

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Education in Youngstown

Teaching Experience

O. H. 333

GEORGE SCHOENHARD

Interviewed

by

Bernice Mercer

on

November 13, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Teaching Experience

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE SCHOENHARD

INTERVIEWER: Bernice Mercer

SUBJECT: Teaching experiences, teachers, student difficulties

DATE: November 13, 1975

M: This is an interview with Dr. George Schoenhard at Kilcawley Center for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Education in Youngstown on November 13, 1975, at 3:00 p.m.

Now, as I said the dates and times aren't so important. We want to start with you and where your home was. Do you remember about your home and your early elementary school, your memories in general about it?

S: Well, I started school in Delphos, Ohio, over in the western part of the state, and I remained there until I was nine. I finished the fourth grade there, and then we moved to Youngstown. That was in 1922.

M: They would have had grades in school there?

S: In Delphos, yes, they did. They had regular eight grade schools and, of course, there was a high school there. I was only there for first, second, third, and fourth grade. They didn't have kindergarten there at that time. I started in the Youngstown schools in the fifth grade in McKinley with Miss Levine, a very fine teacher.

M: What is your father's occupation?

S: My father was in the steel business. He was credit manager of Sheet Metal Manufacturing Company in Youngstown.

M: Do you have brothers and sisters?

S: Yes, my sister, Dorothy, was four years older than me. She started in the Youngstown schools in the eighth grade, again in McKinley. Her teacher was Miss Jones.

I can pretty well remember all my teachers, Mrs. Mercer.

M: Can you talk about the schools, do you remember them?
How did they compare with the schools today?

S: Well, of course, I'm familiar with the McKinley School now and have been for a good number of years. The basic structure is about the same except for the fact that the desks in those years were bolted to the floor and they are not now. Outside of that the school hasn't changed greatly. McKinley School put on an addition somewhere in the 50's, and was able to enlarge a little bit. Basically, the school is very much the same.

I never felt that the teachers that we had back in those years were too traditional or too old-fashioned. The teaching seemed to be of very high caliber. McKinley School in those years was a school in which many rather fortunate young people had an opportunity of attending. Not that they differ greatly from those today, but there are some differences in the fact that the north side of Youngstown was quite a socially elite side of town. McKinley had a very fine group of young people, many of them who went on to college and made names for themselves.

M: I'm surprised as far as the curriculum is concerned, that wouldn't differ too greatly?

S: No, it really didn't. Now, when I got in the seventh grade we actually departmentalized in McKinley School. For your information, Mr. Shepherd was the principal of McKinley at that time. We departmentalized and one teacher became the teacher of music, that was Miss Fredericka, well-known in the city of Youngstown. She died a short time ago. Miss Jenny Jones became the teacher of mathematics. Mrs. Clark, a very well-known teacher in Youngstown, became the English teacher. Miss Jackson was the art teacher and the writing teacher, and so forth.

M: That was a little advanced idea for right then?

S: Yes it was, it really was. We continued that through the eighth grade. As I recall it, it was the seventh and eighth grade in which we did that.

M: In your classes do you remember anyone who really could not read, who really could not handle any of the work, who just sort of rode along?

S: No, I really can't. When I was in the fourth grade in Delphos I remember kind of a big fellow who was a farm boy who seemed to have quite a hard time with school. It was a little unusual that he stayed on because most of

the youngsters of that type simply just kind of dropped out of school. In Youngstown I really can't recall anyone in the class who had a particularly difficult time. They weren't all A students or B students or C students, but . . .

M: They weren't completely lost?

S: No. They weren't completely lost. I don't believe that I was ever in a class in my grade or high school where I ran into anyone who could simply not read at all.

M: Do you remember when you first entertained the idea of being an educator?

S: That's a good question. I asked the same question in my class in pupil personnel here at the university just a week ago, so I should be able to answer the question.

Actually, when I left high school the Depression was about on. It was just the beginning of the Depression and we had some financial setbacks in our family. I really didn't think I would go to college at all. I had no money. I was hard enough to keep ends meet at home. I really wasn't thinking about being a teacher. I then spent three and a half years in all, two years after I got out of high school, and while I was in high school, working at the Palace Theater, the Keigh & Alby Vaudeville Theater. There I did a little bit of everything and earned enough money to start thinking about going to college. Of course, by that time Youngstown College was then in, as a day school it was in its beginning. I started here in 1933, the first full year the college occupied Jones Hall.

