

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Rayen School Project

Faculty Experiences

O.H. 27

MARION MAGUIRE

Interviewed

by

Mark Connelly

on

November 15, 1974

MARION MAGUIRE

Miss Marion Maguire, long-time teacher and librarian at the Rayen School, was born on November 4, 1896, in Minersville, Pennsylvania, the daughter of John and Mary Ann Maguire. She attended Mahanoy Township High School, graduating at the age of fourteen. She then went to Minersville State Normal School and upon graduation in 1914, began teaching Latin and history at Minersville High School. After four years she moved to Ironton, Ohio and taught for two years until 1921, when she came to Youngstown to teach at the old Rayen School, located on Wick Avenue. She remained there for thirty-eight years, retiring in 1959. She taught for twenty-six years and worked as a librarian for twelve.

In the interview Miss Maguire speaks of her association with the Rayen School faculty, staff, and student body. She compares the old Rayen School to the modern Rayen High School located on Benita Avenue.

Currently Miss Maguire makes her home at 766 Bryson Street, Youngstown, Ohio.

SILVIA PALLOTTA
July 7, 1977

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MARION MAGUIRE
INTERVIEWER: Mark Connelly
SUBJECT: Faculty Experiences
DATE: November 15, 1974

C: This is an interview with Miss Marion Maguire for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on the Rayen School. It's being done by Mark Connelly at Miss Maguire's residence at 766 Bryson Street, Youngstown, Ohio. The date is November 15, 1974. It's approximately 1:15 p.m.

C: Miss Maguire, would you please talk a little bit about your family background and also your educational background?

M: I was born in Minersville, Pennsylvania. I am the daughter of John and Mary Moore Maguire. We lived in Minersville for about four years after my birth and then the family moved to a mining community in the mountains near Minersville. It was there that I started school. I went to school right after my fifth birthday in one of those small country school establishments. I had a very fine teacher for the first several grades, to about the fourth grade. We moved from that community to a more northern section of Pennsylvania which was also an anthracite mining district. My father worked there as a kind of lumber supervisor for the Reading Coal Company.

C: Did the second area you moved to have a name?

M: It was called St. Nicholas, Pennsylvania. It's in the Pennsylvania hills.

C: Was the school you attended a one-room schoolhouse or did it have many rooms?

- M: It was a two-room schoolhouse. When I changed localities, the next school that I went to was a one-room schoolhouse. I went there until I entered high school.
- C: Approximately what year did you begin going to school?
- M: It would have been in the year 1901, when I was five years old.
- C: How many students were in the schools that you attended?
- M: Well, I couldn't say how many there were. The room was filled, as I remember. The students wouldn't have all been doing the same grade work. It was a comparatively small neighborhood and you just stayed in that room until you were ready to go to the other school. After we moved up into St. Nicholas, I was extremely fortunate in living right next door to a very good teacher. She was a middle-aged woman at that time.
- C: What was her name?
- M: Miss Malone. Miss Bridget Malone. She took very good care of me. She gave me books for Christmas presents. For instance, I still have a fine book of Tennyson's poems that she gave me when I graduated from high school. I used to go next door and visit with her sometimes and she'd read to me. I felt extremely fortunate in having found a teacher who was so close to me. I was there, with her, until I went into high school. I was only about eleven years old, I think, when I went into high school. I graduated when I was fourteen.
- C: What was the name of the high school?
- M: It was called Mahanoy Township High School. There were several of those small mining communities around. The nearest city was Mahanoy City--that's a good Indian name--and the whole district was Mahanoy Township. People in my district went to the township schools. When I was eleven, I went to the township high school until I was fourteen. Then my father sent me to Millersville State Normal School. I was there until I was seventeen. I began teaching in the fall after I graduated. I wasn't quite eighteen, I became eighteen in November, but the people in the community very kindly took me on as a high school teacher.
- C: Where was this at?

M: It was in Mahanoy Township. At that school I taught Latin and history.

C: How long did you teach at that school?

M: Well, I taught there for about four years. I was twenty-one, I think when I left. I came here in 1921, but before I came here, I taught in southern Ohio for a few years.

C: Where was that?

