

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Rayen Schools

Teaching Experience

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ELIZABETH MCLAUGHLIN

Interviewed

by

Hugh Earnhart

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH MCLAUGHLIN
INTERVIEWER: Hugh Earnhart
SUBJECT: Teaching experience at Rayen, Depression,
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E: This is an interview with Mrs. Elizabeth McLaughlin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Rayen School by Hugh Earnhart at Youngstown State University on October 28, 1975, at approximately 1:15 p.m.

Mrs. McLaughlin what can you tell us about your family and the neighborhood that you grew up in?

M: My parents came here from Scotland. They were both born in Ireland, but had gone to Scotland. They came here and settled in Struthers in 1872. There were very few people there at the time, it was a very small place.

There was a school and I attended that until the eighth grade, at which time Mr. Warren P. Moody, who was our principal, decided to start a high school. He had a two-year course which he himself taught. He was the only teacher, but he was excellent and a very dedicated teacher. My father died when I was three, my older brothers married while I was still a child, so I grew up without any men. To me Mr. Moody was wonderful.

I graduated in 1906 from Struthers School and when I knew I was going to Rayen I was beyond words, it was more than I had ever hoped for. When I went to Rayen I had to take a test. For the two years I passed at Struthers they gave me the one year credit at Rayen, so I had three years in Rayen School. I can remember

walking up the hill and seeing the crowd around those big, old steps. They all waited there. We all congregated there and compared notes and helped each other with our lessons. It was something that I as a little country girl really thought was wonderful. Then we would go up into the big community hall, the assembly room, where Mr. Wilt Griswold would read the Bible. We would stand, of course. Then Mr. Griswold would read the Bible, then salute to the flag, and then we went to our different classes.

The teachers were wonderful. There were teachers who were nationally known, they were really dedicated. I received an education that I think, in some ways, is comparable to a college education of today because the teachers were so good. Most of the pupils were like me, they really wanted an education. I think that really is the basis of education, you must want it. This thing of you have to go to school doesn't go down too good with a lot of people.

E: What courses did you take?

M: I started as a sophomore and I took geometry, English, Latin, and French. In the second year I was there, this would be my junior year, I took English, Latin, French, and German, and the same in my senior year. There were wonderful teachers. Miss Thomas, Miriam Thomas, taught French, and Fraulein Kerwer taught German. I understand that during the First World War she was incarcerated as an undesirable. I never knew too much about it. I felt bad when I heard it. When I heard it school was over so I was glad I didn't hear it while I was in school. She was a wonderful teacher. They were all excellent. I wanted an education and I think that is the first requisite, you must want it.

E: How did you get to the school each day?

M: I went by a streetcar. When I was growing up the only way my mother could get to town, to Youngstown, was to take the 8:00 train in the morning and then she couldn't get back until 6:00 at night. There were two trains.

E: Which railroad was this?

M: Pennsylvania. It went right past the house. Then the streetcars finally came and of course after that, the buses. The buses weren't there while I lived in Struthers, it was just the streetcars.

- E: Being out a couple of years can you remember what the building looked like inside as far as you walking in the front door, what struck your attention?
- M: The first thing were those really wide stairs and everybody trooping up them. Then of course, there were the rooms. The thing I remember with the most love is the residence. Has anyone told you about the residence?
- E: No.
- M: That was the home of H. K. Rayen, he lived there. That was located where the board of education is.
- E: There on Wood Street.
- M: Yes, that is where the house was. That house had been changed into different rooms. There was a boardwalk from the main building, from Rayen School proper, to the residence. It was so wide that you walked easily four abreast. You could walk six, but four was comfortable. As I said in my book, romances were begun one week when the boy of your choice carried your books. Hearts were broken the next week when he carried somebody else's books. I think the way they arranged that, everybody who went to Rayen School while the residence was there had at least one class so that they could have that experience.
- E: In other words, they used Judge Rayen's home for classes?
- M: Yes, those were classrooms, two-story. I think I had about six classes over there. That was fun, back and forth, and I'll meet you on the boardwalk, all that kind of stuff. It was very interesting.
- E: What was a typical classroom like as far as arrangement was concerned?
- M: In the residence there were chairs with the wide handles. I still see them in some of the schools. In the building proper they were just like any other schoolroom desks. I did tell you he read the Bible and we had the salute to the flag. That, I think, is very important because I think whether you're Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, you believe in a superior being and you need that respect. When you lose respect for God you lose respect for everything, at least that's the way I feel about it.
- E: Where did most of the students from Rayen come from?

