

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Education in Youngstown, Ohio

Rayen School Teaching Experience

O.H. 214

EUGENIA M. SHEEHAN

Interviewed

by

Jeanne Ontko

on

May 11, 1981

EUGENIA MARGARET SHEEHAN

Eugenia Margaret Sheehan was born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, the daughter of John Sheehan and Mary Curtin Sheehan. She graduated from Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, New York and received a BA degree from Hunter College, New York in the 1930's and a Master of Arts from Columbia University in the 1940's. Miss Sheehan worked in the Children's Clinic in New York and was also employed as a social worker in Youngstown prior to her teaching career. Although trained in Greek, Latin and English, Miss Sheehan began teaching retarded children at Butler School and Covington School. In 1940 she was hired at Rayen School to begin a 32 year career teaching Latin, English, typing and shorthand. When she was not teaching, Miss Sheehan did secretarial work during the summer at the Youngstown Vindicator.

Eugenia Sheehan has been a member of Delta Kappa Gamma, Mahoning Valley Retired Teachers Association, Ohio Retired Teachers Association, National Retired Teachers Association, The Mahoning Valley Historical Society and the Catholic Daughters of America. A member of St. Edward Roman Catholic Church, Miss Sheehan enjoys reading, needlework and traveling.

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INTERVIEWEE: EUGENIA M. SHEEHAN

INTERVIEWER: Jeanne Ontko

SUBJECT: Rayen School; Sports; Class reunions;
Assemblies; P.T.A.; Extracurricular
activities; Wages; Opportunitites for
women

DATE: May 11, 1981

O: This is an interview with Miss Eugenia Sheehan for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on Education in Youngstown by Jeanne Ontko at 244 Curry Place, Youngstown, Ohio on May 11, 1981 at 2:30 p.m.

Miss Sheehan, can you tell me something about your background: Where you were born, your brothers and sisters, who your parents were, and where you were educated?

S: From the beginning?

O: Yes.

S: I was born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. I have one sister, Kathleen. We moved from Williamsport when I was about six years old, so I really didn't have any formal education there. My father was connected with a steel company in Youngstown and he was transferred several times. We went to Newark, New Jersey. I went to the sixth grade in a parochial school in Newark. Then we went to Philadelphia. I graduated from eighth grade there from a parochial school, St. Agatha's. Then we went to Brooklyn. I graduated from Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn. I attended Hunter College in New York, where I received by B.A. degree and Columbia University, where I received my M.A. degree.

In the meantime, my father was transferred to the home office in Youngstown, so that's why we eventually came here.

O: What was his company's name?

S: Truscon Steel.

O: Anything else?

S: When I came here, I was hoping to start to teach school. But at that time, it was very hard to get an appointment. I finally gave up and went back to New York and worked in a children's clinic down there, a health clinic in New York. Then I got an appointment as a teacher in Youngstown, so I came back here.

O: Why was it hard to get an appointment?

S: It was during the Depression and they had many applications. You just had to wait until you were called.

O: Would it have been high school that you would have taught here?

S: I wanted to teach in high school, but fortunately I had been certified in both elementary and secondary. You see, I had majored in Latin, Greek and English. That again made it difficult, because that was a very small field. It's even smaller now, but it was at that time small.

I had taken some other courses. Then I went back to Temple University in Philadelphia and Marywood College in Scranton and Youngstown State. It wasn't a state university then. I had taken courses in commercial work, shorthand, typing and business training.

So when I was appointed here, I had this background in Latin and in commercial. But my first teaching position was at Butler School, an elementary school. I had what they called then a Special Class. Now, it's the slow learners. I really wasn't very happy. For about a month I was very depressed. But really I became so attached to those children and I loved them so much. You felt that you were really doing something when you taught them. I did that for several years before I was assigned to high school. I loved it. I really loved it.

O: Did that school have a certain class for slow learners?

- S: Yes, Butler School. Then I went to Covington School with a class of slow learners there.
- O: Do you remember what your training was to become a teacher at Hunter College? Did you go originally to become a teacher?
- S: Oh yes, yes. I thought maybe you were asking why I became a teacher.
- O: That was my next question. (laughter)
- S: I know, but I didn't know what to say. That was just what I was going to be. I never even thought about being anything else right from the very beginning. I don't know whether it was because I had several people in the family who were teachers. But teaching was the thing I wanted to do. There was no background in my education for special work for retarded.
- O: Do you mean your training at Hunter?
- S: The whole program at Hunter was for teaching. I had practice-teaching in both the elementary and the high school.
- O: How many years did it take you to get through Hunter College? Was it a four-year course?
- S: Yes.
- O: When you first began teaching here in Youngstown, this was at Butler then, the first one?
- S: Yes.
- O: What kind of subjects did you teach the children?
- S: The retarded?
- O: Right.
- S: We tried to teach reading and writing. I remember we sang songs. We had different projects. I really got to love it there. They're lovable people.
- O: How would you teach them? Do you remember the techniques you used to teach retarded children, for instance, reading?
- S: Well, it would be the same techniques only you would be a little slower, that's all. You would just have to be patient. Patience is what is really necessary.