M: Ironton. I taught in Mahanoy Township until I was twenty-one. Then, a friend of mine who had gone to Millersville at the same time that I did, came out to visit some relatives in Ohio. She came back with a story about how much better teaching conditions were for the teachers in Ohio. You got better pay than you did over in Pennsylvania.

C: What was your pay in Pennsylvania?

M: I think I was getting eighty dollars a month when I left. That was back in the old days when salaries were low. Even then, I was getting paid better than some of the people that worked in the mines. I joined one of those teacher agencies, and got a position through the mail. I got a position teaching down in Ironton, Ohio. It's on the border.

It was very interesting going down there. I passed through some very fine country as I went down and I worked there until 1921. I left there in the fall of 1921. I had never heard of the school tax levy in Pennsylvania but when I came to Ironton the people had to vote for money for the board of education. It was the same as the tax levy we have here now. It didn't pass that year and they couldn't pay us. They didn't close the schools up; we kept on working, but we didn't get any pay checks. I decided that I was going to leave there.

I received news of a teaching position in Youngstown through a teachers' agency. I came here, was interviewed by Mr. Miller and was told that I could have the job. When I left Ironton, they had not yet got around to paying any of the salaries but they did send it to me a few months later. I started teaching here in 1922. It was the end of the school year down at the old Rayen School. I lived at the YWCA and it was just lovely to cross the yard and be at school.

- C: Did you find that the conditions were better in Ohio schools as your friend had said? Besides not getting your pay check, were the other conditions better in Ohio high schools than they were in Pennsylvania schools?
- M: Well, I got more salary in Ohio, but generally speaking, as far as discipline is concerned I didn't notice much difference.
- C: When you got to Rayen, did you notice a big difference?
- M: Well, when I got to Rayen, Mr. Miller was principal and everything there went the way Mr. Miller wanted it to go. He was a strict principal. If we had any problems, we could just go to him and get help with them. There weren't any particular discipline problems that we were burdened with.
- C: What was your opinion of Mr. Miller, as a principal and as a person?
- M: I thought he was a very fine principal. There is no question about that. As a person, too, I think he was somebody that the community could be proud of.
- C: What impressed you most about the Rayen School when you came here? Was it the building or the people?
- M: Well, this old building down here looks something like a big castle overseas. It was impressive, but they were having some trouble finding room for the pupils that they had. I wasn't assigned to a particular classroom. You had to change from place to place. There was good discipline and the study halls were well behaved.
- C: How many years did your career span at the Rayen School?
- M: Well, I came here, as I said, in the beginning of 1922 and I retired in 1959, because I had trouble with my eyesight. They were remodeling the library and I felt that it would be better for the new librarian who would be taking over after me to have it the way she wanted it. Before I retired, I was having some cataract trouble that cut down on my eyesight considerably. A librarian certainly does need her eyes.
- C: How many years did you teach at the Rayen School?
- M: Well, I taught from 1922 to 1947. That would be twenty-five years.
- C: I wanted to separate your period as a teacher from your period as a librarian.

M: Well, I became a librarian in 1947. I was a librarian for twelve years, from 1947 to 1959. I had the good fortune to have had three leaves of absence during my teaching career. That was very generous of my principals because they had to hire someone to fill in my place. They were very kind about letting me go and letting me come back in, too.

C: Where did you go on your leaves of absence?

M: Well, on the first one I went to Europe. Then I was off one semester to get my library degree. I had started preparing for my library degree during summer school at college, but I still had to take off for half a year to get my degree. My other leave was in 1937, before I became a librarian. I took a trip around the world, and I'm very grateful that I have had that opportunity, because it's not the same world anymore.

C: In your twenty-five years as a teacher, did you notice any changes in student body, faculty, or administration, that have really struck you?

M: Well, I don't like to say. During the later years the discipline problems became a little more noticeable and it took a little more effort on the part of the teacher to make the young people do what they were supposed to do.

C: To what would you attribute this discipline problem? What did you think was the cause of it? Do you have any ideas about it?