- M: From all over Youngstown.
- E: Was there any section of town that more seemed to come from than others?
- M: I think more came from the north side, but there were some from the south side and some outlying territories. For that I wouldn't be able to say, but I know that a great many of the ones that I knew were from around the north side, and there were some from the east side. I would say they came from the entire city. Of course, at that time the south side was not what it is today.
- E: How would you describe the student body there when you were in school from 1906 to 1909? What was the student body like?
- M: Very respectful, there might have been one or two incidents, but nothing compared to what it is today. They stood for the Bible reading, and they stood for the salute to the flag, and very quietly went about their way to their classes or their homeroom. There was none of this rushing and hurrying.
- E: What did the student body do for out of school activities or extracurricular activities?
- M: Where the main body of Youngstown University is, beside the Rayen School of Engineering, there was a big yard there and the boys played ball. Then across the street was St. Joseph's, which is now the Newman Club, but that's where the boys played. Of course, there were not so many, there were only 108 in the class that I graduated. The girls walked around and watched the boys. The girls had a galaxy, the Girl's Galaxy, and anyone could join that wanted to. There were no sororities or fraternities, although after Rayen went up to the north side I understand there were a few. In fact, I had a nephew who belonged to the Black Friars, but that was the only one. Then I think there were several girl sororities.
- E: But this was later?
- M: Yes, this was much later, after I was married and lived on Kensington. I went into teaching then and while I was teaching Mr. John Ace Chase came to Youngstown and he was all gung ho about playgrounds. His first experimental playground was in East Youngstown where I was teaching. He and Miss Mary Morgan of Girard came down and they had picked out a spot to start an experimental playground.

He came to the principal, who was Mr. Corsan. It is now Campbell, it was Youngstown. Mr. Corsan picked me so I was the counselor at the first playground in the Youngstown area. My partner was Daniel Quistan, he was the son of the Presbyterian minister in Struthers. In the summer of 1911 and 1912 we had that. Of course in 1913 I was married and I didn't pay much attention to it.

E: Where did you go to college?

M: I didn't go to college. I went to Rayen School then all I had to do was pass a test, take the teachers' exam. Of course, every summer you went to teachers' institutes. After I was finished teaching, they had the Kent State normal school, but of course at that time, I was already married.

E: In other words, the academic excellence of Rayen was such that if you could pass the examination the state was willing to accept it.

M: Yes, but you had to take it every year. The first three years I took it in Canfield. Then the last year I took it at Rayen School.

E: If you can look back at the types of teachers, what teachers stand out in your commemoration?

M: I liked all of them. I think Mr. Chattertant, I loved Latin and he taught that. I think that is why I remember him so well. Lyda Baldwin was the English teacher, and of course, I loved English, I always loved to read. Before I got to Rayen School I had read Stoddard's lectures. I really knew them off my heart. I know she asked me where I had done my traveling and I told her I traveled with a book.

E: Those lectures, at that time, were as much in everyone's home as National Geographic is today.

M: They were beautifully written books, beautifully illustrated, the paper was beautiful, the back, the entire book; I loved them. I know many times my mother would call me and my brother Dick would say, "She's going down the Rhine looking at the beautiful castles." I really read.

E: I have a set of those that I bought.

M: Have you?

E: Yes. Every once in a while I just sit down and look and read through them.

M: I remember reading about the Taj Mahal, about that marble curtain that was so finely designed that it looked like lace. He said you almost waited for it to sway with the breeze.

E: How did Miss Baldwin conduct her classes? How did she run her English class?

M: I don't know if she was noted for it, perfect discipline. That was the case in all throughout the school, the discipline was perfect. I don't know whether I was the teacher's pet or what, but she seemed to single me out for things. She was good with all of them, but if you didn't get your assignment she was right on your back. You had to do your homework.

E: Did you read and then discuss?

M: We read and discussed. In her class we did a lot of Shakespeare. With Mr. Moody, in Struthers, we did the early English: Chaucer, Adam B. Johnson, and all that. At Rayen we came into the newer. For modern literature I really am not up on it because some of the books I've read I just put down, I couldn't be bothered reading them. Every once in a while you get a good book, one that is really worth reading.