- O: How many children did you have in your class?
- S: Oh, at that time, I averaged about fifteen or sixteen.
- O: What grade?
- S: They went all the way from first to sixth grade.
- O: They would all be in one class?
- S: Yes, all in one class.
- O: After Butler, where did you teach?
- S: I went to Covington and taught the same kind of class. Sometimes we'd have some discipline cases that would take most of our time. Then we'd have to make sure the others were busy. We had all sorts of problems that you don't have in other classes. But as soon as you get something across and teach them something, you really have a feeling of accomplishment. They were so happy to learn to write their name or to do a problem or something.
- O: I can imagine. Did you have support from the parents?
- S: Oh yes, we had good contact with the parents.
- O: In what ways? Parent-teacher meetings?
- S: Oh, they had PTA meetings of course. But with the parents of my children, some would come to visit to see how they were getting along. Then I would make visits too. At that time, I would go to see the parents in their homes.
- O: How often would you do that?
- S: About two or three times a year.
- O: For every child you would have to go?
- S: Yes. That was true, too, at that time in the regular grades. They had visitation days. They had about a week to go to each home.
- O: Oh, I didn't know that? Was this on school time or did you go after?
- S: It was after school.
- O: A 24-hour job. Then, after Covington, where did you go?

S: I went to Rayen.

O: To Rayen School.

S: I was there until I retired.

O: What did you teach there?

S: Well, as I say, I was appointed to teach shorthand and typing. Oh, I wanted to go back and tell you. In elementary school I had a wonderful principal, her name was Miss Mary Haddow. They have a Mary Haddow Elementary School here named after her. But she was really the one who gave me the background in teaching. She was way ahead of her time. She was just a wonderful teacher.

O: In what way?

S: She knew how to treat the children. She was so wonderful with the children. She sort of made the teachers that way, too. It was kind of a family feeling or something there. She was wonderful.

Then I was very fortunate because at Covington School I had Mr. Traenkle. He was a little different, but a very good principal, an excellent principal.

O: How was he different?

S: Well, he wasn't so progressive, I guess, is the word. He was more for discipline, very rigid discipline.

O: Did you have discipline problems when you were teaching at Butler?

S: Oh yes, we had discipline problems.

O: I imagine that would be special circumstances with those children. But how would you discipline them? Do you recall?

S: Sometimes we'd call the parents. Sometimes it was just a matter of keeping them after school and talking to them, giving them a little extra work or keeping them in when it was recess time.

O: Okay, back at Rayen then you taught shorthand and business?

S: I started teaching shorthand and typing. The principal there was Mr. Frank Tear, quite well-known principal in Youngstown. Personally he was interested in Classics

and Latin, so when there was an opening in the Latin field, he had me teach Latin.

But at one time, Greek was out of the question, teaching Greek. But one time I taught Latin and English and shorthand and typing, which is an unusual combination. I liked it. I had very nice students.

O: What made you take Latin and Greek?

S: I suppose I really didn't want to learn Greek, but I think it was just the combination of the two, Latin and Greek, that was it. That's what you took at that time, Latin and Greek.

O: Was there much interest in Latin at Rayen School from the students?

S: At that time, yes! There were quite a few classes in Latin. I think there were three Latin teachers.

O: How many students would be going to Rayen when you first started? About how many students would you have in a class?

S: In my class, in each class? Well, probably not more than twenty-five, probably about twenty.

O: Do you recall how many in the entire school there would be at Rayen?

S: Yes, there must have been about between 1,000 and 1,100. I remember that, because the auditorium had 1,066 seats.

O: As an historian, I can appreciate that!

S: Every seat was taken. So, about 1,100 with a few standing in back.

O: What kind of assemblies did they have?

S: We had lectures. We had music sometimes. And plays. We always liked assemblies because they were usually held in the morning. I say we, meaning both teachers and students. The assemblies were held in the morning and they might run a little late. Perhaps you remember that. (laughter)

O: I remember. I can appreciate it. (laughter)

S: They cut into your morning classes. The lunch hour had to be at a certain time, so the morning classes had to be shortened. In the afternoon during football season,

we'd have the rallies in the afternoon, which meant the afternoon classes would have to be cut short. Of course, that was only during the fall.

