

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Salem Schools Project

Personal Experience

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HOWARD PARDEE

Interviewed

by

James McNeal

on

October 4, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Salem Schools Project

INTERVIEWEE: HOWARD PARDEE

INTERVIEWER: James McNeal

SUBJECT: Development of music in school curriculum,  
Preparation for programs and contests, and  
past and present music in schools.

DATE: October 4, 1975

M: This is an interview with Howard Pardee for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the history of the Salem Schools, by James McNeal, at Mr. Pardee's home, on October 4, 1975, at 4:00 p.m.

The first thing I would like to ask you, Doc, is how you first became involved in the Salem city schools?

P: Well, I came in December of 1946. I was hired to start an instrumental program in the grade school, junior high with the idea of taking over the high school the next year, the following year. I had five grade schools, junior high, and the senior high. I started the first band in junior high. They had an orchestra there, so I had an orchestra and band in junior high and one of each in the high school. Then I started the grade school program in the fifth grade in all five grade schools.

M: When you first came to Salem, the Superintendent in charge was who?

P: It was E.S. Kerr.

M: E.S. Kerr. Did you have meetings with him prior to coming to Salem, or strictly correspondence?

P: Well, I had several talks with him before I came here.

M: Several talks. What did you talk about before you

really found out that you had been selected to take a position? Did he give you any guidelines, or any ideas of what the school system was like or what they expected of their teachers?

P: Well, he said, "I'm going to hire you to do the job. If you can do it, fine. If you can't we'll get somebody else."

M: Just that simple. You took over then in basically instrumental operations.

P: Entirely instrumental, strings and brass, woodwinds.

M: What were some of the first things you did to get the program organized?

P: Well, I went out in the grade schools where they had no instrumental music at all, and I gave music aptitude tests to all fifth grade classes in each schools and started beginners that winter.

M: Then from fifth grade did they begin to get private lessons as they . . .

P: The had class lessons in the fifth grade and sixth grade, the next following year individual lessons. Every kid had a individual lesson and also in junior high, they had individual lessons along with daily band and orchestra.

M: Did you have any help at the beginning of the program when you first came here?

P: No, this was a strictly one man deal. Within a couple of years it started to grow, so it had to go to a two man deal.

M: Who was the second individual?

P: Richard Howenstein was hired then to do orchestra and some vocal music and also gave some lessons.

M: Did you encounter any problems, any difficulties, in getting the programs off the ground? Can you recall any of those?

P: Not really. People were quite enthusiastic that music was being offered for the first time in the grade school, and the response was good.

M: The response was good. Did you have any problem in the school itself so far as the availability of room and teaching lessons?

- P: That has always been a problem with some of the grade schools to get a place to teach because they are crowded. They have been crowded for about. . . We had good facilities at the high school and fair at the junior high. We used the basement. After they enlarged the room down there it was adequate.
- M: By junior high and high school you mean the previous high school on Lincoln Avenue and the junior high on Fair Street?
- P: Yes.
- M: Now, you used to develop programs with a lot of things in mind. First of all, concerts, as I recall, and preparations for contests. Can you give me some information on the way in which you went about organizing your program for the year for your various programs?
- P: Well, of course, the first part of the year is football season, and that is a big, important thing the first part of the year. After that then you work on your program music and attempt to do some teaching after football. Also, the tests in the grade school are not done until after football season because there just isn't time to handle it all. We had the first contest in Salem in the history of the school in 1948. First school year that I had the high school band. That was a big undertaking because we had schools from Northeastern Ohio, from Columbiana County down in the Cambridge area and pretty near to Marietta. So it was a big district, and that was the first contest ever held here though we have had several after that. Really our facilities are not set up to well for contest, but it worked.
- M: Is that usually a one day affair?
- P: One day.
- M: One day. What would it require? Say you were still active in the music program, and you wanted to set up the contest. What would it require to get that done, say within the school system as you recall.
- P: Well, you would need two stages, probably two schools with an auditorium. Back in 1948 we used the Masonic Temple and the Memorial building as site reading rooms. We only had one high school auditorium at that time. We used that and the Masonic Temple and then used the Memorial building for site reading entirely. So, logistically it was low margin, hard to do. We did have some solo ensemble contests where we used local churches, as well as Fourth Street building and the present junior high.

- M: How many schools, just roughly, do you recall would have been involved in that in Salem?
- P: Well, I would say roughly fifty. I could have been larger than that, I don't really. . .I know we had, I think, eighteen bands alone. How many choirs I couldn't tell you right now because they held those at the local church, the Presbyterian church. It was a full day, a lot of hard work.
- M: You took any number of bands to contests out of Salem, to contest. What did you attempt to do when you were preparing for contest after your programs were over and so forth.
- P: Well, in the first place, we went to contest to develop a band because that requires a lot of work from the student and teacher too. That is the best way and the quickest way to develop some excellence. It is a learning process not only for the pupils, but for the teacher too. So, I knew that that was the quickest way to do it is to actively get in right away the first year I was here, in contest, because if the band hadn't been going to contest they had no idea of what it was all about. I think that was. . .I'm a firm believer in contest because that's . . . Competition makes excellence, you know.
- M: You took the band then the first year you were here.
- P: First year.
- M: Do you recall where they went that first time?
- P: Well, the first one was here in Salem.
- M: Oh, I see.
- P: That was district contest, then we, from there we went to Columbus, I believe it was, for state. We did that up until the fifties. The last contest I took the high school band was in 1958, but throughout the fifties, not ever year, sometimes we took a tour or played out of town. One time at Muskingum College and many times at out of town high schools. We didn't go every year, but we went at least ever other year.
- M: Now to look at the school system here in Salem, perhaps a little more closely. Could you just give me an idea of what your routine day was like as you worked at the school, and later as you became music supervisor.
- P: Well, I had a routine of having band practice and orchestra first thing in the morning at the junior high school. Then I went to one of the five grade schools

each day. In the afternoon, then I had orchestra and band. I had two periods in the afternoon, orchestra and band each afternoon. That was about the routine. Then, generally during football season, then go to the field and work to 5:00 or 6:00 in the afternoon. Then, I had night rehearsal, one a week throughout the year for two hours. That is about it.

M: You have certainly been involved with the American Legion Band a good long time, too. Do you have any comments about the carry over, perhaps students that you had and their influence on that American Legion Band?

P: Well, it always amazed me that you never get the majority of local players in the community band. You get many out of town people, but generally some of your top players, older players after they have graduated, will join this group. The ones that go to college really don't come back and play very often because they have given up playing for that time. There should be more carry over than there is. It is not only a local situation. I've talked with other community band directors, and they find the same thing that a good share of their players come from other schools and graduated from other school and come. We draw from five or six communities for this now. Very few of the local high school kids are playing. I think the reason for that is they're so busy with their own music program at the time, busy at school. That is just one thing more that they're not going to participate in. A few after high school days do keep on. There should be more carry over than there is, I don't know just why there isn't as it should be. I think we should have a place for these people to carry on after they get out of high school, not just drop it entirely.

M: Is that the usual situation?

P: It seems to be. I've been talking with other directors that have the same situation, that not to many of the local players, you know, while they're in school at least play in an outside band. I think it just reaches a saturation point after a while.

M: Now when you had, let's say you top band, your high school band, could you just give me an idea of from the time you stepped in the door, whatever period it might have been. That high school band, what a rehearsal might have been like. What you wanted to do and how you went about doing it.

P: Well, it varies from day to day. You want the technique of a rehearsal?

M: Anything involved in what you thought should be down to

get those kids ready for either say program or contest, whatever it might be.

P: Well, we went through a routine, of course, every rehearsal. The first part of it was strictly scale work, long tones for tone development, and that is a must. The only way I know to develop it is going through that. I would say we spent about fifteen minutes at least of every rehearsal, even though we had forty-two minute periods in those days. Just tone exercises. Then each day I would have, not necessarily written up, but spots in the music that I wanted to rehearse and work out and try to put the whole thing together. It is a drill, a constant drill. You have to work out the parts and see that everybody is knowing what they are doing and are able to technically play that music. That the whole composition is made up of a lot of little parts. A lot of drill, and a lot of work over small parts to put the number together. I don't think I can add anything to that. We do have a regular routine that should be gone through each day. You always have some interruptions or fire drills or things like that you never can count on. You know, you have a pretty clear idea of what you want to accomplish each period. If you don't have, you are wasting the kids time and your own too.

M: Do you feel you had full support to develop the music program the way you think it should be for a high school?

P: Up to a point. Your limit is a little bit. . .What's ideal and what's practical. I think in the main. . .During the building program I had good support from the administration. I would say probably we had one of the finest principals that. . .Beeman Ludwig was principal in those days. Finest principal you could ask for. He gave you good support, there was good discipline, and it's up to you. You have a good situation to start with. Music is largely disciplined. Without discipline, you don't have music, you've got chaos.

M: Do you have any recollections of individuals in your bands, particularly of your high school bands, that have gone on to grasp bigger and better things? You mentioned that most seem to just sort of give it up, or not get involved, but are there those that you remember that have done the opposite?

P: Well, percentage wise, we've had a great many go to college and study music, and they are teaching now or playing. For the size school, I think our percentage has been very high. I never did count up just how many are teaching and still playing, but a goodly number.

M: What requirements would you say you would have to meet

to have the best combination for a good concert band? Number of students, proportion of instruments and so forth.

P: Well, I was always a little heavy on woodwinds. That was a personal idea. Percentage wise, a larger group of woodwinds and brass. The sound and I would say a group that could be handled well, around from seventy to eighty-five. It seems if they get too large, you get a lot of dead wood. The larger they get the more dead wood you have, and that doesn't go for a quality performance. It can be done with a professional band, of course, you get forty-five or fifty good, solid players and that is adequate to produce. For a school band you have to run a little higher than that. It is an educational thing, so you accept as many as you can handle, but it can get out of hand.

M: Did you have a procedure for accepting or denying a student entrance to the band?

P: I did many years ago. Between junior high and high school the better players are picked. Generally it was nearly all, but there's always a few that hadn't learned to play or didn't work at it, I didn't think would make good material when they got to high school, or weren't able to play high school level music, so we eliminated those people. In the main most of them survived and made the high school band. There is a different philosophy now, everybody who plays an instrument now automatically makes it somehow, but that doesn't make for too good of a program quality wise.

M: You mentioned among other things that at the beginning of the school year as usual football takes the upper hand. What involvement did you have there in the first years you were here with football?

P: Well, it wasn't pleasant. Let's put it that way. Of course, any new teacher comes in is going to have different ideas than the last one, and I guess my ideas were quite a bit different than had been formerly. So, there is a good deal of pressure from football fans and the news paper which unfortunately I ran into several times. The things worked out. I guess I overcame the thing in time, but it took several years.

M: How many years did you work with the football end of it?

P: Well, I had, in this particular system, I had it for five years. At that time then we got another man in, and he took over the football. After football season, I had the concert band. At that time I worked with the junior high band, and then we would trade bands after the football season. That went on for, I would say,

twenty-two or twenty-three years. I think I was fortunate.

M: Getting back to your schedule that took you to all the grade schools. What problems would you run into in having to work with different principals, different buildings, different set-ups, different schedules and so forth?

P: Well, we more or less made our own schedule with the principals at each grade school, and there never was any problems with that. We had very good relations. Over the years that I've taught, not only here, but elsewhere, I have worked under 42 principals and 15 Superintendents. In that time you learn to get along. The majority of them were very co-operative. There was no problems that we couldn't solve, really.

M: Let me go just the opposite extreme then, out of all your experience, rather than thinking about problems, what are some of your highlights across the board from the day you walked into the school system to the day you retired last year? Can you enumerate a few?

P: Well, it is kind of hard to do. I guess you remember the pleasant things, and you forget the unpleasant things, of course. Probably the most satisfying thing that any teacher can ask for is having former pupils still write to you and come back to the school when you're teaching and want to see you and want to hear the band. They want to hear what the program is. They wouldn't come back if they didn't want to, and I had so many fine pupils that it is still good to here from them, and I still do. I think that is probably the most satisfying thing. You look at honors that the band may have won at various times, and it is a sort of satisfaction at the time, but then after a period of years, why it was just part of the job. I guess there is still some satisfaction. To hear the kids come back and start talking about the days when they were in the band, and what they did, and a couple of the numbers they played. I have one pupil from many years back who each time she goes to a concert, I get a letter. They played something that we played, or she was inspired to write because she remembered her days of being in the band.

M: Among other things with the high school band would have to be the area of securing all the things you needed: Music, instruments, and so forth. Were students totally responsible for securing their own instruments? Did the school have instruments? How did you secure funds for music and so on? How did the financial picture evolve from year to year?

P: Well, of course, the school board did furnish music, all

the music we have, and some instruments. The majority of the players owned their own. Probably we had fewer school instruments as such in this school than many other schools of comparibly size because my philosophy has always that a kid would do better on something they own themselves and certainly take a lot better care of it. So, if at all posit, unless it was the most expensive instrument, they got their own. The more you furnish, the less is taken care of.

M: Now, when I was in high school, I remember both the band and choirs recording concerts. Just wondered, how did that come about? Obviously, there aren't any recording of some of the earlier bands. How did the recording end of the music program begin?

P: Well, fortunately we had a druggist, Russ McCarter, who had some tape equipment. His daughter was in the band, and he, as a hobby, recorded every concert we played up until the early fifties. After that we had our own equipment. We always made a tape to check and see what we've done. I think we had three recordings made. This was a disc record, so I had enough made so that band personnel all each had a record. We sold a few, but everything is on tape, practically everything, somewhere. I don't have all the tapes, but I have a good many in late years.

M: That would cover approximately how many years?

P: Well, it would cover ten years at least. No, more than that. It would cover twenty years because I left the high school in 1948, or came here in 1948 and left in 1968. So, we had tapes over twenty years.

M: When you left the high school, that gave you time then to become what referred to as music supervisor. Could you give me a brief run down on what duties that entailed, and what your responsibilities were.

P: Well, generally trying to keep all of the music teachers happy one way or another. Actually there wasn't too much supervision going on because I was teaching full-time, but when things come up, the head of the music department was responsible. So, I worked between the Superintendent and the music teachers, interceded a few times for them and tried to keep them satisfied or at least supplied with the materials they needed to do the job. Actually, we had very competent teachers, and the job wasn't that extensive really.

M: You said that one of your responsibilities was to see that the individuals in the music program had the materials they needed to do whatever needed to be done. What would be included in the overall music program?

P: Well, ordering music. New series in the grade school, we went through those several times and had several changes. It was mostly finding the money to satisfy everybody and still stay within our budget. So, I did work with the Superintendent. I also worked with the clerk on the school board on that. She was responsible for the budget.

M: Just what goes on in the grade schools so far as music programs. You were mostly involved with the band, but what other programs?

P: Well, we have two full-time vocal teachers in grade school, and we have a string teacher three days a week who goes to each grade school and junior high. Then at the time when I was teaching, the high school band director and the junior high band director and junior high vocal teachers also taught some instrumental music. This was mostly lessons. I started every fifth grade myself. I was in charge of that program. The other two gentlemen worked on the sixth grade level. So, I had some of each. I had fifth graders and some sixth graders.

M: You said you had to test each of those fifth graders. Did every fifth grader in the whole school system get. . .

P: Every fifth grader each year is tested.

M: What was involved in that testing?

P: Well, it was given by tape, and it was a test of, not of anything they had learned in music, it was a test of their innate ability. In other words, it was a test of their ear for pitch accuracy, and also of time. Whether their sense of time was good, tonal memory was also included, also their hearing was checked. So, we had a pretty good idea whether they had some musical ability to start with, whether their hearing was good enough for it. In fact, I used to report to the grade school teachers because some of them they didn't realize were hard of hearing would show up for this test.

M: Did you begin that testing the first year you came into the school system?

P: Yes, I did.

M: So that went for roughly twenty years?

P: That went for twenty-nine years.

M: Is it still in effect?

- P: Still in effect.
- M: If you would, describe what you would do. How did you go about getting to the students? What procedure did you go through to get to these fifth graders?
- P: Well, after the papers were graded, the ones who were average or above or superior were notified, the parents were notified. A letter went out to each one stating their, not only their grade, but their interest. If they were interested too, then we met with the parents. We had meetings in each grade school. I explained the program to them, and if they were interested and the pupil was interested, why generally they rented instruments for a period of three months, and we started the classes.
- M: Prior to that, how did you implement the test. What did you do to give the test? Did you give it in mass or to individuals?
- P: I gave it to each. The whole room at once in each grade school. You can give this to any number, it doesn't have to be an individual test. They just mark on their papers what they hear. They don't have to write any, all they do is make a check mark for a correct answer or an incorrect one.
- M: That would require what, a half hour, forty-five minutes?
- P: It would take forty-five minutes to an hour depending on the class because I did explain it, I thought, very thoroughly. I made sure each one knew what they were supposed to do before it started.
- M: Did you ever find that the test was taken and done very well with by a student, and then they just absolutely showed no interest otherwise or decided to give it up?
- P: Yes.
- M: Would the opposite be true?
- P: Yes, but many times pupils with a superior grade wouldn't start on an instrument. They just weren't that interested, and that's the first thing. If they are not interested, it is too much of an expense for a parent to provide an instrument if it is not going to be used. We didn't encourage anybody who wasn't interested, that was the main thing. Of course, you always have some that didn't do well on the test who wanted to take an instrument, so if they were too low then we just tried to tell the parents that they were taking the chance. If they were willing to spend the money to rent an instrument, then we would start them anyway, give them a chance.

Sometimes it worked out well for them, and sometimes it worked out the other way. In the main though, most of our kids who started on instruments were interested before the test was even taken. They wanted to play an instrument, and they wanted to do well. They all tried.

M: Now, the years that you were involved with music in the Salem schools, was there ever anything that you felt you didn't get accomplished that you'd like to as far as students and the program is concerned?

P: Well, I can't answer that. Each year you want to do better, you want to do everything better if you are an interested teacher. I can't say if I had to do it over again I would change very much.

M: Did you have any advice for a new musician, new teacher, musician coming into the Salem school system?

P: Well, certainly, a new teacher is going to be enthusiastic and is going to learn an awful lot the first five years of his teaching. I don't think. . . I think it is harder now to develop a good program than it was when I started. Certainly, it is. . . The schools aren't like they were then. The discipline generally in most schools is about as good as it was some years ago. That very lack of discipline makes music harder to teach because music is so much a self discipline thing. Sometimes we find that kids don't have that self discipline.

M: Do you see any effects of that specifically in the Salem school system as far as our music program is concerned in the last few years?

P: Frankly, I'm pretty lucky. I had the better students to start with. The poorer ones don't survive a music program, especially an intensive one. So, you have the better students who do survive up at the high school. I think our whole concept there today is to not work too hard if you can get by and do it some other way. I don't know of any other way but hard work to accomplish a thing. Of course, you've got so many things fighting for time too in the curriculum that I don't know whether it is possible really, but if students work as they once could.

M: Did you see effects of that as you say in the last five or ten years that perhaps the band size diminished.

P: No, the band size probably grew. I think right now it is as large as or larger than when I had it, in fact, I know it is. Like I said, if you set pretty high standards, your not going to have such a big group. It depends on the individual teacher. Each one has his own

standards.

M: For a good number of years then, Doc, you played a vital role in the development of music in the Salem schools. Just how does an individual like yourself come around to music as a life long interest and endeavor?

P: Well, music is a long story. You start when you're young, and you never get away from it. You just keep working at it. As a young player and pupil, I used to study with various teachers and suddenly you decide to become a band director and start formal music education after high school, but it starts long before that. As I mentioned before, all these people that are teaching now that I've had as pupils started in the fifth grade. I started in the second grade on piano, and in fifth grade started on the coronet. So, I suppose my teaching experience is a little bit of many teachers that I was exposed to and played under. I played in a high school band when I was in the fifth grade until I graduated, and I also played in a community band when I was twelve on the side. I was interested in doing more than the school offered. I had a lot of playing experience under a very fine teacher who was a professional, had been a professional before he started teaching. Then I played under at least three or four different directors that I can remember in college of varying backgrounds. Some of them, several of them were professional. I mean professionally, had professional bands, rather than university or college. So, I think I had a pretty good background in standards of performance and certainly covered the literature everything that was transcribed or written for band that I think I had experience with. It was a pretty good foundation for me when I started to teach.