E: Did you work while you were going to Rayen at all?

M: Yes, in the summertime I worked at the office of the Collar & Kaine Company, that was a women's clothing store. My older sister worked there and in the summertime I went in to help.

E: You didn't work at all during the regular school year?

M: No. I had to walk so far. My home was on the north side of Struthers and I had to walk all the way across. Campbell is on the north, I was on the south. I walked about two miles to get the streetcar up to Campbell, which only took about five minutes. Then I had to walk up Twelfth Street hill to the school so that by the time I got home I couldn't have worked.

E: Did you take your lunch?

M: Yes.

E: What type of things did people haul in their lunch sack in early years of the twentieth century?

- M: Just about the same as you have now. Bologna was always good. My mother used to make a lot of meatloaf and she would have that and keep it and we would have it for our lunch. There was always fruit. There was a little store near our school that we went to and they had fresh fruit and stuff like that. That was Resitars.
- E: Would you take your lunch there and stand around in front of the store and eat it?
- M: No, we had a little room. When I was at East Youngstown there were two buildings. First, there was a two-story building frame and the first and second grade were in the bottom and third and fourth were in the top. I taught first grade. Then the new building was built and it was really beautiful. It is still there, the Gordan Avenue School. We were transferred there. Miss Reuben, who graduated from Rayen with me, she and I were transferred up to the new building and new teachers came in and took our places. Jean Lindsay was the girl from Struthers who came and took my place in the small building.
- E: Was there any kind of eating facility at Rayen School itself?
- M: No.
- E: Where did most of the kids eat there?
- M: They just brought their lunch and sat around. There were no facilities.
- E: We've seen pictures of the large numbers of people sitting out in front and it was good weather obviously.
- M: Yes. Those wide steps and that roof around there, that is the thing I remember most because that's what I saw every morning as the streetcar from Struthers came right into the diamond. They don't have the diamond now. We walked up the hill and it was just a pathwalk, a sidewalk, not like it is today.
- E: Did you have to go over the Erie Railroad tracks?
- M: Yes.
- E: There was no bridge was there?
- M: No bridge.
- E: You had to walk across it?

M: Walk across the tracks. You knew they were there and you took care of yourself.

E: You looked both ways?

M: Both ways, I'll say.

E: What was the town like?

M: In Struthers?

E: Youngstown.

M: The streets were paved downtown, they were good. I couldn't tell you much about the outlying because my home was in Struthers. I met some wonderful people there, that's how I met my husband. I knew Donald Lynn, you probably know him.

E: Yes.

M: Erskine Maiden.

E: Yes.

M: Of course we had a football team and our own group had their little slogan. It wasn't generally known in Rayen, but we had our own. I went with the hero of the track team, Ted Post. We went to all the track meets that were held in Youngstown and to the football games too. There was no basketball.

E: How many games did they play in the fall, two or three maybe?

M: Not too many. Several times they went out of town, but most of the games I think they played here. I was not too interested in football.

When we graduated, we graduated from the old opera house which was in the corner downtown. It would be the southwest corner where a drugstore is now. There was a church there later. I don't know what's there right now. That's where a lot of the good singers and actors came to Youngstown. Later they built the opera house on Champion Street. That was another thing that was of great interest to me, I played and sang. That's all I was interested in was music.

E: What was your graduation ceremony?

- M: They handed out the diplomas. I'm trying to think who spoke, but I can't.
- E: How many were in your class?
- M: 108.
- E: Obviously caps and gowns?
- M: Yes.
- E: Did Rayen have an orchestra or music program?
- M: No, we didn't have any caps and gowns?
- E: You didn't?
- M: No, I wore a really pretty white dress my sister made for me. There were no caps and gowns.
- E: Was there an orchestra or an organ or what? Any kind of processional music of any sort?
- M: Yes, there was, but what it was I couldn't tell you.
- E: Rayen didn't have a music department?
- M: No, they had no music department?
- E: Did they have a choir?
- M: No. We sang when we got together, but there was no organized body.
- E: There was no music teacher?
- M: No.
- E: What about debates, was there a debate team or a debate society?
- M: No, not that I remember. I think if there had been I would have been in it. I don't remember any debate club.
- E: It was a strong institution because many people referred to it as "the" Rayen School.
- M: "The" Rayen School. I spoke of Mr. Moody, I was without men in my life and when I went to Rayen School Mr. Griswold was a man just like Mr. Moody. He was a wonderful man. He read the Bible and you would have stopped and listened to him. They both had their favorite passages that they would read. There was always absolute silence. Those