O: What kind of lectures would they have?

S: We had different speakers. Sometimes we'd have politicians; sometimes the mayor would come and talk or educators, local people.

O: Your plays, do you remember what kind of plays they were?

S: We had a very good dramatics department at Rayen. Miss Lucille Lee was the instructor. I can't remember what the plays were, I mean the names of the plays, but I do remember they did very well. Of course, those plays weren't the ones they put on for assemblies. Those were for evenings, night plays.

O: Would it be like a senior class play for the whole school?

S: Yes, something like that. Mostly seniors.

O: Was there a lot of interest in sports at Rayen?

S: Definitely. We had very good football teams and tennis and golf teams. Of course, that wasn't my field.

O: Latin was your field. Let's go back to Latin. (laughter)

S: Latin and commercial courses.

O: How would you teach Latin? Do you remember? If you were starting again and you had a class and you were going to teach me Latin, how would you teach it?

S: Well, in the beginning, Latin was a lot of drill and a lot of memorization. You just had to memorize vocabulary and declensions and cases. Then we would have the translation of English into Latin and vice versa.

O: Do you remember what textbook you used?

S: No, I don't remember.

O: I guess you made them do their homework then?

S: Oh yes. Then when I got into the commercial, that was almost all drill. I went over and over and over again until they had it by heart.

I'm sorry to see the decline of Latin, although I understand it's coming back. Some schools have done away with it altogether. They have no Latin classes, which is sad.

O: I remember when I was in high school there wasn't that much interest in Latin. Students didn't take it as much as the other languages.

S: It's too bad, because it is the foundation of the English language. Students just don't seem to realize that. But I think it will come back.

O: You taught English also? Literature or grammar?

S: Both.

O: Both? Do you remember some of your students' favorite pieces of literature? What did they enjoy most?

S: I remember one time I had a class of boys. I don't know why that happened; they were all boys. We put on a play not for the school, but just in the room. We had reading from one of Shakespeare's plays. One of the boys had to be a girl and I had a hard time finding one who said he would be. We had a lot of fun with that.

I can't remember what their favorite was.

O: What was the play, the Shakespeare play? Do you recall which one it was? Did you read different ones?

S: I think it was Twelfth Night; now I'm not sure. I'm sort of picking that one out of the air.

O: What grades did you enjoy teaching the most?

S: Seniors, I think. I remember, when they knew they were going to graduate, they tried real hard. Many boys took typing, but there were not so many in shorthand. When they graduated they were ready to go to work. They were very much interested in doing the best they could and they had a lot of enthusiasm, most of them.

O: Did any of the students work when they were going to school? Do you remember? Did they have jobs?

S: Yes. I had calls at school for girls to work part-time. They would go to be interviewed.

O: How about the young boys? Did they work in steel mills?

S: Oh, you mean in the offices?

O: There or in another job, maybe as a laborer.

S: No, not especially. Part-time after school?

O: Yes.

S: No, not that I remember. I did have one boy who became a shorthand teacher. I was very proud of him. He went to Florida to teach shorthand.

O: Do you remember his name?

S: Armeni. He and his brother were twins.

O: Really? Did you have both of them in your class?

S: Yes.

O: Do you ever see any of your former students?

S: Oh yes! I see them all the time. I'm always so interested in seeing whether they ever used their shorthand and typing. Of course, I know anybody who took Latin used Latin. Even though they don't realize it, they use it all the time. But the commercial students, I'm very happy to know that they used their training.

O: You taught at the old Rayen School then too, out on Wick. Did you ever teach at that Rayen?

S: No, I taught in the school on Benita Avenue.

O: There was a painting of it up in the hall today, and I thought the old building was still being used.

S: No, not as a high school.

O: Was it a mixed class? What I mean is were there both black and white students?

S: When I started, not many blacks. We had a few, but not many. Of course when I left, there were quite a few.

O: As for the ethnic composition, do you recall what it would be in your classes of students?

S: In the beginning, we had, I can't say the percentage, but we had many Jewish students. We had very high standards.

O: Did they have religion at all in the school? Did they start with a prayer or classes?

S: We started school in homeroom. We had homeroom in the beginning; for about twenty minutes. Announcements would be made and admit slips given to people who had been absent. I always read from the Bible. I read from the Old Testament, because I had so many Jewish students. I really can't remember how long I did that before they discontinued it.

O: Did you ever have any complaints personally?

S: No.

O: What did you enjoy most about teaching?

S: I suppose the contact with the younger generation; the children and getting to know them well.

O: How about disadvantages? Did you ever think of any disadvantages of teaching?

