

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Salem Schools Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1111

THELMA THOMAS

Interviewed

by

James McNeal

on

November 5, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Salem Schools Project

INTERVIEWEE: THELMA THOMAS

INTERVIEWWE: James McNeal

SUBJECT: Early education, first Salem job, Prospect school, E.S. Kerr, Ora Montgomery, and years as principal.

Date: November 5, 1975

M: This is an interview with Miss Thelma Thomas for the Youngstown State University History of Salem Schools project by James L. McNeal at the Salem Junior High School, 230 N. Lincoln Avenue, Salem, Ohio, on November 5, 1975, at 3:30 p.m. The first thing this afternoon, Miss Thomas, I'd like to have you respond to how and why you became interested in education.

T: Well, I graduated from high school when I was sixteen, so there wasn't much else to do, but to think about going to college. Since I lived in Pennsylvania, and Indiana, the State Teacher's College at that time was fourteen or fifteen miles away, that seemed the logical thing to do. To go to school because we couldn't find a job. This was 1926 and 1927, the Depression years. That's when the Depression was already started and that was the reason I went into that. Of course, it was just a two year deal at that time, then when you graduated you were able to teach. I was eighteen then and started to teach. That's the reason I could get those forty-seven years in.

M: People thinking about graduating from high school...

T: At that time, that is right.

M: Was it quite normal for people to graduate from school at that age?

T: No, there was a girl that was younger than I was, and she was from Buffalo originally. We lived in this small town, and it seems that there wasn't enough children for seventh grade. I had moved from Pittsburgh, she had moved from Buffalo, so they put us into eighth grade so that the teacher wouldn't be bothered with two seventh graders. That was the reason we got so far ahead. That was the only thing. Then, in those days, you had to pass a county examination too, you know, when you graduated from eighth grade. You had to walk three or four miles to another school to take an examination. If you didn't pass that examination, then you weren't eligible to go to high school.

M: So, you really didn't miss out on all that much by skipping a few...?

T: No, we were able to make it up.

M: Would you expand on the two year training and, where you received that?

T: That was at Indiana State Teacher's College. Well, really it was a normal school, and it became State Teacher's College. It is in Indiana, Pennsylvania. They gave us two years, you didn't get a degree, but you were able to teach at the end of this two year course. We took the regular things that they do now at college. We had to take teaching of reading, teaching of geography, teaching of mathematics, besides our psychology and sociology. I remember many geography courses that we had to take because I was interested in geography at that time, and I liked that, so I took those as my electives. The geography of the United States and Canada. I can remember the geography of South America and so on.

M: Now, how did you become interested or involved in, or aware of Salem Schools?

T: Well, they had a shop at Blairsville, Pennsylvania where I lived, and they made tubs and sinks and so on just as they do down here at the Eljers Company and that plant went under. This was during the Depression, 1929, or something like that. So, since my dad worked in that kind of business, he came out here and got the job down here, what is now the Eljer Company. I don't know what it was called then.

M: I think it was called Sanitary.

T: Yes, Sanitary or something like that. Then, my brother, Clyde, who also went the Indiana State Teachers College, and he was a teacher. I was teaching there at Blairsville or not in Blairsville, I was teaching at the Derry

Township which is in Westmoreland County, and he was teaching over at Ligonier, Pennsylvania and dad came out here and was working. He was out here quite a few years, and then we decided we would to apply down here for positions, and we both got the jobs here in Salem then. Mr. Kerr was Superintendent then.

M: This would be in the 1930's then?

T: Yes. Well, no. This was 1940 now when we came out here.

M: Oh.

T: Because we taught...I had taught twelve years in Pennsylvania before I came out. Clyde had taught two or three years in Ligonier before he came out. Then, he came to McKinley and taught sixth grade at McKinley, and I went to Prospect and taught fifth grade. This is how we got to Salem.

M: Now, the Superintendent at the time then was E.S. Kerr.

T: Mr. Kerr, yes.

M: In all tapes that we have done so far, at least most of them, the name E.S. Kerr pops up over and over again.

T: Yes, he had been Superintendent here for years, I imagine before I came, and then he was Superintendent for years afterwards, too. I can remember, let's see it must have been around 1959 or 1958 when Paul Smith came. So, you see, he was Superintendent for quite a few years afterwards.

M: What I'm getting at is you served under E.S. Kerr...

T: Yes, yes. He is the one that hired me. I came out here for an interview, I remember, on a very cool day in February, it was Washington's birthday. For some reason we had Washington's birthday off in Pennsylvania, but not here, so I decided to come out at that time for an interview because we had personal interviews then just as they do now, I suppose.

M: Had you written to him?

T: Yes. I had applied and filled out an application form and so on. He said...

M: Did you have any other awareness of a job opening in Salem or is it strictly hinged on your father moving?

T: Yes. No, I didn't know if there were any jobs vacant when I applied, no. Then Mr. Kerr sent me to work for

Montgomery, who was then principal of Prospect school, and I remember going out to see her then because there was going to be a vacancy. The fifth grade at Prospect which I didn't know about when I came out because I was just applying for school, and if there was an opening all right and if there wasn't then all right, too.

M: Then you got into a Salem school position relatively easy.

T: Yes, that's right.

M: Just one interview?

T: Just one interview and meeting with Miss Montgomery. Then later on, I think it was around June, May or June, I had given up on me ever hearing or anything. I had forgotten all about it because after all I did have a job in that position, and no reason to leave. Mr. Kerr said, "Let's post the note." Oh, I think that he came to Blairsville, that was it, he came to Blairesville, he came with Miss Sharpnack, because Miss Sharpnack was having a man teacher at that time from McKinley. Up until that time I don't think they had ever had men teachers, you know, to do the thinking and so on that they had in the schools. Then he came to Blairsville, and then both of us were out.

M: I've heard several stories of Mr. Kerr actually going to the locations and...

T: Yes, I had forgotten about those, but after you reminded me because I didn't remember now that he came. We had no inkling that he was going to come, I mean, he didn't send any advanced word or anything on down, he just popped in one day. Fortunately, both Clyde and I were at home. So, we were able to meet with him and talk with him.

M: Did he stay a long time?

T: No, I don't really remember whether he did or not. I just can't. It is just sort of vague in my mind, I mean, I was so surprised to see him. I mean, after just having met him in February, and this was later on in the spring. To have someone come like that, you know such a distance, I thought, because it was in those days before the turnpike. You had to all go the way around by Pittsburgh and then out to Pennsylvania.

M: That doesn't happen today.

T: That doesn't now. I meant, I don't imagine it would happen. It wouldn't have to happen today because today we more applicants for the positions. We have more

college students now.

M: I know, interviewing Miss Thorp, she mentioned that Mr. Kerr drove up to Ravenna.

T: Well, you see, Miss Thorp came the same year that I did. I mean, she was new at the high school. I didn't really know her then, you know, because...I remember when we had a meeting of the new teachers that she was one of them. It seems as if there were a lot of new ones that year, that was 1940. They were there for the big turnover, just like this past year seemed to be a turnover, you know, of older folks retiring as we had in June.

M: I'd like to stay on the subject of Mr. Kerr, you worked...Even though you came after he had replaced Mr. Allen, the former Superintendent.

T: Yes. I didn't know him. I just heard about him.

M: Do you have any other recollections of Mr. Kerr in your work with him as a teacher?

T: Well, he was very much interested in the teachers, I mean, he took personal interest in each teacher. He seemed to find time to visit, of course, I don't think there were as many paper, as much paper work, and the school system wasn't as large as it is now. I think everybody seemed to know him more, and got to know him more than we did with the other Superintendents. I don't know if it's because we worked for him longer, or was he just that kind of a person, or as I said, maybe it was just because he had more time. When you would go the office, I mean, he didn't seem to have as much paper work, and you could visit with him. Not that you can't visit...You couldn't visit with Mr. Paul Smith, or you couldn't visit with Mr. Pond because you can too, but you just don't think about going nowadays, I don't think, to the Superintendent as much as we did in those days.

M: What did you go to him...See him about?

T: Well, I can remember I had to find a speaker for the S.E.A., at that time I think we could call ourselves the S.T.A.: Salem Teacher's Association. I was on a program committee, and I would go up there to check on...You know, have any ideas...He wouldn't have any ideas about that. Then, I was a delegate to the O.E.A. several years down in Columbus, and I would go to check with him on that. I would have to go get the money because he had charge of the money in those days, and he had the June money rather than the S.T.A. for some reason, I don't know. He took charge of the money, and would give you the money when you were ready to go to Columbus.

Since Mr. Kerr was so much interested in O.E.A., I think he took a deal of interest, and he attended all the meetings.

M: I have heard from other teachers that Mr. Kerr kept a heavy hand on the S.E.A. that he was the head man.

T: Yes, yes. He was the head man. I recall once, I was President of the S.E.A., and I had held several offices before the President, and also I helped to organize the, I mean, the S.E.A. I wasn't a man, I remember going up here to the junior high here now, and meeting. We started what we call the Salem Teacher's Association, I can recall that we had...One year we had a ballet. Someone called me at Prospect school and said, "Oh, you don't want that person on the ballet, oh no, no." I've forgotten who it was, and what office it was, but, "We just don't want him at all" Somehow, I don't know how, but Mr. Kerr found out that I received a telephone call. So, then he called to me, and wanted to know who the person was that had called me about this office and this candidate because he said, "That wasn't right to do." Of course, Mr. Kerr, when we would get our ballots for O.E.A. and for the officers, somehow or other he would always send out little dirextors, or somehow through the principal say, "Now, this is a good person to vote for. Don't vote for this one, but vote for that one." So, maybe I shouldn't be telling the tales of the school.

M: No, no. The whole point is...There isn't a thing wrong with that, I'm sure. Things are just not like that...