M: Well, I don't know. I guess there are always some discipline problems somewhere along the line, but I don't know if it's the change in the people who are coming into the community or what. I had a feeling that some of the discipline problems in my day and also nowadays, had come from parents who boast about the cute things they used to do when they were in school

I can remember my own father, who was a strict disciplinarian, telling about his tricks. He graduated from high school, which was unusual for his generation. He said that at times the principal taught a class there. Sometimes when the principal was working on the blackboard, my father would do some cute little trick and the principal would turn around and throw a piece of chalk at him to make him behave himself. I can remember some people up in Rayen School, too, telling about the things their fathers used to do when they went to the Rayen School. The fathers did it, so these students were going to show off a bit, too.

We did accumulate more discipline problems, particularly in study halls. In the classroom, I guess it depended more or less on what the teacher would put up with. I never put up with very much.

C: How did you handle your discipline problems?

M: Well, you could make them stay after school. I remember an incident a few years ago. I met a very attractive looking woman. She must have been about middle age then, but she was still a very pretty lady. She came up and spoke to me in what used to be Hinely's store. She said, "Do you remember me?" I said, "No, I'm sorry I don't." She said, "Well, you certainly ought to. You kept me enough times after school." I said, "Well, in that case, I think it's very nice of you to stop and talk to me." She said, "Well, you know, you feel differently about it after you get out of school. You feel that the teacher did what she should have done."

C: Would you say that you had bigger discipline problems with the girls than with the boys.

M: Well, no, I wouldn't think so because the boys were a little noisier. When they left the study hall, certain boys slammed the door, to see how much noise they could make when they were going out.

C: You also said you didn't know if you could attribute the discipline problem to new groups coming in. In the period you taught there, did you notice any new ethnic or racial groups coming in? Did you notice a great abundance of any particular group of people?

M: Well, I think that there were more people coming in from labor groups. There were students whose parents had labor backgrounds and things of that sort.

C: Where were most of the students coming from before this?

M: Well, most came from around the Rayen School area. It was, back in that day, a middle-class neighborhood. I'm not one hundred percent accurate about that though.

C: What would you say about the quality of the teaching at Rayen?

M: I think it was excellent. I remember particularly Mrs. Sara Jane Peterson, who was an excellent teacher and also an excellent disciplinarian. We turned over any problems with the girls to her. Miss Belle Pyle was another very good teacher.

Most of the teachers that I came in contact with had degrees from colleges like Bryn Mawr. I went to normal school and then eventually I went to the University of Chicago, but these ladies had gone right off to a college like Bryn Mawr. They were very fine people to know. The ones who lived here in the community were all so generous about taking us newcomers in and inviting us to their homes. Miss Ada Rogers was another very fine teacher. They made you feel at home in the community.

C: How long did you live down at the YWCA?

M: Well, I can't remember exactly. A nice couple on Upland Avenue gave me room and board and I moved up there. Occasionally, when I came back from a leave of absence I stayed at the YWCA and I've always been very grateful that the YWCA was down there to help me out.

C: Did you walk to school, even when you moved to Upland Avenue?

M: Oh, yes. There wasn't any other way to go. A few people owned cars in those days. I think the man of the family there did own a car, but I wouldn't have considered it right for me to ride to school. I even actually walked to and from Rayen School after I moved down here. In fact, in the days after I moved here, the streetcars ran frequently. You could go up here to Elm Street and get a streetcar and be at Rayen School by eight fifteen in the morning.

C: What was your salary during your first years at Rayen?

M: I don't remember exactly. I think it was around nineteen hundred dollars. I'm not sure. I would have to look back on some records to find that out. Somewhere around the 1930's it was raised to about three thousand dollars. That was during the depression. It was up around six thousand dollars when I left.

C: When the depression hit, in 1929, do you remember the school not being able to pay your salary for a period?

M: No, I don't.

C: As far as your memory goes, was the school always able to pay you?

M: After the years have mounted up, sometimes the memory isn't as dependable as it ought to be. You may find some people who remember that more accurately than I do. I do remember the banks here having trouble operating.