S: I'm quite sick about the way that the standards went down, especially in commercial work. We had certain standards that we had to meet. For instance, so many words per minute or something like that; then they went out to the business world. When I started, the commercial standard was about 100 or 120 words per minute and when I left we were down to about 60 or 80 words per minute.

O: Why did they change?

S: I guess because the people weren't too much interested in maintaining standards. They wanted to learn just enough to be able to go out and get a job. Now, of course, there were exceptions. I had many students who were much better than that. But if they made 60 to 80 words per minute, that would be a passing grade. They were satisfied with that.

O: Do you have any idea why people's attitudes would have changed like that; why they wouldn't want to excel?

S: One reason was that they were accepted by the business world. If the students were able to achieve even the minimum standards, they were likely to obtain positions, so some of them were not interested in doing better.

O: What were some of the businesses here in Youngstown that would hire some of your students? Do you remem-

ber?

- S: Of course, the steel companies at that time and many banks were looking for secretaries, then attorneys with private offices.
- O: Did they ever come to the high school to interview students?
- S: We had what we called Career Day when they would come, not so much to interview them, but to talk about what would be expected of them in the future in their profession.
- O: What would that day be like? Was it a whole day?
- S: A whole day. We would have different local people from different professions. They would be in certain rooms. One person would be in a certain room. A student who would be interested in that profession would go to hear what he had to say.
- O: Was there encouragement for the students to go on to college when you were teaching?
- S: It changed over the years. They didn't have to be encouraged to do it; they just automatically went to college.
- O: To Youngstown University here?
- S: Some of them. Many of them went away to college. Lately, most of them go to Youngstown University.
- O: It just seems to me if they have this background in business and commercial work, that they would be more apt to want to get a job right after high school.
- S: That's true. They did in my field. I was speaking of the whole school. In my field, they were interested in getting a job.
- O: During World War II for instance, did you talk about the events that were happening around the world? Did your students show any concern about how the events would be affecting them?
- S: I really don't think so.
- O: Like, for instance, Hitler. Did they know who Hitler was?

- S: Oh yes. Oh yes. Then of course, I had students who had brothers in the war. They would talk about that. But more just personal conversations. It didn't come up too much in class. I think that would be more likely in a history class.
- O: Did any of your students go? Get drafted? Any of the seniors or juniors?
- S: I don't think so. I think it was mostly family members as I remember, like their brothers.
- O: What was the dress code like? Did it change throughout the years?
- S: I remember one time they had an assembly when I first started teaching. I was standing in the back. I remarked to one of the teachers how nice the students looked from the back. Their hair was so shiny. She was quite surprised and said, "Well, we wouldn't expect anything else." That's the way it was, you didn't expect anything else. I said how well they behaved. She said, "We just wouldn't expect anything else."
- O: But did it change afterward?
- S: It has changed. I told the girls I taught that when they went out to work they should dress well. I said, "I don't think you should ever go out with your hair up in curlers, out to work or anyplace else." Well that was the seniors I was talking to. The next day one of the seniors came to me to return a book and she had her hair up in curlers. (laughter) So, it obviously didn't take.

Another thing I remember, we were talking about manners. I said, "When you go out of a door, look behind you. Look to see if anybody is coming in back of you. Don't slam in without looking." So, about a year or so later, I met one of the girls downtown. She said, "Now one of the things I remember from your class is always look behind me when I go through a door."

Oh, you can talk about chewing gum in the offices, then they come back and tell me, "Oh, he doesn't mind if I chew gum."

- O: Was that a problem, chewing gum in class?
- S: I never would allow chewing gum in class. I think there's nothing worse than standing up in front of a class and seeing people, twenty or thirty people, chewing gum. Of course, in typing, they seem to think it

helps them type when they chew gum. That was one of my pet peeves.

O: What did you do if somebody was chewing gum?

S: I told them to throw it out if they ever came in my class with gum.

O: How about the wages that you were paid? Do you remember how much they were when you first started?

S: I think when I started it was about \$1,500 or \$1,400.

O: That would be for like nine months?

S: Yes.

O: Did you have any other benefits?

S: We had so-called sick leave for, I think, about fifteen days of pay.

O: Did you have a close association with the Board of Education? Did they work closely with the teachers? Were they supportive of the teachers?

S: You mean the Board itself? You don't mean the superintendent, the Board itself?

O: The Board and the superintendent also.

S: Oh, yes. I just knew who they were. I had no close associations. I always respected them. We always had a good Board of Education, but no close contacts at all. The superintendent, now, I would meet several times. He would come to the school.

O: Why did he come?

S: Just to visit.

O: Did he ever come to class and surprise you just to come to see how you were teaching?

S: Oh, yes.