teachers were good teachers. Mr. Chatterton taught Latin, he later was the head of South High. Mr. Hure was a teacher, he later was principal of Rayen. Mr. Miller was a teacher, he later was a principal at Rayen. Mr. Johnson taught geometry. Mornie Morrison taught English. Miss Kerwer, German; Miss Thomas, French. I wrote down the names as I thought of them: Miss Morrison, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Chatterton, Miriam Thomas, Sarah Jane Peterson, Elida Baldwin, Florence Tuckerman, Mr. Hure, and Mr. Miller. That's about all I can remember. It's pretty hard to remember.

E: Look how long back we're recalling. Children are always children in every generation, those little pranks and things, can you remember some of the pranks they pulled at Rayen on occasion?

M: No, I really can't because as soon as school was out I had to hurry down to get the streetcar home. All of that I missed. Finally, when I was a senior, I had met two girls who were very good friends and any time there was a party I had to leave before it was barely started so their mother and my mother got together and it was decided when there was a party I should stay at their home. That was fine because I was the one that played the piano and led the singing and that's about all we did in those days, that's the way you had your fun. That's the way I got to stay for the parties.

E: Maybe the student body got together and worked out something with your mother so they would have a piano player around. Tell us a little bit about the town you grew up in, what it was like at the turn of the century.

M: It was a small town, everybody knew everybody. It was dry, there was no drinking.

E: In Struthers there was no drinking?

M: No drinking, it was dry. My mother kept a hotel, we lived in a hotel. For that reason, we worked very hard when it came time to vote because we knew that she was by herself with no man around except the man who lived at the hotel. She always said if drink came into the town she would be afraid. I can remember walking in the parade with the WCTU [Women's Christian Temperance Union]. I was about ten years old. I was one of the first that had a bobby haircut. The things seem so silly now compared to the things they have today. It was lamps, there was no electricity.

E: Gas lamps?

M: Before gas lamps there were chimney lamps.

- E: You're talking about in the homes?
- M: Yes. Then there were no streets. When the mud was bad it was just muddy that was all, we had to clean off the mud. There were no sweepers, no washeries, nothing to make life easy the way it is today.
- E: What type of people stayed at the hotel that your mother ran at this time?
- M: Just before we went into the hotel the Rod and Wire was built in Struthers. It was right in back of the hotel. There were a group of men from Youngstown and Niles, they were the ones who stayed overnight. The men from Youngstown came down, they had horse and buggy and some of them came on that 8:00 train that my mother used to take. The ones that stayed at the hotel, many of them were from Niles because it was a new mill and the wages were good. It was worth their while to come Monday morning and stay until Friday night, and that's what they did.
- E: What kind of rates did you have?
- M: I couldn't tell you.
- E: You didn't have to work in the hotel yourself?
- M: No, the most I ever did was help set the table.
- E: You had a dining room there too?
- M: Yes, a big dining room. My sister and I used to lay the silverware and get the napkins just right. When she bought the hotel there was a man that went with it whose name was Henry. He went berserk one day and that was very exciting, I can remember that. We found out later that his mother had been at an insane assylum for years.
- E: He went with the hotel, was he sort of like a porter or janitor?
- M: He was a general man. There was a little room down in back of the kitchen where he always slept. The people who were selling the hotel said that he had been with them for years and he had never been any trouble, he was worth his keep, so my mother decided to keep him on, but we were always afraid of him. The girls who came to play with me were always afraid of Henry.

E: Now you look back and wonder why. Do you remember the temperance movement and marching in it as a youngster? Do you remember the Ku Klux Klan in operation?

M: Very well. Personal experiences.

E: Can you tell us about them?

M: That really wasn't part of Rayen.

E: I understand that.

M: I was married and we had bought a home when Vincent was about nine months old. We lived next door to a young couple. We were all young couples together. They had been very good friends. We never dreamed that they would be a part of it. One Saturday night they had a big meeting on the road from Youngstown to Hubbard, there was a field there, an immense field. They said there were 50,000 people there and I don't doubt it. They burned a cross and we stood on the back porch and my husband and I just cried. You could see the flames up to the sky, that was on Saturday. The next day my husband went to the door and the two little girls from next door were sitting on our steps in full Klan regalia.