- C: Would you say you got along comfortably during the depression?
- M: Well, we certainly knew there was a depression and we had to be careful about our money. There was no question about that. It has always hung like a cloud over times ever since. I hope it never returns to us. I hear them mention now that we're in danger of recessions and things like that.
- C: When you took over the library, what were your duties as the librarian?
- M: My duty as librarian was to be of service in the library at the library desk. I helped pupils who came in to look for certain kinds of books. I decided what new books would be needed for the library, and put in the orders. Then when those books came in, they had to be catalogued before they were put on the shelves.
- Another duty, which the library girls helped me with was going over the library shelves and seeing that the books were in order. Some of them might be put back in the wrong place. We had to see if they were in good condition. Then, too, you had to keep the shelves clean. There was a dusting job involved.
- C: You say that you had a role in deciding which new books to buy. Was it up to you to choose what new books to buy?
- M: Oh yes.
- C: On what did you usually base your decision in buying books?
- M: Oh, well, I bought what I thought were most useful to the various departments and sometimes, it wasn't entirely my decision. The teachers in the various departments might have read of something that they thought would be useful to them and they requested that it be bought. That would be in things like science. The teachers in the English department put in requests to have certain types of books added, too.
- C: Do you recall what your budget was for the library?
- M: I'm sorry. I simply don't remember.
- C: Now, you said you had to check to see if the books were in good condition. What would happen if a book was falling apart? What did you usually do with it?

- M: You tried to repair it, if it could be repaired by pasting or taping. Ordinarily, though, you replaced it with something that was in better condition, or you hoped to replace it, if you had enough money.
- C: Were many books donated to the library?
- M: I can't remember how many were donated originally. There were some donations while I was in charge of the library.
- C: Which people or groups do you recall donating books?
- M: Individuals usually donated the books.
- C: Can you recall any?
- M: No, I don't recall any of their names.
- C: How would you rate the library at the Rayen School? Was it a balanced library, in which all fields were adequately covered or did it tend to favor certain areas of study?
- M: Well, I thought it was well balanced. The librarian who was there before me, Miss Elizabeth Harding, was an excellent librarian and I just took over what equipment she had gathered there. She's to be given credit for building up the library. I think it was in very good condition when I got there.
- C: Do you recall how many volumes it contained?
- M: No, I couldn't do that anymore, either.
- C: Did you check any other high school libraries in the area? Did you ever examine those libraries? For example, did you ever visit the library at South High School to see how it was run?
- M: Well, I think I was in some of them but I couldn't make any comparisons.
- C: How much use was made of the library by the faculty, and students? Was it in constant use?
- M: Oh, it was very busy, yes. It opened in the morning. I don't think anybody was in there during homeroom period, but it was always very busy during the other periods of the day. After school, too, the pupils were back in. They came in to get the books they needed.
- C: Did the faculty make much use of the library?

- M: Yes, they did.
- C: What teachers were most apt to be found in the library? Which teachers made the most use of the library that you recall?
- M: Some of the men teachers came in there and did a good deal of magazine reading. They read expensive magazines that we ordered. On the whole, I think the library was used quite often by most of the teachers.
- C: Did you have much trouble with theft or destruction of books at the library?
- M: I once wrote a little piece for the Rayen School paper about that. I found, after careful checking, that only five percent of the pupils gave you trouble with stolen books or with books that were not returned on time. The other ninety-five percent were good. That five percent could be bothersome sometimes. The things that this five percent did was not a reflection of the general school population. It was just that small group that caused trouble.
- C: Did you notice the cases of destruction or theft increasing as time went on?
- M: No, I don't think that I did.
- C: How did you usually handle late returns to the library?
- M: They were supposed to pay a fine on late books.
- C: Do you recall what the fine was?
- M: I think it was two cents a day.
- C: Has the fine ever changed during your period as a librarian?
- M: No.
- C: Did you find that your position as librarian gave you insight into a side of Rayen that you didn't have as a teacher? Did you see things about the school that you didn't see as a teacher?
- M: Well, yes, I think it gave me more insight into the school because it gave me more contact with all the different groups in the school. In the library, practically all the students came in for something or other. As I said, I was always grateful to the girls who acted as library assistants at the desk.

You came into day-to-day contact with all the faculty members, too. People always came in there looking for books or to look up something. Sometimes they looked up things in magazines or teachers may have assigned certain books to their pupils. There is a much different feeling being in the library than being in a classroom with a smaller space around you.

C: Now, what sticks out most in your mind as you recall your years at Rayen?

M: Well, I'm very grateful for the fine principals that I had the privilege of working under. I've been reading in the papers about some of the things going on in the schools, and I have great admiration for principals because they have to get along with the pupils and all the teachers. A principal has to adjust to everybody, and has to have particular characteristics. It takes a great deal of patience and strength of character to fill a position like that.

Our principals at Rayen were very fine people. I've always been extremely grateful to Mr. Miller and to Mr. Herr while he was at Rayen. Mr. Tear was excellent also with his unending patience. Mr. Lindsay came in right after Mr. Tear left and he was a very fine person, too, but he didn't remain at Rayen very long.

C: Now, what would you have changed about the school if you could have? What one thing would you have changed about the school if you had the power to do so?

M: I can't think of anything that I would have changed about it because we had good assemblies, and an excellent cafeteria. I had a nice room to teach in and it was a pleasant place to be.

C: While you were there, would you say that the faculty was a closely-knit group. Did the faculty members get along well together?

M: Well, I think most of them did, as far as I know. I can't remember any difficulties.

C: Was there a good faculty-student relationship?

M: Well, I think that depended on the individual teacher and students. It might have been better in some cases than in others.

C: Was the student body a fairly closely-knit group? Were there any major conflicts in the student body that you knew of? Were there any racial or ethnic conflicts?

- M: Well, I don't remember anything that bothered me especially about it in those days.
- C: Do you still keep up with what's going on at the Rayen School? Do you still keep up with the activities there?
- M: Well, I haven't been in touch with it lately. All I know is what I read in the papers about things. I have felt that we shouldn't go back there to visit because I think the new teachers don't want to feel that the old ones are coming in and checking up on them.
- C: Do you feel that Rayen High School, now, is the same as the Rayen School that you worked at?
- M: Well, as I say, I haven't personally been inside to do any checking up on it. I suppose I wouldn't know most of the faculty members there now. As I understand from the paper, the student body is sixty-five percent Negro now. I'm not sure whether that number is correct or not. I do think it is a change from the student body that we had earlier.
- C: What was the approximate percentage of blacks in the school while you were there?
- M: I'm not sure but I think about ten or fifteen percent of the pupils that came in for an individual class were black. We used to say Negro in those days, but I guess that's not being used much anymore.
- C: Would you say the black students fit in well with the student body as a whole? Was there much antagonism between the whites and the blacks while you were there?
- M: No, I don't think there was much antagonism.
- C: If someone came up to you and said, "Did you teach at Rayen High School?" would you make a distinction between the Rayen School and Rayen High School? Would you draw a distinction between the two?
- M: Do you mean the old Rayen School downtown?
- C: Would you draw a distinction between the Rayen School, and what it stood for and has come to be known, and Rayen High School today? Many people draw this distinction.
- M: Well, I'm not familiar enough with the situation nowadays to say whether I'd make a distinction or not.

- C: Well, some people emphasize that strongly. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- M: No, I don't think there is except that I want to say that I feel very fortunate in having had the opportunity to come to Youngstown and work in Rayen School.
- C: I have two more questions about your family. You said your father had a high school education.
- M: Yes, he did. He wanted to go to college, but he couldn't.
- C: What was his occupation?
- M: During the time that I was in school, he was working for the Reading Coal Company and he was in charge of a lumberyard. He had an office down here and there was always sawed lumber around.
- When I first started I had to teach botany and I was not really prepared for it. My father very kindly showed me all these cuts of wood and showed me how to tell the differences between them. I took all of the cuts of wood to the school and pointed them out to the pupils. When I began teaching my salary kept going up and his just stayed the same. He decided that he would get out of that lumberyard assignment and get into business for himself. He became a contractor, building roads, and did very well at it.
- C: How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- M: I had two sisters and four brothers.
- C: Did any of them receive the education that you did?
- M: Two of my brothers graduated from college. One of them graduated from Penn State and the other one graduated from Harvard. Both of my sisters did what I did. They went to the same normal school, and to college afterward. One of them went to Penn State and the other went to New Jersey or Philadelphia--I can't remember which one.
- C: Were your brothers older than you?
- M: No, I'm the oldest of the family.
- C: Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- M: I can't think of anything else.

C: Okay. Thank you very much

M: Well, thank you. I admire your fine conduct of this interview.

END OF INTERVIEW