T: No, no. Not today. The Superintendents today keep there hands off of the S.E.A. That's right. It's a teachers association, I felt that sometimes maybe there was too much interference with the organization, maybe there was too much. We got off to a shaky start, but we brought it out. I remember one time, I was President then, and everybody was asking for a raise, and someone made the motion that we hire a lawyer. Well, we had no money in the treasury. We didn't have one penny, so someone went up and said, "Well, how are we going to hire a lawyer when we don't even have any money in the treasury at that time?" That was just one of the things, those were sort of hectic years until we got organized. Now, I hope that...I've seen now the S.E.A. operate for the last few years. For awhile I think they were great, but I think maybe a few might be going overboard now, and a little bit too radical in it for the majority of the teachers in Salem. I don't think, when you hear what some say, why I don't think they're speaking for all the teachers in Salem. I hope that it doesn't end up by being nothing at all, you know, or being one of those kind of organizations because I feel

that it was a good organization to start with, and we did have a principal, administrators in it. Of course, we were asked to leave. I mean I first was the organizer and president of it and worked hard for years and years in it. Then, when I became an administrator, it seemed strange that nobody wanted you anymore to be a member of it because now you weren't a teacher any longer, you were...

M: Part of the administration.

T: ...of the administration.

M: Weren't there...There were organizations that administrators could belong to.

T: Oh, yes. Yes, there were organizations that administrators could belong to, but I think that it wasn't handled too well. I mean, I think they could have handled it a little bit better than just saying outright to one administrator, "We don't want you here anymore." You know, "Don't bother coming back now." You know, you could have said, "Well, this is just for teachers, and you have your own organizations."

M: Any other comments about Mr. Kerr? Surely there must be more.

T: He always had beautiful daffodils in his yard, and every time he would have an S.E.A. meeting we'd always...We always had a spring dinner. I can remember we would always go out there to pick the daffodils, put them on the tables because he said, "Just come on out and get daffodils." He did have beautiful daffodils there at his house in Franklin.

M: Is that a hobby of his or just lucky?

T: I don't know whether...I think he did transplant them, you know, so that he got that whole hillside full of daffodils there. He did take an active interest, maybe as I said, suggested maybe too active, but he was, and he did come to all the meetings of the S.E.A.

M: I've been told even to the point of moving pianos, for example, at the elementary school that he would have to be there. That nobody was able to do even some of these, what we today consider just menial things, maybe send a few kids down to take care of it. He wanted to be in there. He sort of kept his finger on the pulse of everything.

T: Yes, and he knew just about where everything was at every building, you know, he knew what was in the building. The principal knew, of course, that is the princi-

pals job to know what is in his or her building, but he also knew where everything was. I can remember that we had, when I came in 1940 and 1941, we had only one film projector and that was a silent one. We had one, only one for the whole system, and since we did get the state films from down in Columbus, and no one in Prospect seemed to know how to operate the machine. In that day we didn't have any pony express going around to bring the things every morning from the inner office mail. So, it was my job, and I would come up here and park someplace because there wasn't that parking lot out here. There wasn't any on the side. I don't remember where I parked. Anyway, I would park and I would carry this...It wasn't too heavy, this silent film projector, plus a screen because we didn't have a screen then either.

M: Oh, boy.

T: And carry it over to Prospect so that we could see the films, the state films. Then, I would go around to the rooms and show it to them because some of the teachers didn't know how to operate it. Then, I taught them how to do it. It seems as if when I...At Indiana that was one course we did have to take, and that was an audio visual course, so in those days even back in 1926 and 1927, we really did have some good courses, you know because in those days not very many teachers took the audio visual days. There probably weren't that many machines in their school, so they figured, "Well, why should I waste a three hour course on something that I'm not ever going to use." We have to have to operate, learn how to operate the silent and a projector; one of those old filmstrip projectors. I can remember lugging those things back and forth every week because it was our day for the movies.

M: Did you start teaching at Prospect?

T: Yes, the fifth grade at Prospect.

M: You stayed there how long?

T: Twenty years.

M: At that building?

T: At that building, yes. Teaching fifth grade mostly. I think there were a couple years where I taught fourth grade, but the majority of the time it was fifth grade.

M: Well, I know when I went to Prospect, when I was in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, those three years, I ran a projector down in the auditorium.

T: Yes.

M: I think there by then there was one in there permanently.

T: Yes, yes. Then we bought one.

M: Locked up in a box.

T: We locked it up and put it in a green box down there, so that we would have it. Yes, I remember that you were the one that knew how to do that because I think it is good to teach some boys and girls too how to operate one. I don't think that every child should just operate one because they're not all good enough to do that or responsible enough.

M: I understand also that Mr. Kerr was quite picky about the clocks in the schools. Were you familiar with this?

T: No, because you see at Prospect we didn't have a clock. You know, we didn't get one of those new fancy clocks, that automatically ring the bell, until the addition was put on. I don't remember what year that was when we put on the addition on to Prospect, and they put one on to McKinley, and the same year they built Buckeye. That must have been around 1948.

M: Yes, late 1940's.