You asked me when I first started thinking about teaching, I am certain it was when I was in the theater. I contemplated the thought of having that type of job all my life. I did enjoy my work there, but I didn't want to do that all my life. I suppose I looked around to see what I could do and my interest in history had accelerated by that time and all I could think of then was to be a history teacher.

M: Do you remember your first teacher in college?

S: Oh yes, Dr. Bowden. I always thought a great deal of him. He was a very fine, fine history teacher. Of course, we had Professor Bare here and it wasn't long after I got here that Dr. Wilcox came.

When I started here the school wasn't equipped to certify teachers. It wasn't till after I had been here a little while that that privilege became a part of Youngstown

College. How they got certified I really don't know.

- M: Was there always a long list of courses that had to be taken? Somebody mentioned that no matter how much experience you might have had with something, it didn't help you at all as far as becoming qualified.
- S: Oh, I don't particularly feel that I was ever too critical of their curricular offers. I was so glad to get to college that if they would have said to take certain courses I was glad to take it. It didn't really make much difference. No, I would say that the courses I took seemed to always have some relevance to what I felt I was going to be doing. I know some people today say the courses they are taking aren't very practical and aren't very helpful to them in the teaching career, but I don't know, that must have bypassed me. I felt that the courses that I took were all useful and I enjoyed them, really.
- M: You've taught for several years?
- S: Yes, I did. I taught for nine years in the public schools. I started out in a strange situation. My first teaching assignment was to teach the crippled children from the Rotary Home. The Rotary Home is now part of South Side Hospital down on Werner Street. There were enough young people in there who had inflammation of the marrow of the bone, called osteomyelitis, that we were able to have classes sometimes, maybe senior high class, with three or four children in it.
- M: Will you comment a little bit on what kind of challenges were presented?
- S: Well, I think in my first year of teaching I taught 28 different things. That was rather unusual in the sense that first if I did get a youngster in there who was taking four or five subjects in his own school, you would just tutor him along. As I said, occasionally you would have two, or three, or four, maybe even five in a group. You tried, in the hours that they allowed you, to keep them abreast of their regular schooling so that if they had the opportunity to go back to school they were right up with their classes. It was quite an experience to work with those youngsters.
- M: Would each one of them require some special things?
- S: Oh yes, that was pretty bitter too because they would come out there and they knew they were going to have to be there for months. That was a type of bone infection that was very, very serious. It's interesting to note

that in about 1939 the sulfa drugs became available. They were so effective that these antibiotics were able to, I don't know whether I should say totally cure, but at least control this bone disease that the Rotary Home for crippled children just ceased to be. There were no more children out there with that disease. It was really a marvelous thing, yes indeed.

I had another experience that I think will interest you. In the spring of 1937, the very beginning of the visiting teachers program in the city of Youngstown, in releasing a man to perform visiting teacher duties, an opening was made out at Lincoln School which I was able to take. It was kind of an interesting affair. I have told many of my classes my experiences there. We had what was called room 20 down in the basement of Lincoln School. There, along with my work out at the Rotary Home for crippled children, I proceeded to do that only in the afternoon. In the mornings, I taught from eight o'clock to twelve o'clock noon at Lincoln School with 28 boys who had all kinds of problems. They ranged in age anywhere from about eight years old to seventeen. They had I.Q.'s that were down in the severely retarded up to the normal range. I can remember one boy who had a 96 or 97 I.Q. They simply presented a variety of learning problems, all kinds, learning problems that were more behavioral than anything else.

We were down in that basement room with grating on the window, which, of course, was on most of the windows in the basement rooms. We had along one wall a bookcase that contained just a great number of textbooks. Most of the time these kids didn't have textbooks. They could use these in the bookcase if they wanted to, but we simply worked without them and we had about two or three manual training desks and a few tools and a little bit of wood, and we had a radio. It was the job of the teacher, my job in the morning, to simply figure out what to do with these kids.

M: That was a real motivational class.

S: Right, it was. It was really a motivational class. Those who are familiar with this at all, Albert Platt was the teacher in the afternoon and he was doing this visiting teacher work in the morning. That's pretty much how the visiting teacher program got started in Youngstown.

M: This day that you described is from one type of terrific challenge to another one in the afternoon.

S: Right. I might say the mornings used to pretty well wear me out.

- M: So you were already for the afternoon? (Laughter)
- S: Yes, that's right. The afternoon was a lot quieter. I continued that for two years and then went into the regular teaching classes at Lincoln School.
- M: Lincoln at this time was through eighth grade?
- S: Yes, it was on through eighth grade at that time. It was the largest elementary school in Youngstown. Mr. Burtsfield was the principal, and the school's population was about 1,350. It was quite a school.
- M: This was 1938. Now, I've been told so much about Mr. Smith, who was from Lincoln early on.
- S: Mr. Smith was principal of Lincoln prior to Mr. Burtsfield's being there. Mr. Smith went to East High School when East High School opened in about 1926 or something like that.
- Lincoln had been, of course, the junior high school at one time, too. We used to call it Lincoln Junior High School. Mr. Cesalts was principal of that for a time.
- M: Well, there's no elementary there?
- S: Good question. The elementary was out in Oak and Shehy and Hazelton and some of the other places.
- M: Mr. Kennedy went to Shehy?
- S: Yes, he did.
- M: The population of Youngstown was booming at this time, wasn't it?
- S: Yes, it was, it was really booming.
- M: I would like you to describe a little something about the kids at Lincoln. Do you remember any of those kids?
- S: Yes, quite a few. I suppose I can remember the names of half a dozen right off, but I really don't like to mention names. These kids, I must say, were hard to handle. They were very, very difficult to handle.
- M: They wouldn't have been there.
- S: No, they wouldn't have been there. I might say that a lot of these kids were brought there from outside of the attendance area of Lincoln School. It wasn't unusual to bring some youngster there from any school on the

north side of Youngstown if he was just kind of a behavior problem. It really is true, and it was kind of a mixed up affair, but somehow we managed. The point I guess I'm trying to make is that I can name names of possibly half a dozen young people in that class who turned out very well. They did very well, some of them I could also say didn't do very well. They're either presently in the Ohio State Penitentiary or at one of the penitentiaries in Ohio. Some of them have entered the world of trade and another one that I can remember very distinctly is now a policeman in Youngstown. They managed to take rather responsible positions in town and become good fathers and heads of families.

M: I have an interview that says that some of the youngsters that weren't interested at all in the academic, that stayed through the eighth grade, but then got into the trades and different things, became, in fact, better off than a good many that went on to college. Did you find this was true too?

S: Well, at that time a lot of young people at seventeen were going into the CCC's, Civilian Conservation Corps. Of course, this was the time of the Depression, and this was the time of the WPA and PWA and the HOLC and all the rest of them.

M: Alphabet soup?

S: Alphabet of designations for government agencies, almost the way we have them now. At any rate, the CCC took a number of our young people at seventeen. I had the highest regard for the CCC Program. They would sometimes leave school with a degree of hostility but frequently they would come back to school and they would be dressed in their uniform and they would be just as sharp and polite and nice as you could imagine. I think the CCC was a program to be admired. Really, I do.

M: We hear that from other places.

S: I'm glad to hear you say that.

M: Could you tell what it was that you, above all, were able to do to get these children interested?

S: I'm glad you asked me that question because I had a series of books that I had bought on my own that were rather simplified versions of classics, and I was able to get to these people better by some of these classics than anything else. Now that didn't mean to say that they could read them, but together we would learn the names of the people in the Victor Hugo's Les Miserables.

Then we could learn the story of Les Miserables, and they would love it, they really would love it because it is a classic and it is a fine story. It's fine in any society. I remember we took another story of Victor Hugo. They loved Notre Dame de Paris, The Hunchback of Notre Dame as it came out in the motion picture shows. They learned about Quasimodo and the different people that were in the story. It was quite possible to teach this type of thing in that kind of form. Then I did something there that I suppose some people would think wasn't too wise at that time, but at least it had been important in my life, the Tom Swift books. I don't know whether you remember those books or not, the Rover boys books. I don't mean to say that we did this all day. Sometime during the day we would read some episodes from the Rover boys or the Tom Swift boys. If the Rover boys were going on a trip, we went on a trip with them. If Tom Swift was going on with his great dirigible and he was making this type of journey, we followed them on the map. We did everything possible to make this story live. I think the degree of success that I had with that type of program was very satisfying, satisfying to the kids. You could tell that the kids were getting it. They did enjoy it and they came, attendance was very good. We managed to get along.

M: This area of town was a challenge in itself, wasn't it?

S: When it was an elementary, from kindergarten through eighth, it had a terrifically large geographical area to pull from. We had some young people who were from the area down near the tracks. We had those on the other side of the tracks, and we had young people who were from the more socially elite areas of the east side. We had kind of a variety of classes. I can remember, Mrs. Mercer, something that I frequently share with my classes here at the university, not when I was down in room 20, which was called a special class, but when I was up in the regular teaching program at Lincoln. I taught history there. It used to be my job each year to designate who would be in the different sections. Now we were homogeneously grouped at Lincoln. Believe it or not, we had thirteen sections of eighth graders, thirteen sections. We made an effort, and that was the job of the committee and myself, to try to determine what young people were to be in each section. We also had eight B's and eight A's just to make the situation more complicated.

M: That made somebody coming in the middle of the year . . .

S: Right. You started the second semester basically as an A and you started the fall semester as a B. At any rate,

if we were working with the eighth grade, we would have eight B1's, eight B2's, eight B3's, and eight B13's. Now the B13's, theoretically, were the slowest pupils. The eight B1's were the most accelerated youngsters. Theoretically, the sixes were supposed to be ahead of the fifths, and the fifths ahead of the fourths, and so forth. That was a time in which we were very conscious of ability grouping. That's not very popular today.

M: I've heard of that.

S: You wouldn't get away with that today.

M: Since you had the job of this grouping, it must not have been just really cut and dry according to . . .

S: No, somehow I had the feeling that we had some success in our grouping.

M: You didn't have it numerically about a test?

S: No, no it wasn't simply by a test. Now, I do think that geography had something to do with it. Some youngsters that came from certain schools, we almost automatically put them in certain classes. The kids that came from Warren Richey, we just about knew where they belonged. Now that's geographical grouping.

M: That wasn't the intent maybe, it's just how it happened?

S: No, it wasn't, but it was just about the way it happened because there seemed to be, along with that, a degree of success. We can find all kinds of errors in that way of doing it, but it worked quite well, really.

M: What was the job of the student teacher? You started to talk about the man that was the first one in the city. You met him occasionally?

S: Oh, yes, we worked together. I didn't become a visiting teacher then until 1947. By that time there were five visiting teachers in the city schools, I happened to be one of them. That same five stayed together for ten years at least. No, I guess maybe longer than that, maybe fifteen would be closer to being correct.

M: Mr. Kennedy was one?

S: Mr. Kennedy was one, Mr. Luxon, Mr. Lambeth, Edith Jordan, and myself. I didn't count them but I usually miss somebody along the way.

M: I don't think you did.

S: We worked together for a long time. I spent nine years in that particular very fascinating area of pupil personnel. That was really a very fine experience. Mr. D. Lehman was our supervisor, and a very warm-hearted splendid person. Our job was really to not only handle the attendance problems, but to handle problems of maladjustment and any kind of a problem that kept a young school child from getting the most from his school experience. It was a very rewarding occupation, really. We didn't handle the attendance problems as they typically were handled by a truant officer of yesteryear. We used to look upon attendance as being something symptomatic of maladjustment. We would try to get to the root of the problem.

We had, of course, excellent relationships with the social agencies in the community, including the Mahoning County Juvenile Court. I have felt that the Judge Beckenbaugh, who was judge of the juvenile court at that time, was a perfectly splendid person and his court officials were very, very human people. I think some very marvelous things were done for kids at that time. That doesn't mean to say that they weren't done for youngsters after that time, but I'm simply talking about those nine years when I was a visiting teacher.

M: Was this a rather new thing in Youngstown?

S: Yes. Basically, the idea kind of came from Columbus, and from Cincinnati, and from some of the other schools in the tri-state area. When I call it a tri-state area I'm talking about Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. There was a group of pupil personnel workers who since the early 30's had been organized as the Tri-state Pupil Personnel Conference as they called it. They met yearly and tried to solve some of these problems with youth. The tendency was to set up a program in the various large cities in the three states somewhat the same.

We were very much the same as Columbus. We were employing teachers, not police officers, but teachers to handle some of these grievous problems that kids had. They didn't go out as police officers because they weren't police officers at all, they were teachers. We insisted that they be good teachers. They had to have at least, and this has been true in Youngstown since the very beginning of this program, five years of good experience in the classroom before they could do this job. Then they had to work for certification till the point came where all of us became certified as visiting teachers.

M: Did that require more than quite a little bit of sociology as you became a caseworker?

S: Oh, yes. We had to get as much of that as we could. We weren't graduate social workers. We want that clearly understood because sometimes graduate social workers were a little bit quick to criticize us. In order to be certified as a visiting teacher then, as it is true now, we all had to have a masters degree, and we had to convince the state of Ohio that we had taken sufficient courses in sociology, psychology, and education. We were a jack-of-all-trades as far as kids with problems were concerned. It was our job to work with the school psychologists and the guidance counselors.

M: There were psychologists then and counselors at that early date?

S: Oh, yes. Psychologists really got started in Youngstown about the early 1940's, about 1940 to 1942. There had been some psychologists in the city schools prior to that time.

M: Kay Haddel must have been one of the first ones?

S: Kay was one of the first ones. I think she came in about 1942. There had been a small psychology program prior to that time.

M: I would like you to describe how you felt about this job when you first got it, your conception of what it was going to be and whether you found out that it was what you thought it would be. Do you remember the first year that you had the job?

S: Oh, yes, very much. Very well, I should say. I had an office in Parmalee School. Parmalee in no more. I had Hayes and Rayen and a half a dozen elementary schools and also, I might say that I had the west side of town. I had Chaney and Stambaugh. I had all of the north side and a great deal of the west side. Of course, you would only take cases in on referral. Each morning in the office of Parmalee School I would wait for calls or seek them out. I would call the different schools or they would call me. Usually they would call me to discuss cases with me and the next day I would call back and give them my report.

You asked me how I felt, I was very thrilled. It was a thrilling experience to start out in your car along about eleven o'clock in the morning and you would be out there the rest of the day just visiting homes, and becoming acquainted with people, and stopping in school and just handling whatever problems you could. You became acquainted with the school nurses and helped them try to stamp out pediculosis. (Laughter) A little bit of everything went on.

- M: What about the people that weren't yielding? What was the experience you remember when things didn't work out and push came to shove or something like that?
- S: Well, of course, we had to use the court. I commented on the fact that we weren't policemen, which is true, but as teachers of the school, as representatives of the Board of Education, we had to take some children and some families into court. We went into court with them not as hostile individuals but for the purpose of trying to settle problems. There were some young people, undoubtedly, that had to be taken out of their homes, some of them ended up in institutions, but very few, I would say.
- M: How did you go about this? Did you take it directly into court?
- S: No, we didn't. The case, in almost all instances, would have progressed through the school, which means a teacher would have worked with the problem, then the assistant principal, the guidance counselor, and the principal would work with the problem. Then with his knowledge and approval the situation would go to Mr. Lehman's office in the Board of Education. He was frequently called head of pupil personnel or called supervisor of child accounting. He would hold a hearing.
- M: There weren't very many guidance counselors though?
- S: Guidance counselors were more than what you think.
- M: But mostly in the high school?
- S: They were in the high schools. Even today there aren't any in the elementary schools, except home school visitors, and they're not really guidance counselors. But there were a number of guidance counselors even in the 40's and early 50's.
- M: The reason I like to hear a lot about this is because I believe these people, in spite of their impact being great, have been invisible.
- S: You mean the guidance counselors?
- M: As well as the visiting teachers. Unless you had some troubles you didn't learn about these teachers.
- S: Well, that's right. You became well-known in your district, usually. Of course, that was a blessing because people got to know you and welcome you. Very seldom would you go into a home where they weren't very

nice to you. I can almost count those cases on one hand. It would happen once in a while.

M: That's the thing I remember being told about it. What would this, in Mr. Lehman's office, be like?

S: It was simply a situation where we sat down with Mr. Lehman and with the parents. In other words, Mr. Lehman would be there, the pupil would be there, the parent would be there, and the visiting teacher would be there. We would simply try to take time, usually we would take in the neighborhood of half an hour to forty-five minutes to kind of sift through a problem. Some could be handled rather quickly and some took a very, very great amount of time.

M: Give us an idea of a typical interview in Mr. Lehman's office.

S: Well, cases were quite typical. You, generally speaking, were working with a youngster, whether it be a boy or girl, that didn't want to go to school. Because he didn't want to go to school, he was frequently a discipline problem in the school. In almost every case, although this wasn't always true, but in most cases, the kid was capable enough of doing school work. He frequently fell into the upper ranges of what we call the dull-normal range. He was capable of doing his work if he wanted to, but he didn't want to. Unfortunately, a great deal of the trouble emanated from the fact that the mother and father had a poor opinion of the school and had a difficult time in persuading the child to do his job, and had little control possibly in the home. Unfortunately, I might say, so frequently we only had the chance to talk to one parent. If you could talk with the mother you were quite fortunate. Very frequently we couldn't somehow find the father. I don't know whether that gives you a sufficient picture, but resistance to the school program was a very typical problem.

