

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jackson Milton School Project

High School Experiences

O. H. 681

JOAN ACRI

Interviewed

by

John Gulgas

on

April 17, 1985

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jackson Milton School Project

INTERVIEWEE: JOAN ACRI

INTERVIEWER: John Gulgas

SUBJECT: school days, activities, teachers

DATE: April 17, 1985

G: This is an interview with Joan Acri for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Jackson Milton High School in the 1950's, by John Gulgas on April 17, 1985, at 8:00.

What were some of your favorite subjects at Jackson Milton High School?

A: Shorthand, typing, journalism. I liked English, but it wasn't one of my favorite subjects.

G: What about teachers, who are the ones that are most memorable?

A: I think probably the ones that I remember as favorites were Mrs. Seisholts, who was our seventh grade homeroom teacher, and we also had her in high school. Also there was Miss Jochman who was my office practice teacher, shorthand, typing.

G: Why do they stand out? What makes them special?

A: I guess maybe it was just their method of teaching. They enjoyed their students; they enjoyed what they were teaching. They had very good discipline in their classes.

G: What were some of the extracurricular activities that you were involved in at school?

A: Mostly extracurricular would have been the Glee Club, Band, plays, operettas, that sort of thing.

G: I noticed you were in the Commentator, what was that?

- A: The Commentator was the school newspaper. The year that I was senior I was coeditor of the Commentator. There was the other editor and myself; she was a junior at that time. We went to Chicago for a journalism meeting. I don't remember the name of the hotel. We went with our teacher and his wife. We had a big snowstorm back here; that would have been 1950. We got stranded in Chicago because we couldn't get back home. That was quite an experience. We were gone for almost a week; we were supposed to be gone for just the weekend.
- G: I was kind of curious about the social functions. Were there many school dances?
- A: We had approximately, I would say, maybe four dances a year. They were never well-attended. The biggest dance when we were in school was the May Dance. We had our May crowning and that was the big event of the year. That was the only one that we did get very good attendance. We tried having other dances and we just never had good response at them.
- G: Was this like a record hop?
- A: Yes. At that time there were a small group of boys and girls who formed a little band. They would play for the dances.
- G: If we can talk about a typical day, when you entered the building what was one of the most striking things that you saw when you first went in? Did you always use the same exit?
- A: Yes, you always used the same exit and the same entrance. Two years before we graduated we only had the one portion of the school. The new section at that time wasn't on the school. I think our senior year was the first year that we had part of a new section. They gymnasium that is there now was not there when we went to school. What they use for the cafeteria now was our gymnasium; that is where the plays and everything were. The door that faces the parking lot was our main entrance that we used. There was always a teacher or Mr. Kepner, who was the superintendent, there to greet you as you came in through the doors. There was always somebody there. The school was much cleaner than it is kept now. Everybody went to their homerooms respectively. We had roll call. There was a Bible reading over the PA system, which they are no longer allowed to do. There was no objection at that time to that. There was never any problem with that. That started your day. I got to work in the office a lot so I went around to rooms and took the attendance and got the list of who wasn't there and reported

back to the office. We had fifty minute classes. Our periods weren't broken down like they are now; the kids have more periods in a day now even though they don't go to school any longer than we did.

G: How would you describe the discipline? Would you say it was pretty rigid?

A: I wouldn't say it was rigid, but we had good discipline. You always had students who were a problem, which you are always going to have. I don't want to say the students were a lot different then than they are now, but I don't know how else to say it; they are. You had respect for your teachers and you obeyed your teachers. Discipline was not a big problem.

G: What about transportation, were a lot of the students bused?

A: Practically everybody. Unless you lived right in the village of North Jackson and you walked, practically everybody rode the bus. There were very few people who drove to school. No one had a car. There was one car in the family and dad had that to go to work.

G: Was there a dress code?

A: So to speak there was a dress code, because you were not permitted to wear slacks to school. There was maybe one day out of the year that was set aside and you were allowed to wear slacks to school that day.

G: How about hairdos, do those come back to mind? Are there any particular fads that were maybe unusual?