E: He probably went through the porch roof.

M: He was very upset. He yelled at the kids, and of course, they went home screaming. Their father came out and Vin told him, "I thought you had more sense to be decent about things like that." John said, "I don't believe in it a bit. Do you know why I joined?" Vince said, "No." He said, "I'm running for county auditor and that's the only way I'll get it." He got it and he held it as long as he wanted. There were no Catholics elected that year. Vin and John had been good friends, but there was always a shadow between them after that. They thought they were hurting the Catholic church, but they didn't because people who were falling-away Catholics came back to the church. If they were falling away they probably hadn't been to church in years, but they still considered themselves Catholics. It was a bitter time.

E: This was nationwide, it wasn't just local?

M: No, it wasn't just local.

E: Judge Heffernan, we interviewed him about a year and a half ago and he was running for mayor. He was Catholic.

M: It was very hard.

E: It was very emotional, no rhyme or reason.

M: No. I remember that Saturday night because we stood out there and cried. I often wonder even now why they picked on the cross, because the cross is what Christ died on. I couldn't understand their reasoning at all, why they did that. It was a means of making money for a lot of people.

E: Oh yes?

M: I know John became county auditor.

E: Because he belonged to the right organization?

M: Right.

E: We've been talking for a considerable length of time, but when did your husband pass away?

M: In 1939.

E: We had mentioned something about the 1920's and the Ku Klux Klan, how did you make it through the Depression?

M: I worked. I started back to teaching. I taught for two years and then I had a heart attack. By this time there were a couple of girls, Vincent was working. He was fortunate in the dead of the Depression. He was lucky, he got a job, he sold paint at the Cavanaugh Company. He worked there. Then one of the girls was old enough to work and just one after the other they came and they each did their bit. I worked too. Later on when they all left I kept reference. I bought a house up on Elm Street. When Vin died he left enough insurance that I paid off the house. I had a dress shop in my home and I sewed dresses and I did the repair work on them. I managed just to keep from hand to mouth. They all went through school and the boys got their college from the GI bill. They all managed. I have beautiful daughters and they all married wonderful men.

E: It's amazing that . . .

M: What one woman can do when she makes up her heart.

E: What anyone can do when the chips are down and there is no place to turn. You just start putting it together.

M: You have to. I know when he was dead people came and they would say, "What is she ever going to do with all those kids?"

E: It didn't bother you, did it?

M: What would I have ever done with them? They were my reason for living.

E: Did they all go to Rayen?

M: Yes.

E: Every one of them went to Rayen?

M: Six went to Rayen and four went to Ursuline. Ursuline came out then and I was teaching in the Catholic schools so I sent the four to Ursuline.

E: Did you find that when you were teaching you did things much like what they did at Rayen?

M: No, it was more like what we had done when I first started to teach. The discipline was still excellent. I understand that it isn't too good at St. Ann's now, but it really was good then. We had more trouble with the parents than what we had with the pupils.

E: What subjects did you teach?

M: I taught fourth grade. After I was well I started to substitute and I substituted all over the city and the Catholic schools. I taught any grade that was open or needed help because I knew it all, my children were going to school and I helped all of them. It seemed that children and school were my whole life.

E: Well, we've been chitchatting about Rayen School, as you look back now is there anything that you see at Rayen that if you had the power you would have liked to have changed and done different?

M: Back then?

E: Yes.

M: No, to me Rayen was perfect. I loved the teachers and I loved the surroundings. I remember one day I came in and I made a noise and one of the teachers said, "Miss McEvoy, what noise!" I said, "That's the exuberance of youthful spirit." She said, "You didn't get that out of

Stoddard's lectures." They all knew of Stoddard's lectures. I think that's where I got most of my knowledge about the other world. There was nothing in Struthers, we had no public library, we had nothing. There were not too many magazines in those days. I had known this women's sister who was a teacher too. She was always getting books and I would read what any of them would bring in.

E: Well, is there anything else you would like to add?

M: No, that's about all.

E: Thank you very kindly Mrs. McLaughlin.

M: It was a beautiful experience going to Rayen School.

END OF INTERVIEW