M: How would you manage to solve it? The mothers were either mad at the school, or mad at the kid, or both; what did you do?

S: Well, the thing you could do was to say, "Now look, the school law says you have to go to school." With a few cases I suppose that would be possible. You would say this is the way it's going to be or you're going to court. But that wasn't the typical approach we liked to use. We liked to try and find out what the underlying problem was. With some good counseling techniques frequently we were able to open up the situation to the point where we found out some underlying causes that

might be the root of the problem. At least that's what we always like to try to do.

M: Mr. Lehman would have some ideas about what might be done?

S: Yes, he would. Sometimes we would bring in some of the social agencies in Youngstown, different settlement houses. Sometimes it necessitated that we involved the church that the family was going to, of course, with their permission. In 1950 the child guidance centers opened. We were able to use the child guidance center as a resource. They were a tremendous help to the schools.

M: If this was not successful, then describe this court procedure.

S: Well, I guess that I should say there were a lot of young people, if they were sixteen years of age, occasionally we had to encourage them to leave school. If you think I'm talking about pushouts I'm not. But after you had exhausted everything you could do and the kid just looked like he was headed for court difficulty, frequently you would suggest that he would seek employment.

Of course, we were very fortunate to have what we called the Ohio State Employment Service. Today they call it the Ohio Bureau of Employment. We had marvelous working relationships with the Ohio State Employment Service. There were certain people that we could call there and they would be very quick to try and find a job for this kid. Lots of young people succeeded very well in the employment where they didn't succeed in school. If the case finally went to court, hearings were usually held. Official hearings were held on Friday afternoons and Tuesday afternoons for the girls. Fridays would be for boys. The hearing was quite informal, and I would say that it lacked some of the rigidity that is true in even juvenile court hearings today. I know things were said in those court hearings which today would be tossed out as hearsay, but it was a kind of a family court. The decision that was made frequently kind of had a degree of homespunness about the thing, I guess I would say.

M: Was that the quality of the judge?

S: Yes, he was quite homespun himself.

I would like to mention at this time Miss Agnes O'Conner who worked with girls. She was a marvelous person, absolutely marvelous. Graham Lynch worked with the boys. There were just a number of young people who were good conscientious probation officers who would take time and

sit and talk with these kids. I know they did everything they could to try and straighten out the situation. It was a nice thing because the visiting teachers had a chance to sit down privately with the probation officers. We would talk some of these situations out at length before we would ever call the folks in for hearings. We did have a good opportunity for input.

M: Does it still work that way?

S: Yes, it still works that way. The juvenile court, of course, has become more legalistic than it was at that time, which is according to the trend of the times; that is, you become so very sensitive of the child's rights today that he has to, if he wants to, be represented by a counsel. The prosecutor's office is now a part of the juvenile court hearings.

M: That wasn't necessarily true before?

S: No, no it was not true before. It was kind of a family conference before. More responsibility fell upon the shoulders of the judge. He had to make kind of an "off the cuff" decision. He wasn't quite as crowded by legalistic--I can't think of the word I want to use--legalistic means of trying to sometimes evade the problem.

M: You were here for nine years in the visiting teachers program. Afterwards you became the coordinator of the entire agency?

S: No, I went from there to West Elementary and Junior High School as assistant principal. I was the operating principal of the junior high school. I spent three years there, three very good years. I really didn't enjoy that as much as pupil personnel work. I frequently tell my classes I didn't like myself out there. I felt as if I was an old "meanie".

M: Can you account for that?

S: Well, I can, but I don't know whether people would agree with me. I always had the feeling that I wasn't always sure that the teachers liked me. I guess maybe it was a personality quirk with me, but I like to be liked. I sometimes had the feeling that the teachers were critical, and that used to bother me. I think I had more problems there with the teachers than I did with the kids, even though I had a fine faculty. Somehow criticism used to hurt. Three years later, when Mr. Layman retired down at the Board of Education, I felt very happy indeed that I could go down there and head up this phase of pupil personnel and take over the child accounting and later take over the psychologist supervision.

- M: This now involved much more than visiting teachers.
- S: We had the lunch programs and the buses. We had many administrative details. Of course, the child census, all the working permit situations, all the custody matters, all the hearings, the same kind of hearings that Mr. Laymen had had, we had all of those. It was just a variety of things that in many smaller school systems was carried on by the superintendent, but in the large school systems such as Youngstown those responsibilities were given to the supervisor of child accounting and pupil personnel. There was plenty to do in that office.
- M: The custody is something that we haven't mentioned at all in either of the interviews about this section of the educational responsibility in Youngstown; how is that carried out?
- S: Well, that situation really has changed since the time I was in it. We used to be very sensitive in this school district that children lived with their parents. If they didn't live with their parents then the party with whom they did live would have custody of them. Sometimes the juvenile court would okay the child living with the grandparent in some other section of town, but if the child came in from out-of-town and was coming into live with the relative or friend, we insisted that the court from which the child came actually gave custody to these people so that we would always know who was legally responsible for that child. It was a very time-consuming occupation, particularly at the beginning of the year. The fact is the first two, three, or four days of the school year a line would stand outside of the office with grandparents, or friends of children.

Sometimes the people would come in and we would say, "What is your name little boy," or "Who is the little boy?" The women would say, "What is your name boy?" She wouldn't even really know who she had. She had been down south visiting and she brought this youngster up north and she wanted to put him in school and she didn't even know his name. Now that was a little bit unusual, but I don't mean to say that it didn't happen. It happened a good number of times. Quite often we would have to insist that they go home and attend school where they could live with their parents, someone who was responsible for them.

I would say that in the course of time those conditions changed. They changed for the simple reason that there commenced to be such a terrific movement of people. The large cities in the state of Ohio got to the point where

they simply couldn't handle those custodies and others. They would finally simply say we'll take an affidavit. You just sign here and say that you will be responsible for this child while he is in your home. You would leave it go at that.

I might say that that never happened while I was down there. I was down there as the supervisor of this program with the Board of Education for nine years, up until 1968. I never had to break down and accept an affidavit. Shortly after I left there they had to because the problem became too great. It wasn't just Youngstown that had to give in, it was some of the other schools too.

- M: This change, I suppose, is not for the better. You have more children in school that you just really can't reach their home in any kind of way.
- S: Well, they would start sashaying back and forth. When the problems would become great then they would simply say, "I'm going back home." They would go back home and stay home for a little while, and then they would get in trouble down there and they would come back here. You see, that really isn't the way for children to grow up.
- M: They would just miss any kind of difficulty in either place?
- S: Oh, yes, that's right.
- M: What was the relationship between the parochial schools; did they have some kind of program similar to this? As I recall, a lot of the parochial school kids would come into the public schools during the middle of the year.
- S: We had marvelous relationships with the parochial schools. Now lots of people don't realize this, but the public board of education in Dayton, Canton, or Cleveland, or any other place handles the census records of the parochial schools. We in Youngstown handled all their census records.
- M: I didn't realize that.
- S: Yes, we keep all their census records. We were aware of what youngsters were in their schools and what kids weren't in their schools. We would, however, receive information from them only twice a year. At the very beginning of the year they would give us reports on the children that they had with them, and at the end they would give us a report of the children that were still with them. Our records, relative to parochial schools, were not quite as good as they were in the public schools. We wouldn't really get involved with the custody matters

unless they specifically brought it to our attention. And they did bring it to our attention in a number of time, along with other problems that they had. They always felt free to call us if they needed us.

M: This is an area that I didn't realize anything about.

S: It's good that you're hearing it today, Mrs. Mercer. Each visiting teacher in the city of Youngstown would have certain parochial schools assigned to them. Of course, the parochial schools would know who these people were. If they had problems they simply would get in touch with the visiting teachers or they would get in touch with my office.

M: I should have realized that.

S: A fascinating thing in this office was to try and decide which children went to which school. That was very, very difficult. It was our job to set up the attendance area. Of course, during the nine years I was down there the population was growing, the school population was growing very rapidly. Each year I was there the population was greater than it was the year before, until it peaked in 1968 with 28,500. These are just for public schools. Now, in 1975, we're down to about 21,000. Not talking about the parochial schools, but in the public schools we had to find seats in our classrooms for these kids. We would have to change boundary lines and we would have to decide if this school had a little room, or if this other school didn't have enough room. We would have to shift around. Sometimes we would have to bus and sometimes we wouldn't have to bus. This wasn't a particularly popular occupation. You could get yourself into awful kinds of jams. I can remember some very interesting, very touchy situations that did arise, but that was part of the game.