A: I guess it was a fad when everybody wore saddle shoes. You polished those shoes every night so they were clean the next day. Everybody wore bobby socks. Very rarely did you wear hose to school. It was very exceptional if you did wear hose. Girls did not wear heels in those days like they do now. We were just little country kids with our plaid skirts and our white blouses. It was very, very simple.

G: What was lunch time like?

A: Lunch time was nice. There was no rowdiness. You ate your lunch in the cafeteria, which at that time was very small. Our cafeteria was located where one of the wood shops is located now. Unless you went home to lunch, which the kids in the village could go home for lunch if they wanted to, you either carried your lunch or you bought it. There was no teachers' lounge; teachers ate with their students or they had a table set off in the corner where the faculty could sit.

G: Were there any places where you could walk to lunch like we have today?

A: There was an Isaly's; there was a place called McGinney Foulks that you could walk to and get milkshakes. Those are the only two things in the village that you could walk to and eat.

G: Did they have any restrictions about students going out at lunch time?

A: You were not really permitted to do that. If you went out for lunch it was to go home for lunch. Kids didn't have money then like they do now either. You didn't spend your money on going out to lunch; you either carried your lunch or you ate in the cafeteria. In order to make money for the senior class we used to sell potato chips, candy bars at lunch time. I guess they are not permitted to do that now. That was one way that we earned our money. The junior class, I believe it was, sold klondikes. They were five cents apiece I think. You did this at lunch time.

G: Were there any after-school or weekend hangouts that were in the area that a lot of kids went to?

A: The only place I can think of, and it wasn't a weekend or after-school hangout, but if you had a date you had to go to Youngstown or Austintown. There was nothing in North Jackson apparently unless it was a dance at the school. There was a place in Austintown on the corner of Raccoon Road and Mahoning Avenue. There used to be a restaurant there, and that is where you went. You would see all the kids from North Jackson in there.

G: What would that look like?

A: There were booths down the side. The kitchen was in the back. It was nothing spectacular. There were jukeboxes on the wall that you put money in them and played music. The name of it is Durell's.

G: Were there any other places?

A: Just McGinny Foulks. They tore that down. I am not sure it was there our senior year. Those were the only two places in town. There was the roller skating rink at the lake where a lot of us used to go. The building is still there. A church owns it now.

G: What was that like on the inside?

A: It was nothing fancy, but it was well-kept. They kept it clean; it had a nice floor. There were benches around the

edges and there was a place where the organ was. We had an organist that played music.

G: As you look back, what do you think could have perhaps been done to make the high school experience better?

A: If we could have had more advanced methods of doing things it might have been better. I don't know whether it would have been better or not. I thoroughly enjoyed my high school years. I still use today what I used when I went to school. I don't know whether I can say that it could have been improved for me or not.

G: If you could pick out a single, most memorable event what would you pick?

A: I think one of the nicest things I remember was that we enjoyed the plays we put on; we enjoyed the musicals that we did; we enjoyed the minstrels. We used to have a music concert every year that was held at Mount Union, Alliance. The band members used to get together too.

G: Was that a competition?

A: It wasn't really competition; it was just that all the schools in the area went there and then at night there was one, big concert with the bands and glee clubs. You spent all day Saturday over there. That was a good experience. You met kids from other schools; you met other music teachers. It was really something. You would go there and work all day, each of you. The sopranos were in one group, the altos in another group, the band someplace else. You would come together at night and put on this great concert. That was really nice.

G: What about some of the practical jokes, can you remember them?

A: There weren't any played on me that I can recall. There were practical jokes that were played. They used to do something with a chair to one of the teachers, but I can't think of what it was. Our rooms had the pupils' seats, the teacher's chair, and then a blackboard. There was a wall and it was open on the top; there was like a cloak room in the back. They would put the teacher's chair on top of that wall. I know there were other things done too. We had some good times in school and nobody ever got hurt.

G: Did they have any type of hazing by incoming freshman?

A: No, none of that. We were a small school. I think maybe some of your bigger schools had that. We didn't have sororities or anything like that.

G: Did they have any service organizations?