O: Really? Did you have substitute teachers come?

S: Yes.

O: Well, how about student teachers? Did they come to your class, too?

S: Yes.

O: What would you do when a student teacher would come?

S: I had some excellent student teachers. I don't remember the length of time. They would just sit in class for probably two weeks, then they took over the class. I would sit there in the back of the room for about a week. Then I would leave them by themselves. I would come back and forth, but I always left them by themselves for a while. Otherwise they would have been too dependent on me.

O: Then it's different when you're on your own teaching than when somebody else is there?

S: I always felt that I had very good student teachers.

O: Where did the student teachers come from?

S: Youngstown University. I think those from the University were the only ones I had. But some of the girls whom I taught in Rayen came back as student teachers. I liked that.

S: Oh really? That was nice! That would be interesting. Did you have a close rapport with the other teachers?

S: Very close.

O: In what way were you close?

S: Well, of course, during school hours we didn't see much of each other. But in high school we have what we call a free period where you correct papers. We had a teachers' room where we'd talk about our problems. Then of course, outside of school, there was a group you would be in. We still meet after we retire.

O: Did you work with any of the tour guides down at the Arms Museum? Were they ever teachers with you at Rayen? Did you know them before you worked at the Museum?

S: I knew several of them through teachers' meetings.

O: Going back to homework, how much homework would you take home with you?

S: In shorthand and typing there were reams and reams and reams of paper, because in shorthand, you really had to correct them. In fact, I was very, very much interested in spelling, the correct spelling, because a

secretary has to know how to spell. Sometimes the employer doesn't know how to spell. So, she really has to be able to send out letters with the correct spelling. Some of the girls were a little bit provoked, because I would take off for misspelled words. Because they got the tone of the letter they didn't care about the spelling. They soon learned how to spell. Of course, they were allowed to use dictionaries, because they can in an office look it up in a dictionary. But when you correct papers like that, you have a lot of paper work to do. One disadvantage of commercial teaching, I think, is the paper work.

- O: If you were teaching that again now, would you put as much into it?
- S: Yes, I would. In typing you have to check for errors. Of course, they are supposed to check for errors themselves but it seems to me they missed a few. (laughter) Now, I wouldn't go over the shorthand for errors. I really didn't care. If they got the transcription, that's all I was interested in.
- O: Looking at the men teachers, was there any difference in their pay scale and the way men were treated, or was there any discrimination or anything like that?
- S: Of course, in the athletics field, they were always paid more. They got more for the athletics.
- O: Really?
- S: Well, they put in more time, they said, on the field and in training, so they got paid more.
- O: Did you have to get involved in extracurricular activities?
- S: Oh yes! I had some experience with--they call them Y-teens. They were connected with the YWCA.
- O: What would you do? What were some of the projects that Y-teens did?
- S: I really can't remember. We had meetings after school; then we had meetings down at the YW at night. Oh, we had speakers and parties and different projects.
- O: Was there a lot of enthusiasm in the kids to get involved in things like this?

S: Yes. We had a business club and we met after school. I was in charge of the Annual for several years. That was interesting.

O: That is hard work.

S: It is, but I had a good staff.

O: Getting back to when you were teaching English, were there ever any books that were censored or that parents would complain about?

S: No, not at that time. I didn't have that problem at all. That was later.

O: Yes, because right now you read about it in the newspapers.

S: I have talked to English teachers. I know that after I got out of the English field they had problems, but I never had any.

O: I think I asked you this before. What types of books would you assign to the students to read? Say Shakespeare, would they have to read that?

S: That was in class. Then they had book reports that they had to give. They were allowed to go to the school library and take any book from the school library.

O: As for the union, were you in a union when you were teaching? Was there a teacher's union at all?

S: Oh, no.

O: There wasn't a union?

S: There was an organization just like there is now called the YEA Youngstown Education Association, but it wasn't really a union. The difference there would be that it was not affiliated with the other unions.

O: Were there teacher's strikes?

S: I think I remember two. But they lasted about two days.

O: Would this be in the 1960's or 1950's? Do you recall an approximate time?

S: In the 1960's, I would think.

- O: Why was there a strike?
- S: For an increase in pay. It caused a lot of hard feelings, even two-day strikes. People who wanted to go in; people who didn't want to go in--it took a long time to get over it.
- O: You've been answering this to a certain extent. Have you seen any major changes in the education process here in Youngstown from when you first started teaching? When did you retire from teaching?
- S: In 1972. Like I said, I feel the standards have been lowered. There just isn't as much expected of the students in high school. I don't know whether that was the teachers' fault or the students' fault.
- O: Did they ever have a convention where you could go?
- S: Every year in Cleveland. We enjoyed those, too. We would go up the night before and then stay overnight.
- O: Who would put these conventions on? Who would sponsor them; the YEA? Or was it a national . . . ?
- S: The NEOTA, that's Northeastern Ohio. We'd have it in Cleveland. We'd have the Cleveland Orchestra first, then we'd have a main speaker. Then in the afternoon, they would have different sessions for different fields in hotel rooms or different places where you'd go for your business or your Latin meeting. They usually were very good. Sometimes you just didn't learn anything new. But it was an experience.
- O: I guess just to compare other teachers and get together and talk, too?
- S: Yes. There was a difference in the schools, too. Some principals would want you to report on the convention when you came back. Other principals just wanted to know that you went and learned something.
- O: Did you ever have to write a report?
- S: No, I never did. I never had to write a report on the convention.
- O: Do you remember who some of the other teachers were? Can you just recall some of the teachers that you worked with and some of their names?
- S: Their names?

O: Yes.

S: Of course I can. (laughter)

O: How about some of the English teachers that you worked with?

S: When I first went to Rayen, they were what they called the Old Guard. There were many older teachers there. Older people you talk to now remember when they went to Rayen to the older teachers. Yes, I remember Miss Seeger, she was the Latin teacher. Miss Joshua, she was an English teacher; Miss Morrison, who was an English teacher. But then they had been there very long, so they were about ready to retire when I went there. We had some changeovers. There were so many English teachers there. Mr. Wilson, who is now down at the Board of Education, Mr. Joseph Wilson was an English teacher.

O: Did they ever give you any advice when you first started teaching?

S: I had very good advice when I started teaching. As I said, they were all older teachers when I went to Rayen. They were very, very nice to me. They went out of their way, really, to help. When I had a study hall, one of the older teachers would always come in to see that I was getting along all right, with no problems. I really appreciated it very much at that time.

O: A day in school, what time would it start? Do you remember? How many classes?

S: It started at 8:30. Then we would have, as I said, homeroom where the announcements would have to be given. That would be about twenty minutes. Then we would have three classes in the morning and we'd have three afternoon classes. We'd have two lunch periods.

O: How long were they, each class?

S: Well, they changed, but on the average 45 or 50 minutes. They had about five minutes to change classes. That was quite difficult, because sometimes they'd have to go from the first to the third floor and then back again. No elevators. The lunch periods would be fourth and fifth periods. Then we'd have three periods in the afternoon. We would get out about 3:15. Then

we would have a half hour for detention or makeup work.

O: Did each teacher have to take turns with detention?

S: No, at one time they did try that, to have everybody in one room for detention. I don't think it worked out very well. We had our own detention in each class.

O: Homeroom, did you have the same people in homeroom for four years?

S: No, I didn't. I know in some school they did that. I usually had junior homeroom.

O: Did you get to know your students in homeroom, too, or is it more just for them to come and get organized?

S: When I first started teaching we had very personal contact with homeroom students. They all knew each other. We'd have homeroom parties at their homes. They would invite the homeroom students and the teacher to a party. But that changed later. They just came and went in homeroom. They didn't even know each other most of the time.

O: What kind of parties? What would they be like?

S: Mostly we'd play games and they'd dance. They'd have refreshments of course.

O: They'd invite the teachers to come, too?

S: Oh, yes. They always taught me all of the new dances. They aren't like the dances they have now.

O: Did they have outside dances and proms? Did they have the prom then?

S: Yes, of course, very formal proms. They had them at Stambaugh.

O: At Stambaugh, at the auditorium?

S: Yes. Everybody was very formally dressed. They looked lovely. We always went to see how they looked.

O: As to report cards, how often would they give out report cards? Do you remember?

S: Every six weeks.

O: Was it the A through F system? Is that how it went?

S: Yes.

O: Did you, as a homeroom teacher, have to get all of the grades? Was that done beforehand?

S: Yes, that's the way they had it. They gave it to the homeroom teacher.

O: If there was ever any discipline problem, did the homeroom teacher have any extra responsibility in that regard?

S: Usually just detention or getting in touch with the parents. Then ultimately, send them to the principal.

O: What kind of holidays did the students get off for from school? Do you remember?

S: Yes, I'm trying to get them in chronological order. We had George Washington's birthday off and that was always on the 22nd. Of course Thanksgiving and Easter. We usually had a week for Easter, sometimes starting on Thursday and go through Monday. We had two weeks at Christmas. We had Memorial Day.

O: Did they have a Christmas program?

S: Yes, always.

O: What would it be like?

S: We'd generally have an assembly where we had a very good program. They would sing Christmas carols and put on a little play. But in the classes, the last day before Christmas vacation, we really didn't get much work done. They had Christmas parties, although later we weren't supposed to have parties or refreshments. I used to write the Christmas carols in shorthand and then they would have to read them or I would read them a story and they'd have to take it down in shorthand, a Christmas story. We would do a lot in shorthand. In typing, we'd even draw Christmas pictures using the typewriters. We'd do that with every holiday. We'd have pictures to draw with the typewriter keys.

O: Did the students ever have to do anything for the administration? Did they do typing, extra typing?

S: Oh my, yes!

O: Like what?

S: Mr. Tear, one time, I think it was Mr. Tear. He was principal far back. He and someone else wrote a history of Rayen School. Our class had to type it for him. That was quite thick, probably about fifty pages. Then we'd have to mimeograph it and put them all together. That was quite a project. But we did much typing for other teachers in school and mimeographing.

O: Did they have the office machines in your class then?

S: They had mimeographs, but not any others. We had the dictaphones, of course; we had to learn to use those, too. We only had about three, so we had to take turns using them.

O: Oh really? How many students would you have in the class, like in a typical business commercial work class?

S: In the beginning in shorthand, I would have twenty to twenty-five. In the advanced course, I would have fewer students. Although if they were going to work in an office, they'd need two years. But they wouldn't take the second year, so it would go down to fifteen or eighteen the second year.

Now the typing classes, of course, would be much bigger. There would be about thirty in the class.

O: Did they each have their own typewriters?

S: They each had their own typewriter, yes. Then, of course, we had electric typewriters, too. Again, we only had about three of those. The rest were manuals. I imagine now they've put more electric typewriters in. Those would be what they'd find in the offices now.

O: I know when I took some office practice classes we just had three or four electrics. Everybody wanted to work on the electric except me.

S: Oh, I like the electric.

O: Really?

S: Yes. They're much better

O: They're too quick. You said that Rayen had a good choir.

S: Oh, very good.

O: Did they perform outside of the school?

S: Yes.

O: Where at?

S: They always had their own night, Choir Night, when they used to perform right at the Rayen Auditorium. But there would be guest appearances. Different organizations would ask them to come and sing. They had a good reputation.

O: Who was the director? Do you remember?

S: Mr. Nischwitz. Now, I understand, at Rayen they don't have a choir.

O: What kind of organizations would ask the choir to come and sing? Would it be churches or business groups?

S: Churches, especially at holidays like Christmas they would go and sing. Sometimes church organizations or maybe the YMCA.

O: During the summer time, did the students and teachers ever get together on picnics?

S: We might have a picnic after school, but not usually.

I taught summer school for several years, too. That was always at South High. But that reminded me when you said summer. But, no, we didn't have picnics.

O: Then you were teaching January through December weren't you?

S: Yes.

O: That's a lot of work. (laughter)

S: I enjoyed that. When I first started teaching, I worked down at the Vindicator as a secretary during the summer.

O: The Catholic background that you have, was there any difference teaching in a public school rather than a parochial school?

S: I didn't teach in a parochial school.

- O: You went to a Catholic school. You graduated from a Catholic high school, right?
- S: No.
- O: But you did have Catholic education?
- S: Through the eighth grade.
- O: Do you see any difference in the public school education?
- S: At that time, they had more rigid discipline in the eight grades in parochial schools than they did in public schools. I don't think that's true now. That's only from heresay now; I don't know really. At that time, I think they had much more rigid discipline.
- O: From your own background from like grade school and high school--this is going to sound like a silly question--but how much of what you were taught do you think that you applied to your own teaching? I mean, was there anything specific that maybe you were taught in grade school or high school, a technique? Or were you influenced at all by any kind of teacher or their style? Do you understand my question?
- S: Yes. I don't think so, except in grade school I was probably taught how to study. At least, I wasn't taught how to study exactly, but I studied and had to study, because, as I said, they expected so much of you. Maybe that carried over.
- O: One thing I wanted to ask you about was as a single woman working, did anyone ever comment about that? About you working or your being on your own? I guess I think about it nowadays. You know about being a career woman. There is more emphasis on it in the 1970's and 1980's. Just from my own studying, it just seems like women weren't supposed to work.
- S: No, I don't think that applied so much to single women. I didn't come across that at all. I think it's more married women who have that problem of someone questioning their right to work.
- O: If a woman was single when she started to teach, and then if she got married, was she permitted to keep teaching.
- S: No. I don't know when that was changed. But for a long time, as soon as girls were married, they couldn't

teach.

O: That was just for a woman, not a man?

S: Oh yes, just a woman.

O: Did that bother any of the teachers, any of the women teachers?

S: Yes, it did. They didn't like it particularly that they had to give up their careers.