T: Something like that. That is when we got that clock in the office that would ring the bell automatically and so on. Oh, yes, he collected clocks, and he would take these clocks someplace to someone down in the southern part of Ohio. He had a friend down there that would help him to fix clocks. He was interested in clocks, so if a clock went wrong, he came out to fix it not the maintenance department, or not the principal, but he came to do the clocks.

M: Today we have to have a guy at about \$50 an hour to come in.

T: Oh yes, I can remember those fellows at Buckeye a couple of years ago that oiled it, you know. He wasn't supposed to oil it because if you oiled all of the electrical parts of the clock, you ruined it.

M: So, you spent twenty years at Prospect, and of course, I remember Miss Thomas in the years that I was there. That would be from 1948 to mid 1950's. I remember, and I would certainly like to have you respond to the name Ora Montgomery.

T: Well, Ora was a person, very kind and lovable, I leaned

so much from her, I mean, about principalship. She just brought something to the principalship that maybe, that you don't get at any school, that you don't learn from taking courses. Ora was just unique in helping anybody like Laura Sinns to be a principal in Salem. She was just the kindest person. I mean, I think all the parents over at the Prospect district thought so much of her, and the children did, and the teachers did, that there wasn't anything we wouldn't do if Ora asked us to do it, you know. You just went ahead and did it, and you never grumbled or growled or anything because she never asked you do anything that I don't think that she wouldn't do herself. That is the kind of a person that you like to work for. You don't like to have people tell you do things that you know very well that they would never do themselves, or work on anything.

M: Do you know anything of her background of how she came to Salem?

T: No, I don't. She too moved from Pennsylvania years ago, and then when she came to Salem she came and taught at Columbia for school. Then when they needed a principal at Prospect I think that Mr. Kerr, it must have been Mr. Allen. Then she was made principal at Prospect, but she had taught at Columbia Street before that. I don't know how long.

M: She taught at Columbia?

T: Yes, she taught at Columbia.

M: She became a principal at Prospect?

T: Yes.

M: At Prospect, in your first few years in the 1940's, can you tell me just as you think back, what a routine day was or routine few days in the fourth grade at Prospect?

T: Well, let's make it the fifth grade.

M: Fifth grade.

T: Well, first of all, everything was in this routine, it was much just what I had done in Pennsylvania. Except that I was disappointed when I came to Salem because Salem did not seem to have...Well, we just didn't have the materials or the books that I was used to in Pennsylvania. For instance, we didn't have even a set of readers that we could keep right at Prospect school. We traded these readers around, and we kept them every six weeks. I mean, they would send them to McKinley, then to Riley, to Columbia Street, and then over to Prospect. We were allowed to keep the readers for six weeks, and

then send them on. Well, you know, you can't finish a reader in six weeks and teach reading, but somehow the children learned to read, and they did. I was disappointed in that because we didn't have regular readers or workbooks and so on. It wasn't until years later that we did get readers that we kept right in our own building with workbooks. We also did...Had practice pads in math, rather than a math book we had consumable practice pad which we tore out the pages, which was an old...I'm not sure the name of it, but anyway they were teaching subtraction by the additive method. I don't know, I never had taught subtraction by the additive method, you know, I taught by borrowing. Here we were saying, "Nine and how many more make five or fifteen at the top?" Well, the kids...I just felt that the kids weren't able to do that or to get that when I was teaching it that way. They didn't seem to. Then, one year we had a workshop where we had people come in, I think for evaluating the schools or something, but we had someone from Cleveland, we had someone from Mahoning County, and we had Harold Shane whose name you see now in the N.E.A. journals. He came in too. At that time, I think he must have been out in Indiana, someplace, maybe it was Bald State Teacher's Collage at that time. So, I can remember this women from Mahoning County, and she observed me in teaching this math lesson with this additive subtraction. She said, "Oh, no. You are still not doing that in Salem?" I said, "Yes, I don't know. That what they've done, and that is what I'm doing because the children don't know any other way." She said, "Why don't you just change them over and teach the other way, right now." Then they met, I think, these so called professional people that would come in to observe us. I think they had a meeting, and soon after that we changed the subtraction then over to the regular subtraction, I mean, the borrowing. That bothered me all the time, that kind of work. Then, it seems in a couple years after that we did get a new math book, a hardback one, and we got the new readers with the workbooks, and we began to get some paper. Before that we had only had...I always laughed at the teachers now these last couple of years because we have a cupboard full of paper, you know, art paper I'm talking about, construction paper. We would get one package of each color, and we would wonder, "Well, when are we going to use that paper. Now, shall we save the red for Valentine's Day or shall we use it for Christmas?" (LAUGHTER) That must have been how poor we were here, Salem in those days. That always struck because I had come from, it wasn't rich at Derry Township in Pennsylvania, but still we had paper, and we did have more modern texts than we had when I came to Salem. So, Salem has come, really it has come a long way.

M: Miss Thomas would you make a comment about Miss Montgom-

ery's last years and retirement?

T: I don't believe that Ora was ever content with retirement. I mean, I think she missed the children, she missed the teachers, and she just missed meeting the parents as she did because she always...Parents were always free to come in and out to her office, and they did. I mean, they didn't wait for any day, special day to come to visit because they were always visiting or calling her on the phone and so on. So, she did some substituting. She substituted for DeForest Fourth Street in the kindergarten. At that time the kindergarten was down in the basement, and it seems as if she did catch a very bad cold because it was a bad winter. Then from little children, she probably caught cold from them too because it was such a large kindergarten class that year. Of course, she did have a heart condition. I think, all of that led to her death, which was too bad.

M: You said they had a special recognition for her at the time?

T: Well, at the time of her retirement, yes, we did have a party for her at Canfield. I can't remember the name of that place in Canfield. I have eaten there since, and ordered there, but I can't remember the name of it. I remember having the party there and having her come, and the teachers from Prospect at that time, some former teachers and secretaries and secretaries from before. We had such a very nice time. We gave her a gift, and she seemed to appreciate all of that very much.

M: She had given so much of herself to the job...I can understand how the retirement...

T: That is right, yes. I think too, you know, she got married before she retired. Or did she get married after she retired? Oh goodness, I can't seem to remember anything. I thought that with keeping house and having a husband that she would be more content, but I really don't think that she was. So many people aren't. I mean, I'm content. (LAUGHTER) I don't miss it that much. You know, the children, the parents, the teachers, and so on.

M: I'm glad to hear that because really..

T: It is hard if someone can't adjust to the retirement after working for many years and looking forward to it, and then not being able to adjust to it. It must be hard for that person.

M: While you were at Prospect, there was another individual that was there that I remember, and of course, he is no longer with us, and that was Joe Gallager.

T: Oh, yes.

M: He is in all my grade school pictures.

T: Mr. Gallagher, yes. He was a custodian of all custodians. He was the best custodian that Salem has ever had that I ever worked with because he was there all the time, and he was willing to do anything that you might ask him to do. I can remember him coming in to clean the windows, and probably you do to, when he used to clean the windows. He would say, "Would it bother you if we cleaned the windows during school time?" I said, "No, it didn't," and it didn't bother the children. It didn't bother me at all. I would much, much rather have them clean windows than trying to look out some dirty ones as we have had with other custodians. He was a very nice person, and he gave a great deal of his time, and his life, to Prospect. I think he thought more of, maybe of Prospect school, than he did of his own home. He took better care of it. I can remember him even scrubbing the walls after the walls were painted. He made himself a ladder of some kind, and he got up on there, and every year he would scrub all those walls down in that building. Of course now, you must remember that was before the addition. Then, after the addition, well of course, that was a little bit more to have four rooms and another two other hallways and restrooms added on to his job. When we had the original rooms, he took care of all those and swept them and dusted them. There was no night man. He would come up and fix the furnace, and we were always warm. We were never cold unless it was way, way below zero, but I can never remember having to put on my coat or having the children put on their coats in order to keep warm on a Monday morning. He was always sure that it was warm. That was maybe because he just lived down around the corner from the building. It wasn't hard for him to get up there. He was a grand custodian. Even now, I think it was last year or something like that, one of the custodians came in, and I even called him Mr. Gallagher. I mean, it just seems to be on your mind when you're talking about custodians or when you're talking to a custodian to think about Mr. Gallagher.

M: He was in everyone of my grade school pictures.

T: Yes. He always wanted in the pictures, and he always fixed his hair because he had such pretty white hair. He would fix his hair and he would brush it. He was so proud because he had a diamond ring, and he wore that diamond ring all the time. I can remember him always, when he bought it, he would come around to show us the diamond ring. He had that nice garden. He would raise cannas, and he would always dig the canna roots and give

us some of them; the teachers. So, that we would have some handy. He would always have us down, so we could look at his cannas and his roses, too, because he did have beautiful roses in his yard down there on Sharkstan Street.

M: So, much like Ora Montgomery, that school became his life.

T: Yes, that's right, yes. He and Ora worked very well together, you know, as the custodian and principal. Sometime, you know, custodians and principals don't work too well together.

M: Well, some of the other teachers that were at Prospect...You worked with Mrs. Shrag...was there in first grade.

T: Yes.

M: I had Evelyn Johnson as a first grade teacher. I believe...Was it Miss or Mrs. Boyd?

T: Miss Boyd. Miss Elizabeth Boyd.

M: For kindergarten?

T: For kindergarten.

M: Then up through...

T: There was Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Jenny Johnson.

M: Oh, it was Mrs.?

T: Yes, Mrs. Jenny Johnson. You probably had her. Of course, she taught at Columbia, and then came over when Columbia was torn down, and she came over there. Mrs. Shrag taught for awhile at Fourth Street, and then she came to Prospect.

M: What about Edith Goodman?

T: Edith Goodman was there a number of years. She came several years after I had come to Prospect. She had taught originally too at Prospect before, and then had left and then came back again to teach. Mrs. Shrag, we haven't talked about her. She is another one that hasn't adjusted to well too retirement. She misses it.

M: I see her occasionally, but I haven't had a chance to talk with her.

T: I got a card from her, a note from her on my birthday, and she said that she really misses it. She hoped that

I would adjust better than she had, but she is a very good teacher, Mrs. Shrag, very good third grade teacher. Well, she taught first grade, and maybe you had her in first grade or did you had Miss Johnson?

M: Well, she was the other...

T: She was the other first grade teacher.

M: Yes.

T: Then she moved on to third grade, and she liked third grade so well that she didn't want to go back to first grade ever.

M: Well, you eventually moved into the fourth grade because when I was there I had Jean Wyngart. I told you the story I'm sure, or Jean Wyngart, or both of you. In third grade they wrote the name of the teacher on the back of the card that you were to report to for fourth grade. For some reason or other I heard some stories about Miss Thomas. She was really hard to work for, she was strict, and she was this and that. (LAUGHTER) So, I tried to shift around there, and I got caught and sent back to the right room for it.

T: I can remember, too, one time we were...Miss Jean and I were walking out of the building, and these little kids didn't see us. I think it was at report card time, I think at the end of the year. At that time we would write on the name of the teacher that they were going to have for next year. I heard the one saying, "Oh my, I don't know which one is worse, Miss Thomas or Mrs. Wyngart. Oh, they're both bad." (LAUGHTER) Then we just kept on going and walked past them, and then they did shut-up when they saw us go past. They had their backs to us. No, we did, we got bad reputations at that time. I don't...After they were in the rooms for a while, why it wasn't quite so bad. I can remember when you were in high school that you wrote such a nice paper about your fourth grade teacher. When you had Miss Euliseny, and you were writing those themes, I think, and then I was up at the high school in her room, I can remember looking back on the bulletin board, and she had your theme up that you had written about Mrs. Wyngart. I'm sure it was...

M: Yes.

T: Because I remember telling Jean then when I saw her. I said, "Well, you be real proud of Jim because he wrote such a nice paper about you."

M: Well, the funny thing about it was that I tried to go to the other room, and I ended up having both teachers

anyway because you shifted reading.

T: Yes, because in...We decided that we would do the early experiment, you know, like they do now only we didn't know a name for it or anything. We decided that we would divide the class and that she would take one group and I would take another group. In that way we thought we could serve the interests of the children better because probably, maybe a fast job wouldn't be slowed up by a very slow reader. They would enjoy it much more, and we would use different books. We would...It has a name now, but in those days why we didn't think about any names for it.

M: Your talking accelerated or tracks or...

T: Tracks, yes, that is right. About exchanging, like now, today, they do that in a great many schools. I mean, they even do it for three grades, fourth, fifth, and sixth, or they do it for first, second, and third.

M: With no precedent how did you determine from the third graders coming up, who would go to Singing Wheels with you, for example, and the others stay with Mrs. Wyngart?

T: Well, I think, that we have both had experience, and I think all you needed to do was just to listen to you read and how well did you comprehend what you have read, you know. After a few weeks, you are able to tell.

M: You don't need the eye openers?

T: We don't need that, and we don't need any IQ's, you know, for that.

M: Now, I have a lot of memories of you, of course, the other teachers at Prospect during grade school years, but then I lost track of you when I went into junior high and high school. Then one day in Miss Euliseny's English 4 class, she mentioned that starting next week for a while a Miss Thomas would be around. I'm curious, how did you wind up in 1961 up at the high school in the reading program?

T: Well, I got my Master's Degree in 1958 from Kent, and I had taken supervision, administration, and a minor in reading. Mr. Paul Smith was then principal. Ora Montgomery retired, that was it, and there was going to be an opening at Prospect school for principalship. I asked for it, but I did not get it because some other person had been promised by Mr. Kerr that he would get the principalship. So, that had to follow through, so Mr. Paul Smith wanted to start our course in reading then. He wasn't much interested in reading, and that was the days when we started the speed reading idea came

out, that everybody should read a certain number of words per minute and so on. This was the first that we had heard, "Johnny can't read," and so on. So, Mr. Paul Smith said, "Would you please come up to high school or junior high and start it?" "Well," I said, "Alright, I'll try my best." So, we ordered some materials and books and that is how I got up to the senior high. First, I was just to take the seniors and then I moved down and took the sophomores. Then they decided...Earl Smith was principal here at the junior high and thought he would like to have someone come in and do the ninth grade here. So, I came down here and did the ninth grade one day a week. Well, I'm sorry to say that some other ones that I got when I was down here were just problems. The problems in the classrooms, the ones that I ended up with down here, not that they couldn't read, they were perfectly able to read. It was nothing the matter with their reading ability except that just didn't want to read, and they didn't do their assignments and so on.

M: You ended up with more or less a detention group around here.

T: Detention group during the day, and I was down in the old home economic room downstairs, and I would be down there in the free periods when the home economics teacher wasn't in business and operating down there. At senior high I took all the seniors that were in Miss Euliseny's classes, as well as in Miss Talbutt's class, and then all the sophomores.

M: I'm just curious, knowing Miss Euliseny as well as I did as a student and as well as I do now as an adult and teacher, was she reluctant to have that interrupt her schedule? She is very picky.

T: Yes, at first she was, and she didn't want to give it up. Mr. Paul Smith talked that the college bound that students should be exposed to that type of reading. It wasn't teaching reading really, it was this idea of speed reading with comprehension. I think that then she got used to it because then she finally realized that here was a free day in which she could mark all those themes that she had and not spend so much time maybe in the evening of her own time working because she is a hard worker and does a very good job.

M: I remember that her mother died that year in 1961.

T: Yes. I think that she made good use of that time because she was able to make her plans and make out her test and also, as I said, grade papers. Now, that lasted for about three years that I did that up there. Then there was a shake up in the principalships, and Mr.

Paul Smith came over one day to the old Forth Street building because I was over there teaching summer school and teaching reading in summer school, and Vera Hallow was teaching math. He came over, and it was August, and he said, "You're going to be principal at Prospect and Buckeye." I said, "What?" He said, "Yes, you're going to principal at Prospect and Buckeye." I said, "Alright."

M: Just like Mr. Kerr coming to Pennsylvania.

T: He said, "You'll be principal." I said, "Well, alright." Then he said, "So, you have to report in such in such a day because principals go back two weeks early, and I was planning on taking a vacation after the summer school, but that meant no vacation because it meant I had to go to Prospect and Buckeye. Out then I thought that was what I had wanted, and what I had worked for, and got my Master's Degree for so I better take advantage of it as much as I did like the reading. I felt that I didn't get too much with the reading because the ones that I got, as I said, some of them were problems and some of them hated to come. I can remember we made a tape for Mr. Paul Smith to put on the air, and you were one of the ones, and Philip Greenhizen and the Schmit girl. What was her first name? She was in that. He's always the one that mentions to about Tom and the Singing Wheels.

M: In fourth grade.

T: Yes.

M: I couldn't forget it.

T: You couldn't forget that...

M: 1963 then...

T: Yes, it must have been 1963 then.

M: You got the word out of the blue that you were going to be principal of two schools.

T: Yes, of Prospect and Buckeye. Of course, Buckeye at that time was a small school because it only had about 190 pupils because that is before the addition was put on, you see. Prospect had their usual amount. I think they had 358 or 360 now, and that is about what they had then.

M: When you picked up the principalship, it took two buildings.

T: Yes, It would be around 400 or 450 pupils. That was

hard, I mean, going back and forth, trying to spend half a day at each place. In those days we had a special phone. All you had to do was just press a button, and it connected Prospect with Buckeye, which cost a great deal of money.

M: Hotlines.

T: Hotlines for us, yes. (LAUGHTER) I can remember then when Prospect was...When Buckeye was added on too, and I was just principal at Buckeye. That was the first thing that happened because they came and took the phone out because that phone was so expensive at that time.

M: Did you set up your own schedule so that you were at one building half a day in the morning...

T: Yes, and then in the morning and then I would alternate. Then maybe one week it would be all mornings at Prospect, but then that didn't always work out because sometimes something would happen, and I'd have to rush over to Prospect. That was before the overpass was built, too, and you had to go all the way around, you know. Half the times I would meet a train, and be sitting down there and knew I had to be either in Prospect or Buckeye, but I had to wait for a train. There were more trains in those days too, than there are now. They would just sit down there as long as they do now, too.

M: So, you found other than the inconvenience of traveling back and forth that it didn't pose any problems as far as your ability to do what you had to do as principal?

T: No, I don't think that that...Except that, you know, you didn't get to know the teachers as well, you didn't get to know the children either. Because after all, you were just there for half a day. You didn't get to know the parents because many times you would just have to talk with parents on the phone rather than trying to set up a conference. It was inconvenient having two PTA's to go to. Two of everything, two staff meetings. If you had to have a staff meeting, you had to have two of them. It didn't work to put them together very well.

M: Christmas programs.

T: Two Christmas programs, two of everything. We had good secretaries at both buildings, and that helped a great deal because they were able to answer many of the questions, you know, that parents might call about, and the principal wasn't there.

M: Now, did that situation continue until your retirement?

T: Yes, just until Mr. Couples was made principal. Now, this is his second year at Prospect. Mrs. Reese took my place, and she did Prospect and McKinley up until a year ago, and then Mr. Couples was made principal of Prospect and she just had McKinley.

M: Let's say the school system had a few bugs.

T: It did, that's right. Of course, in that day when we first became principals, when I did, we didn't make that much money as they do now, of course. No, all of teachers, everyone has gotten a raise. I don't know, it was hard but I enjoyed it. I felt there were problems, yes, as I said. I think the most important thing is not getting to know the children and not getting to know the parents. Most of the teachers I knew, the Prospect teachers I knew, and I knew that they were capable, and what they could do, and that they could be left alone, and that they knew what to do because of our older teachers. There weren't as many new teachers, and at Buckeye the same thing. Most of the teacher there were older teachers and had been there for years, and they could get along very well if somebody said you could get along very well without a principal. I don't know whether it is true or not. We have never tried it.

M: You responded to one thing I wanted to ask you that after so many years as a classroom teacher, instructor, to take over as principal, what are some of the big differences would be? You mentioned the lack really of a chance to know the teachers and students as well as say a classroom teacher might. Were there any other major adjustments you had to make after so many years in the classroom? Did you find that you had any real major difficulties?

T: No, because as I said, I think that the major difficulty might have been when we had a new teacher. I mean, I'm that kind of a person that, somebody said, "Miss Thomas thinks too fast, and she doesn't give us time enough to think about it," or something like. It is because I knew about it so well myself that sometimes I forgot to tell them what do. I think, especially with a new teacher, maybe I wasn't as helpful as I should have been, but as I said, the teachers at Prospect and the teachers at Buckeye were all older teachers at that time. They knew what to do, and they knew what to expect, and I knew what to expect from them, and they knew what to expect from me. So that we just got along real well. Except I said when the old teachers started to leave and the new ones come in, I felt that maybe I wasn't as helpful because I didn't have the time. Especially I'm thinking about, well, at both Prospect and Buckeye because older teachers retired and a few new ones came in. I felt that I should have helped them a

little bit more over their first year because it is difficult to start in a system, to come and...Because I had remembered when I started. I think you should always keep in mind what you did, I mean, and that you didn't know everything and what to do that first year because I can remember my first year and all of the mistakes that you make. I think that was one place where I should have helped the teachers more, the new teachers.

M: Overall, again with the goodly number of years in the classroom, and then a good number of years as principal, and you've been frank with me on all these other things. I'd like a frank response to...Did you really enjoy the administrative side as much or more than the classroom?

T: Well, I enjoyed the administrative because I thought of all those years when I was going to school, and I thought of all the years that I taught, and I thought, "Now, when I become an administrator, I hope I can do these things." I always thought of what I would like to have a principal have done for me. I tried to do those things for them, but as soon as you become an administrator, you notice the difference, I mean, even your best friends that you had on the staff at Prospect and at Buckeye. There is a difference because, after all now, you are management now. You can't be maybe quite as frank with them, or you must be frank with them, and you hate to be frank with them because you are maybe going to hurt their feelings, or something like that. So, there is a difference as soon as you become the principal, but I tried not to let that bother me and still keep these people as my friends. They still are, many of them that are still, now that they are retired at Prospect and the ones that are retired at Buckeye. They don't seem to hold any of the old feelings or anything about what I might have had to tell them at one time or another about maybe their work or discipline or so on in the classroom.

M: You spent counting the years in Pennsylvania how many years total?

T: Forty-seven years. That seems like a long time.

M: I'll be thirty-two next week. I can't imagine that many years teaching.

T: I know my nephew here the other night, he said, "How do you like your retirement?" I said, "All right." He said, "How many years now was it?", and I told him. He said, "Oh, it can't be." He said, "At one job?" I said, "Yes, at one job, but thank goodness that job was varied." You know, it did. It broke it up. That was the nice part about it. A teacher in Pennsylvania and

then in Ohio and then reading teacher and then principal. I think that helped to make the time go. To me it doesn't seem like forty-seven years, but I wouldn't want to have said that I had forty-seven years in second grade or forty-seven years in first grade because I think that that really could be monotonous. Maybe it isn't, but I have read about teachers that have retired and have said that they have taught fifty years in one particular grade, but for me, no. This was...We had nice breaks in there. After all, when I did start in Pennsylvania, I did teach sixth, seventh and eighth grade. I had that combination of sixth, seventh, and eighth. Then they wanted a teacher for a rural school, so I did teach the rural school for many years, all grades, you see. Then I went back again to the sixth, seventh, and eighth before I came out here to fifth grade. So, I have experience in all grade levels, then.

M: You partially answered my last question, and that was with your remark that it doesn't seem like forty-seven years.

T: No.

M: I wanted to ask you, out of the, especially the years in Salem, how you looked back on them, and I think your remark that it doesn't seem like that many years is the best answer.

T: No, it doesn't seem like thirty-five years that I have taught in Salem. Salem has come a long way in those thirty-five years, and I think back from 1940 when I started. 1940 doesn't seem long ago to me, to someone else it does. I enjoyed them all in the years I have been in Pennsylvania and the years here in Salem, all of them. Even if I did get tired carrying those books around at the senior high, you know, all those reading books that I had that time and then all the ones I had down here at the junior high. I remember carrying them. I wish I had had a cart like they had at the stores, you know, that is what I should have gotten, something like that to help me.

M: Well, the school system has been very fortunate to have had you all those years.

T: Well, thank you.

M: I've certainly been very fortunate in you giving me permission to interview you this afternoon. I do appreciate it. Thank you very much.

T: Thank you. It's been a joy, Jim. It came along better than I expected. (LAUGHTER)

END OF INTERVIEW