M: Where was the water shed, let's call it, when you started to realize that teaching might be an area of interest.

P: I suppose when I was a senior in high school, I got my first taste of directing a high school band then when I was a senior. The director made me one of his assistants. Luckily for me, he had pneumonia and was out of school for about a month, and I had the whole music program. So, there wasn't very much attending classes for me, but I was in charge of that and the Superintendent watched over me a little bit. I got the idea then that this might be something I could do. I certainly liked it, got enthused about it. When I went to music school, my idea then was to become a high school band director. For those days it was a little different because most of our freshmen class, the fellows, wanted to be professional players. I think I was one of the very few that wanted to be a band director rather than a professional player. So, I concentrated on things I

thought would help me in that.

M: After the training that was necessary and schooling and so forth, since we began this tape with you coming to Salem. What steps did you take that eventually led you to Salem? How did you become aware of a position here?

P: Well, I had ten years experience before I came to Salem. I had worked in a county schools. I had five county schools, one day at each school circuit. Then, I worked for five years at Conneaut city schools. Then, I resigned that job and went out to Washington state. I didn't find what I want, so I came back here in November and there was no job. I heard about this, a friend of mine from Cleveland called me. He told me he heard this job was going to be open in the next year in the high school, and there might be a possibility of getting started down here earlier. So, I came down and was interviewed and talked to the Superintendent several times. So, I was hired to start the program. I told him it has to start in the grade school, so he said, "Well, you start in first of the year then." That's the way it got started in Salem.

M: That year again was?

D: That was 1940, well, I started in 1946 just prior to Christmas vacation, and continued on to that next year. In the Fall of 1947 I went to the high school as well as grade school and junior high. I was the first full time instrumental teacher they ever had. Part of that time they had a man teaching in junior high who had an orchestra, I believe taught something else. In the high school the English teacher had two periods of music, but he was primarily an English teacher.

M: You were the first full-time instrumental. . .

P: Yes, I was the first full-time instrumental, yes.

M: Could you tell me what the salary was for a position like that, that hadn't existed before?

P: Well, I was very fortunate that the Superintendent offered me more money than I had been making in the previous job. I started at \$2500 a year which was several hundred more than I made before. You may laugh, but I started in 1936 at \$900 a year.

M: Oh, my goodness.

P: And that wasn't full-time, but I had to live on it and go to summer school besides until I got my degree. See, I started without a degree. That was easier to do then than now. So, I went to summer school and took academic

classes. I had all the credits I needed in music and more to be certified, but I didn't have the academic work. So, I had to go four years, four summers really, to finish up a degree.

M: These last few minutes would you care to speak to how you view the music education program in Salem in comparison to say other areas, changes that you have seen occur for the better or for the worse. Just some overall last impressions about the Salem school system and the music program.

P: Well, frankly when I came here, I thought the school was about twenty years behind in instrumental music, behind comparable schools. I think over a period of ten years or so we caught up and surpassed some other schools. At the present time I think we're certainly not the leaders anymore. Many schools have surpassed us in excellence chiefly because they had more teachers. We are still understaffed for the size school they are. Frankly, this doesn't sound very good maybe, but I think we have lost a little in the last few years. We used to have many directors come here and look at our program and our scheduling and come to concert. That hasn't been the case in the last few years. We are kind of holding our own. I don't think we are making, really, too much of an advance now. It is chiefly lack of personnel. Other schools have added more teachers, of course, are able to carry on a bigger program than. . . You can only do about so much with so many teachers. I feel they really haven't kept up with some of the leaders.

M: Doc, you have indicated are time is just about up. I want to finish by simply saying thank-you. I appreciate not only knowing you as well as I do, but I consider it a privilege to sit and chat with you.

P: Well, it's been my pleasure, thank-you.

END OF INTERVIEW