O: Did they ever complain about it?

S: Yes, they complained, but I don't think they complained so much to the administration. They complained among themselves. I suppose there were a few who made their complaints heard by the administration.

O: You say you were involved in PTA meetings, right?

S: Just during elementary, not in high school. They did not have PTA.

O: Oh, they didn't? Isn't that unusual?

S: I don't think any of the high schools do. I'm not sure. Rayen didn't. They may have had it in other high schools, but we didn't.

O: You would just visit the parents. How would you contact them if you had to?

S: Mostly by phone in the high school. There was a time we had to make visits. I think that was in high school, too. I know it was in elementary. But usually if you had a problem, either the parent would call you or you would call them.

O: Do you remember Circus Day when the circus came to town?

S: That was when I was teaching in the elementary.

O: When you taught in elementary?

S: It was before I taught, too.

O: Oh really? What was it? I heard about Circus Day and I just wondered exactly what it was?

S: Well, I never knew about it before I started teaching. We got out real early whenever the circus would come in,

I guess it was down on the West Side Crossing. I wasn't familiar with this town and somebody had to take me there. We'd see the circus come in. I don't remember much about that. Why would you ask about it?

O: I heard about it! Somebody else mentioned it!

S: Now let's see, at Butler we had Circus Day. I think the students had to bring notes if they were going to the circus. That's right, they had to bring notes if they were going to the circus.

O: The administration accepted those?

S: Oh yes, they accepted them. I don't know who wrote the notes, but they accepted them. That was a holiday.

O: Can you think of anything else, any other experiences? I'm sure you have a lot. (laughter)

S: There were the class field trips. In the elementary grades, I would take the class to the farm one day, or the movies, if there was a special show, like Pinocchio, or Snow White! My business classes would visit offices, such as those in the Sheet and Tube, and Commercial Shearing.

O: I really appreciate you taking the time out to tell me.

S: Well, I wish I could talk some more, but I really can't think of more.

O: Well, if you think of more, you can let me know and I can come back here.

S: They were special days and special occasions.

O: But you did enjoy teaching then, right?

S: Yes. At Rayen in 1966, they had their 100th anniversary. That was a wonderful occasion. We had one week of celebration. We had worked for a year planning it. People came from California and other places for reunions from different classes. That was very interesting.

O: What would they do during that week?

S: They had different reunions, of course. The classes got together. Then one night, we had open house. All

the halls and rooms were decorated. They had a big mural down in the hallway that the art class had painted. People who hadn't seen each other for years would meet in the halls and there would be great rejoicing.

O: Oh, I can imagine

S: We had students we hadn't seen for years who came back. Oh we were so happy to see them. After all, that's quite an occasion, 100 years old.

The old high school was downtown for a long time. Some people call it Rayen High School. That's a very, very wrong thing to say. It's Rayen School, The Rayen School.

O: Okay, I didn't know that.

S: If you meet any of the Old Guard, you will be corrected.

O: Well, is that because it was the first high school then?

S: Yes.

O: What was after Rayen, then? Rayen was built in 1866?

S: Yes, it's still The Rayen School.

O: Was South the next school? Just the history I'm trying to think.

S: I think it was South. It must have been South.

O: That was the big rivalry wasn't it, between Rayen and South?

S: Oh yes, the Thanksgiving football game between Rayen and South.

O: Do you remember that?

S: I didn't teach at Rayen when they had that. Well, I guess they still have it, but it isn't quite the event they had a long time ago. Oh, I know when I first came to Youngstown, they had a big write-up about it. Everybody talked about the Rayen-South game on Thanksgiving.

O: Now, how long were you here before you started teaching?

- S: About six years.
- O: Then you started to teach? What did you do then in between?
- S: I went back to New York and worked in a children's clinic there. Then I did some social work here.
- O: Oh really?
- S: In Youngstown, case work.
- O: For what, what organization?
- S: For the relief organization.
- O: What kind of work did you do?
- S: Go around and visit welfare people and see if they needed welfare and if they did I helped them. Then I worked in an accountant's office after I got my shorthand and typing. My shorthand and typing really have helped. They have been very good for me.
- O: Well, I think that is important. I know with my typing, I'm glad I've had the background. It's helped not only for school, but for typing book reviews of books, but also for a job.
- S: Many students took it just for that too, just for college work. Then they always earned a little money typing people's themes, for so much a page. (laughter)
- O: Yes, they still do that. Well, then, is there anything else, Miss Sheehan, that you'd like to add?
- S: Oh Jeanne, I can't think of anything.
- O: Okay, well, I want to thank you so much.
- S: Oh, you're very welcome. I appreciated the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW