant superintendent does that it goes way down to someone else.

And in all probability most of the teachers haven't even ever talked to the superintendent. It became complicated every time something happened and as your school changed you had to change your curriculum; you started having reading aids coming in, for the blind and for many, many different things. They hired a school psychologist, and at least as far as I was concerned that was a waste of money, because they would send a sixteen year old down to the psychologist because he was a problem in school and in a couple of days he'll be back right in the same seat doing the exact same thing. And his notes from the psychologist would read he is a disturbed child because of his home life. That doesn't help you and that doesn't solve the problem, you already knew that. So this just seemed to me like a lesson in futility, by trying to correct mistakes by just assigning more people to them, which did nothing except confuse the whole business. When I went there the faculty was elderly. Many of them had been there since the First World War many of them and there were one or two of them who when the school started were there. Then it changed rapidly because when they got up to the retirement age the percentage of faculty members retiring was very high for a few years. So then they would come in waves and all of them were dedicated and they did a good job. They were very dignified people and so on and the community had a great deal of respect for them. No strikes, that was unheard of. Strikes did not come about until after the Second World War, because all during the war and that period the unions and so on became very powerful because they were riding in a wave. Then the young ones came back from the service and started teaching and they adopted the same methods that they were using in industry. They saw unions and so on that were striking and striking and getting more money and advantages and so on. Teachers, the older ones looked at it and they didn't pay much attention to it because they were brought up under a different system, where it was unheard of to strike in the school system. So we started having teacher strikes and things that was not until after the Second World War. You had a shortage after the Second World War of labor in the steel mills because such a large percentage, the young men had to go into the service. And that brought especially the blacks from the south and so on up for a better chance of making money and a better way of life. They came up and moved into the city and then after the Second World War, the whites in the city started to move out, until like in many cities you have like 80% of the population is black. And your white population rides in or drives in the morning and then in the evening they are out. Their children do not go to school in the city and they are not interested except from a job standpoint. So it changed a great deal, then the state stepped in and they started to change a lot of things that were accepted before, for instance if a girl got pregnant in high school she could continue her education but she had to go to night school. Then the state stepped in and she could stay in school until she was very advanced in her pregnancy and then the state assigned or hired teachers to go to the homes, which started a welfare program and so on, that is the best way to describe them. They'd tutor them privately until they had their baby, then they could come back. So consequently whether that had anything to do with it, I think it had some relationship to it. But never the less pregnancy started to increase rapidly among the high school girls. And it got to a certain point that like on certain days of the year such as the last day before Christmas, in the spring and Easter, they would bring their babies to school to show them off. So I really don't know but everyone likes to help somebody who is in trouble, but it seems if you go too far with it you create a situation where an undesirable thing that is going on skyrockets and it becomes accepted as a way of life. So consequently most of these people ended up

on some sort of government aid. Unless the grandparents stepped in or some other relative the child was being brought up on the edge of poverty without adequate supervision. And they turned around and lived the same kind of life when they became an adult. Depending on the government, no work ethics. It creates a real social problem that we are dealing with today. Then you go to the other extreme of when a young girl became pregnant, and then everyone talked about her she was set off into a separate category. I have no answer as to how far you should go about aiding without penalties, I don't know and that's a real problem in all societies. You could go to the extreme where in the eastern countries if you steal something then your hand is chopped off. Now we look upon that as cruelty. But they don't have gun problems because they are so strict and the penalties are so severe. Anything else you'd like to ask?

M: Well where did you live when you were teaching school at South?

C: I lived right here.

M: Because you started at Poland?

C: Yeah I taught at Poland for five years before I went to South. I bought this home and at that time there was no requirement. You know you could live anywhere you wanted to as long as you showed up at school and did your job.

M: Did you have a problem here during the war getting enough gas to drive back and forth?

C: No because we shared rides. There were about four teachers from Poland at that time and I'd drive one week and then one would drive the next week and you eventually cut it down to one fourth of what you would usually drive.

M: Were there any special programs at South during the war years? As far as things like scrap drives....

C: As far as what?

M: Scrap drives or Red Cross classes.

C: I don't remember any, no. The school was used at night because there was a shortage of people to work in the mills and so on because the young men so many of them were gone and they had classes in welding and various things like that that were used in the mills but those were held at night. And people could sign up for them and night school at that time was expensive.

M: The field house, I kept hearing about the Field House so I drove around the school to find it. Was it a major part of the school and the community?

C: Yes, all of the male physical ed. classes were held there you know during the day. And then the basketball tournaments and so on were held there. Graduation, when I first went there was held in Stambaugh Auditorium. Until 1950 they sent high school boys up there to arrange things and the whole business and then the union moved in and there was a conflict between the union and the school as far as how much it was going to cost. So they just moved out of Stambaugh and had their graduations in the Field House. But the Field House was used for music, various things, well in fact any community activity that needed a large space.

M: Were you a popular teacher?

C: I would like to think that I had been.

M: Several people I've talked to said that you should talk to Oliver P. Cash, and they always said Oliver P. Cash, and they said I should talk to you. It just gave me the feeling that you must have been popular at the time and apparently you stayed involved with the community, so I thought you would be a good guy to talk to.

C: I was in charge of the pep assemblies. I knew so many of the students that I did not have in class, I knew from other activities. I provided music for all of the athletic events like football and pep band for basketball. Then we went out into the community and sang and did programs at churches which you received nothing for at that time. So it kept me busy.

M: Were they still doing programs at churches in the seventies before you left or was that another thing that changed?

C: It had pretty much stopped by 1970.

M: Because I was surprised at what someone else said about the number of concerts that were done at churches.

C: Well today I am bothered a great deal with the pettiness, the smallness and all of the various little groups objecting to something, they just seem to have a chip on their shoulders and anything that comes along, they try to tear it apart. It seems like all we do today is cater to a few and neglect the many. And all during my teaching I had Jewish students, Greek, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, black, white, Asiatic. And we would go out and sing at churches and I told them that if they had any religious objections, I did not expect them to appear if they didn't believe in it and there was no type of penalty. I never had any trouble. And the Jewish students who sang Christmas songs vigorously, I looked at it as an art form. The Christmas songs the whole thing was to give. And they enjoyed singing the more classical type of music then they did the popular of course a lot of the popular music does not blend itself to larger groups and most of them were larger groups. Although I did have ensembles that sang around, some of them would be on radio programs at that time. A great deal of the radio programs were local. Now it is all canned, it's all...you know you go to Gary, Indiana and you hear the same things on the radio there

that you hear any place else. Very little outside of the news is local. So that's about it I guess.

M: Yep, that's about it.

C: But being a music teacher I had so many students, I had four hundred a day. But it can't be compared to class work because they are two entirely different things. You know, you could handle large groups. After teaching there for thirty-two years the number of kids I had was astronomical. So almost anywhere I go anymore at least around here I always run into someone I had in school. The strangest thing was that I was at Fort Walton Beach and this would have been about 1970, some where in there, and we were down at the beach and in the water and so on and a couple of young fellows, they had n airbase close by. One of them popped up and he said aren't you Mr. Cash? Here the two of them were in the air force and on their time off they were down there enjoying the water. So they pop up in the most unlikely places. And I enjoy going to the reunions they have after all of those thirty-two years, thirty-two reunions. I always look upon the kids as friends as well as students. Anything else?

M: Not that I can think of right at the moment. That was something that Mr. Beach had said, another thing that had changed so much was that you went from feeling like a part of a family when you were friends with the kids.

C: Yeah.

M: There just wasn't that relationship.

C: For a good many years up through the Second World War and after. If I had any discipline problems with a child I would discipline him after class. And then if that didn't work I would call the parents and usually I got results. Then it got to so I couldn't even contact the parents. We would have open house at night hoping to get parents there. If we had twenty parents there we were lucky. The relationship between the school and the parents just deteriorated. And so many of our problems today are just because they trace right back to the home. You have these young people running around at night at two o'clock in the morning that was unheard of. You could call any home and they would know exactly where their child was supposed to be day or night. And so consequently you just don't have that today.

M: You know with the murder rate in the recent years in Youngstown....

C: How can these young people steal, carry guns and everything else with out the parents knowing it?

M: Parents don't know, they are looking the other way.

C: Well a lot of them don't care you know? A lot of them don't have the proper supervision at home or encouragement. So it's a real problem. We argue about the different cultures today.

M: I always felt that your work life depended on them.

C: Yes you always come back to what it was but changes move the other direction, how far it goes, you never know. Responsibility is the thing that is lost today.

M: Yeah.

C: Everything that happens is someone else's fault.

M: My daughter's fourteen and she is the youngest still at home and she goes to Chaney and the whole thing is just amazing. The way things have changed. I usually know where she is but she has friends who just seem to go home to eat and change clothes and I think they metal detectors at school the other day. She and a friend were joking about it and who knows...I couldn't have imagined it when I was in school.

C: No, I can't imagine why in a school with young people that you should have to have metal detectors.

M: When I was in high school the kids who really wanted to experiment with drugs could go to the city you know and find them, there just weren't any where I lived. And you know nowadays I think that if my daughter wanted she could get them, if you can get the money you can buy just about anything.

C: Yes it is hard to stop. Because kids like to be in with others their age. They don't like to be on the outside looking in. And if they pick the wrong friends they are in trouble. There is nothing more important than the friends that young people select and copy after. If you get in with the wrong ones you are in trouble.

M: Then there are so many other influences, like television, that just make it easier to do all of the wrong things.

C: I would follow these morning programs and it's the same thing. It is as if they scraped the bottom of the barrel of humanity and people who are absolutely stupid that everything that they do is not in their interest. No sense of responsibility toward anyone else, just a total lack of common sense. And their problems are all being created by their own actions.

M: But then people that watch those see that as a normal way to live. It just grows.