Along with that was a decision of who was eligible to ride the buses. That was a problem.

M: I always thought that would be based on some kind of statement . . .

S: Well, it was based on statement and laws and also local ruling. See, the local board ruling could be a little bit more lenient than the state law. Now I'm referring to distance to school, children had to walk or they would be transported. Occasionally something would happen like this, the city would come along, almost without saying a word they would build sidewalks in a certain place and then because the sidewalks were there we weren't obligated to bus their youngsters. That would

really be a problem.

M: People wanted the best of both sides?

S: They wanted the sidewalks and they wanted the buses, and they weren't going to let their kids walk to school. Sometimes we would have parents walking along with them carrying placards indicating how unfair we were to their children, occasionally not recognizing the very street they were walking on was a rather dangerous street. They could have walked on the next street on a perfectly good sidewalk. It made a better picture in the newspaper if they were walking down a rather dangerous street with their children. It wasn't an occupation that didn't have its headaches or its rather humerous moments.

M: I suppose there were occasions where an immense problem would yield rather quickly.

S: Every one of the nine years that I was there, the population was growing so much in one district, one south-side district, that during the summertime we had to change the boundaries. You almost felt apologetic to these people, to say "Now, we're going to have to change this again, I'm sorry." Most of the time, I must say, these changes would take place with very, very little difficulty. Occasionally, we would have difficulty.

M: Would that affect Monroe?

S: Yes, Monroe is the one I'm talking about, particularly Monroe because that's where the population was growing, partly because of the arterial highway that they put in through the Williamson and the Grant School District. That was a problem.

We had a fascinating experience one time... In 1966 we decided to sell Elm School to Youngstown State University. It ended up we had 601 kids in this building, in the Elm building, that we had to get rid of. We just couldn't open the door and let the wind blow them away. We had to find places for these kids to go. That was a kind of interesting experience. You would sit and study that out for a long, long, long time. Of course, during this time, between 1959 and 1968, when the population ascendancy was there, we improved and increased the size of a good number of our buildings: McKinley, Jefferson, Harrison, John White, and Warren Richey. I certainly haven't picked them all: Harding, Jackson; we simply kept adding on.

M: As you look back on this period of service with Youngstown, do you have any ideas or thoughts about what you would have liked to see happen that maybe didn't happen, things

that you think might have helped?

S: That's an interesting question. I always wished that we could have had an opportunity school. Today we call that kind of an alternative type of program where young people who simply seem to express no ambition or desire to attend the regular program find some kind of program that is acceptable to them. They would frequently come into my office in March and would say I want to go back to school. When were you in school last? I was in school but left after Christmas vacation. Have you been working or doing something since then? Yes, but now I lost my job and I want to go back to school. When you would make inquiries at the school you would find out that this kid had been a very difficult child. The school wasn't too anxious to take him back, to be very honest with you. In all rights he had the legal right to go back to school, but to push the child on the school at that time usually resulted in utter failure. He wasn't well-accepted. So many times I wished that we had had a kind of open school where we could have accepted him. These types of things are very popular today where he could come in at any time or leave at any time. He's made to feel at home if he comes back.

M: He won't find himself way behind everyone else?

S: No, that's another very good thing. They're working now on what they call competency based education. He can go in and pick up his task. He knows what his task is, so he can pick up this task and move along with it.

M: At the place he can achieve?

S: Right. I think this has been a very wholesome thing that has entered. We didn't have too much of that. We would have to sometimes try a little doubletalk and refer him to wait till the next semester. That wasn't too kind and that wasn't good.

M: Things could happen, things could go very badly in that interval?

S: He could be down in the industrial school or in the penitentiary in the meantime.

M: Now they do have these sort of things?

S: I must say, in all honesty, not so much in this community but there are cases like this, there are schools like this throughout the country. These opportunity schools are becoming more and more popular.

M: Is there something else you would like to talk about,

just in general before we close?

S: Well, I would like to thank you, Mrs. Mercer, for giving me this opportunity to share these thoughts with whoever may be listening to this interview. I would like to recommend to these people, if they're looking for an interesting life, to get into the field of pupil personnel. I don't think there's anything else.

END OF INTERVIEW