A: I don't think there was anything even outside of school. At one time there was a rifle club that was after school. I was never in it, but I had a couple of girlfriends who were in it. You went to school at night for that. Outside of that I can't think of anything that anybody would have been involved in.

G: Senior farewell activities, what were they like?

A: We didn't really make too big a deal of that. I can remember what I thoroughly enjoyed, and I don't think they do it anymore, the seniors took over and ran the school one day. One of the seniors was superintendent. I happened to be secretary that day. Other students were other teachers, things like that. I can remember enjoying that very much. We had a senior picnic at the school, but outside of that there wasn't a really big thing made out of that.

G: When that happened did they follow the superintendent around all day?

A: It was an all-day thing. If you were superintendent you were it for all day. If decisions came up you were supposed to make the decisions. It was a fun time.

G: What did the newspaper used to cost?

A: I think it was ten cents a copy. The kids who were involved in the journalism class were mostly involved in the newspaper.

G: Did they do stories outside of the school, or was it just school news?

A: No. Each class had their own news.

G: There were seven through twelve grades in the high school?

A: We were all in one building. One through twelve was all in one building.

G: Was there one building principal?

A: You didn't have a principal; you had a superintendent and that was N. D. Kepner, and he was it. When a teacher was off, he filled in. If a school bus driver couldn't make it, he drove the bus. When the pump broke down, he helped fix the pump.

G: They got their money's worth out of the superintendent.

- A: Yes, they did. He was a fantastic person.
- G: How long was he superintendent?
- A: I think Mr. Kepner came there when we were in the third grade. He was there until we graduated, and I think that was his last year. He lived in the community.
- G: Were there board meetings once a month?
- A: I am not sure.
- G: The other thing I notice from looking at the yearbook is that you had class advisors. Was that the same function as today? Did they supervise activities?
- A: Yes. Our senior homeroom and our senior advisor was Mrs. Lauban; she was also our homeroom advisor. You checked into the room first thing every day and you went back to that room.
- G: She would have the whole senior class in one homeroom?
- A: Right. We only graduated thirty-one.
- G: How many teachers did you have throughout the day? Did any double up and teach more than one subject?
- A: They did. I think probably my senior year I had a different teacher for each subject. There were teachers who taught more than one thing though. Mrs. Seisholts taught government, but she also taught seventh grade English. Mrs. Lauban taught twelfth grade English. Mrs. Seisholts also taught journalism. Miss Jochman was shorthand and typing. We had her for accounting one year also. There was a chance that you could have one teacher for two subjects. You didn't have the staff then that you do now.
- G: Were there any problems because there were elementary students and secondary students?
- A: I don't remember that we had any big problems. I often hear today that they should put seventh and eighth graders out in a field someplace by themselves. We didn't have that problem.
- G: Let's go back to lunch time. Did the whole school eat lunch at one time?
- A: No, you had to split it up because we didn't have the room. First through six grades had their lunch period and then seventh through twelfth had their lunch period. You have to remember too that we didn't have the size classes then.



G: What were the school lunches like?

A: I was a packer. I ate occasionally. We had things like hot dogs and baked beans. They used to fix gravy with hamburger in it that they served with potatoes. You had vegetable soup. Vegetable soup and chili was always one of my favorites in school; that was usually pretty good.

G: My last question deals with current events. When you were in high school you had some things happening in the world; one of them was the Truman-Dewey election. I was wondering if that kind of struck a chord with you? Do you remember that?

A: Current events wasn't one of my better fortés. We did have current events though; that was discussed.

G: About the same time was the steel strike.

A: Yes, that came after.

G: The Korean War too.

A: Yes, Jack [husband] was in that. We had boys from our class who went into the service right after we got out of school.

G: What were your feelings about that period?

A: I was seventeen years old when I graduated, so that didn't affect me too much. Had I been personally involved, had a brother in it, then I would have been. It was far away.

Our senior class was one of the last graduating classes to make a trip to Washington D.C. following graduation. We traveled by Greyhound bus which was available at all times to us while in Washington D.C.--transported our group wherever we wanted to go. It was a great trip.

G: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW