

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Education in Youngstown Project

Teaching Experience

O. H. 555

JOSEPHINE PIERSON

Interviewed

by

Jeanne Ontko

on

May 18, 1981

JOSEPHINE PIERSON

Josephine Pierson was born in Meadville, Pennsylvania, on April 27, 1906, the daughter of John and Jennie Johnson Pierson. After graduating from Meadville High School, Miss Pierson received an AB from Allegheny College in 1927. After further education at the University of Rochester and the University of Pittsburgh, she received a M.A. in 1940. In 1927 Miss Pierson began her teaching career at Tod Elementary School and from 1928 until 1966, she taught English and history at Wilson High School. After retiring from teaching in 1966, Miss Pierson worked as a tour guide at the Arms Museum. A member of Trinity United Methodist Church, Miss Pierson also belongs to the Alpha Chi Omega Society, Penhellenic, Ohio Retired Teachers' Association, Northeastern Ohio Teachers Association, Mahoning Valley Retired Teachers, the National Education Association and the Mahoning Valley Historical Society. She was also a member of Delta Kappa Gamma. Miss Pierson enjoys reading, gardening and bridge playing.

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPHINE PIERSON

INTERVIEWER: Jeanne Ontko

SUBJECT: Training, Extracurricular activities, PTA,
Conventions, Wages, World War II, Co-teachers

DATE: May 18, 1981

O: This is an interview with Miss Josephine Pierson for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Education in Youngstown, by Jeanne Ontko, at 245 Berkshire Drive, Youngstown, Ohio, on May 18, 1981, at 1:30 p.m.

Could you give me a little biography about yourself, where you were educated, born, your family background?

P: I was born in Meadville, Pennsylvania. It was a college town with Allegheny College. There was also another college in Meadville at that time. It was a seminary for the Unitarian church. There was only one high school in our town, Meadville High School. Practically everybody in the high school took the preparatory course. I thought you would probably ask why I went into teaching.

O: I'm going to. That is one of my questions.

P: I will tell you why. There was nothing much else for girls to do in those days, so practically everybody went to college. You went to college or you became a nurse. Well, I didn't want to be a nurse. Most all of my friends and the people with whom I grew up went to Allegheny and prepared for teaching.

O: How long did it take to go through college?

P: Four years. In high school you had a four-year course. We took the requirements. You had to have so many years of Latin, so many years of English, so many years of history, so many years of math and so forth to be in the college preparatory course.

O: Was it a big college that you went to?

P: No, I suppose you would call it a small college today. It was probably between 500 and 800, something like that. So it is really a small college. It was a very old college. It was established in 1815. It was sort of a family tradition for us. There have been eighteen people from our family who have gone there. My grandnephew is there now. He is the last one so far.

O: Your teachers got to know you I take it.

P: Yes, but, of course, again when my brothers were there-- my two brothers were older, and they were there first-- we knew all the college professors at that time. We went to the Methodist church there which was the college church, so many of the people in the church were the college professors. We grew up with the kids, the professors' children and so forth. It was just that kind of a town. It was a small college town and a very old town.

O: You say that your sisters became teachers also.

P: Yes, my sisters. My two brothers graduated from Allegheny too, in civil engineering. The sister with whom I live went to Allegheny for one year. Then we had cousins and nephews and grandnephews and so forth who attended.

O: Were your parents college educated?

P: No, neither one of them were college educated although many people used to ask mother if she taught, but she never did. Anyway, no, neither one of them. My father worked for the Erie Railroad. Mother was just a housewife as most women were, but she was always very active in all the church and school organizations and that sort of thing.

O: On your biography sheet you say that you also went to the University of Rochester and the University of Pittsburgh. Why did you go? Rochester is in New York State?

P: Yes. My older brother became an architectural engineer. He worked for a company in Rochester that was called Neisner Brothers. His first wife died. He had had his eye on a big, old farm outside of Rochester in a place called Pittsford, New York. After his wife died, he kept looking at that farm; he finally bought it and moved out there. We used to spend all of our summers with him before he remarried, so that was how we became interested in Rochester. Of course, we visited him in Rochester before that time. One summer I did some of my master's work at the University of Rochester, New York.

O: This is a master's in education, or what would it be in?

P: Yes, I guess I did put down M.A., but it would be in education. In addition, the University of Pittsburgh also sent professors to Youngstown during the week, and many teachers would take courses here in the evening-- which I did. Then I had to have a residency at Pittsburgh, so I went down there in the summer.

O: What do you mean they would send them up here? Was it to Youngstown?

P: Yes.

O: Youngstown College?

P: No, we met, as I remember, in the Board of Education building. Our classes were scheduled there. The professors from Pittsburgh would come here two or three nights a week. Over a period of years you could do that. You just can't do that in a couple of years.

O: When you got out of college you really didn't have to go straight ahead for a master's.

P: No.

O: Why do you think that was that way?

P: I think it was a financial thing as much as anything. I also think that it was not a requirement in the education field. I don't think it was a requirement for business either.

O: When you were being educated to be a teacher, what were you concentrating on? What did you want to teach?

P: English and French. I had as many hours in English as I had in French, so I could teach either one.

O: In your major?

P: In my major. That was the way I wanted it. Then I had a minor in history, so I could teach any of those. When I first started to teach, I taught history. I taught that for years. I really liked that.

O: What kind of history?

P: American and World.

O: You taught that in . . .

P: In high school.

O: I didn't know that. I thought you were purely in the English field.

P: No.

O: Did you teach English later?

P: Yes. Do you want to know how I happened to get into that?

O: Yes, I'm curious.

P: Well, I was teaching history and liked it very much, but as I recall it was the time when we were getting Wilson accredited with the state. The state came in and found out what credentials all the teachers had. Well, I had only a minor in history, but I had a major in English and a major in French. One of the men who was teaching English had only a minor in English, and he was teaching English. It was right in the middle of a grading period when we switched. I became an English teacher and he took over history because he had a major in history. It was crazy, but that was the way it happened.

O: Do you remember how many hours you had to take to get a major?

P: I would say offhand in the thirties some place.

At one time Mr. Slavin taught at Wilson too.* At one time we had a program in which American History and American English were correlated. The subject matter of English, very often through the books written, portray the history part. He was teaching history, and I was teaching English. There was a third teacher but I can't remember who it was.

O: What did you do? Do you remember?

P: We took field trips, wrote letters of thanks, wrote for permission, et cetera. Anyway, I would try to correlate the history with the English.

O: I will have to talk to Dr. Slavin.

P: That was a long time ago. Of course, he always did teach history.

O: Right now he is concentrating on French history. Then he teaches more of the European history too in the history department.

*He was just Mr. Slavin at that time.

Why did you come to Youngstown?

P: One of my brothers lived in Youngstown. One of my sisters was teaching at South High School. I applied at various places, one of which was Youngstown. When I came here to apply, Dr. Richardson was superintendent of the schools. He interviewed me and accepted me. I can't remember why, but I didn't start the very first month of school. I started in October. I had my first year in an elementary school. I taught departmental work in an elementary school.

O: But you were trained for secondary, is that right?

P: I was trained for secondary, but there was no opening at that time in secondary. Dr. Richardson said they were going to open a new school, Wilson, the next year, so they hired me to teach this first year in the elementary school. I taught in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, math. I had enough math to teach that although it was not on my certificate. I can't think what else, but there were others.

O: Did you enjoy it?

P: Yes, I really did.

O: So you were at Wilson right from its beginning.

P: Yes, right in the very first years.

O: Do you remember any of the problems that may have happened?

P: The school wasn't even finished when we went in; there were no seats in the auditorium. I guess it started as a junior high.

O: This would be in . . .

P: 1928. It started out as a junior high. The workmen were still there. There was a lot of noise and confusion, of course. There were no seats in the auditorium as I have already said. In addition to that there were some elementary grades in Wilson. I can remember too much about the others, but I know that there were a number of elementary grades there for a while. That was just one year. The next year it became officially a junior high. Then as the community grew it became a senior high and the school had to be enlarged.

O: Well the original building then is on Indianola. Is that where it is?

P: Yes, that school where it is now is the original building.

- O: What grade schools would be around that area?
- P: Taft was there. Bennett was a straight grade school as was Adams.
- O: When you first started at Wilson, what classes would you teach and what years?
- P: I taught in seventh, eighth, and ninth. I taught history
- O: How long was it then before you switched to English?
- P: Our first graduating class at Wilson was 1939. So it must have been around 1936 or something like that. I was teaching history in senior high school. In tenth grade I had World History. So that must have been about 1937, so I would say it was probably back about 1936 when I switched.
- O: Do you remember some of the ways you taught history? How would you make history interesting for the students? Do you remember?
- P: They always said it was interesting, but I don't remember how I taught it. I know I worked very hard at it because most of my training had been in English. The American History and the United States History I taught in junior high. Then I taught World History in senior high. I really worked at that to make it interesting. They were sophomores in high school. I still know a lot of those people today, but they just loved it, and I did too. I suppose we were both kind of learning together.
- O: Was it strictly books and lectures that you would do?
- P: Yes, books and lectures and so forth.
- O: How about field trips? Before you mentioned field trips.
- P: I didn't have field trips when I first started. Later on when I went into senior high school and when I was teaching English, we did have them. I think we did have some field trips when I was teaching junior high too. I remember one group. There were three busloads of us; we went to Cleveland and spent the whole day. We went through parks; we went through ships; we went to the airport. People got sick. It was wild, but we did have field trips.
- O: Did the kids have to pay for those field trips? Do you remember? Can you recall?
- P: I don't believe they did. We went by bus, and the buses were furnished, I imagine. As far as the food was concerned, maybe they carried their lunches. I can't remember that.

- O: In Youngstown did you ever make any field trips in this area? Did you go to Butler?
- P: Yes, we went there. We used to take them to a concert in the spring too.
- O: Was that concert at Stambaugh?
- P: Yes. I just can't remember about the other field trips. That one stands out in my mind because it was such a long day. I remember we had kids getting sick all over the place and all kinds of problems.
- O: When you were teaching English, what would be some of the books or the methods that you used to teach English? Was it purely grammar? Did you teach literature?
- P: We had certain units. I was teaching American Literature. You were supposed to--by the state--spend so much time on grammar. I used to vary it. I would have a unit on poetry, a unit on essays, then a unit on grammar.
- O: Do you remember any particular home or story that your students were particularly interested in or any plays that they may have put on?
- P: We never put on any plays. That was from the drama department. That was entirely separate. As far as the English classes were concerned we never did that. That was all in the drama department. I know a lot of the students said that they had never liked poetry before, but after being in my class they just loved poetry. Even the boys would say that!
- O: Was there any particular kind that they liked?
- P: I can't remember. Of course, some of them liked different things. The boys would like different things than the girls.
- O: How big would your classes be?
- P: They varied, but most always they were in the thirties.
- O: That would be big.
- P: They were big.
- O: How big would Wilson be?
- P: That is hard to remember back that far. I don't know whether there are 1,200 there now or not, but I know it has grown since. I really can't tell you that. They used to make poetry booklets, and they really would love those. They would choose the poems that they liked best

and they would illustrate them by putting pictures to them. They liked to do that.

O: That was one of your assignments then that you gave them.

P: Well, they could do these things for extra credit. They used to like this.

O: Did you give a lot of homework?

P: Yes, I really did.

O: Did you think that homework was important?

P: I did.

O: Why?

P: I just felt that. Of course, it was the thing to do. Everybody had homework in those days. That was part of it. I always felt that it was stimulating their minds.

O: Did the teachers have to do anything besides teaching?

P: We did everything. We always had to take extra classes during the day if somebody was feeling ill or had to go home. If the teacher would call in the morning and couldn't get a substitute, then we would step in and take the classes. We never got any extra pay for it.

O: Really?

P: No, you never even thought of it. I sponsored a girls' organization. I don't remember what it was.

O: What did they do?

P: It was sort of a service group. We would have to go to meetings at the YWCA. It was associated with the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association). In addition to the training sessions, we would take the kids to the games. I always went to all of the games.

O: Was football important to Wilson?

P: Yes, very important. Before Mooney was built we used to have very good football and basketball teams. We had championship teams. Then after Mooney was built that sort of divided the area. Many of the youngsters went to the parochial school.

O: Was it an ethnic neighborhood?

P: Yes.

O: What kind?

P: Slavish, Slovaks, Ukranian, and some Italian.

O: What effect do you think it had on the school having all these different kind of ethnic groups together? Was there any?

P: There was no rivalry. Is that what you mean?

O: Yes. Was there anything like that?

P: No, I wasn't conscious of it.

O: Did it make for a closer community or school?

P: We were always very close to our students; I will say this.

O: Really?

P: Yes, there was really very close relationships between students and faculty. It was quite noticeable. Even when people would come in--like state inspectors or people would visit us from other schools--they would all remark about the closeness there was between faculty and students.

O: Why do you think?

P: I don't know. It was sort of like a family, a big family. Whether Mr. Glasgow, who was our principal for so many years, had something to do with that or whether we all just felt that closeness . . . It was a beginning school and we all started out together. In our first years many of the youngsters had difficulty with the English language. Judge Leskovansky had sort of a language problem when he was at Wilson. So many of our youngsters would speak the foreign language at home and then English at school, but there were no special classes or special things for them. It was difficult.

O: You had to teach English then, right?

P: Yes, but they all came through and learned it. Every so often when they got away from school they would slip into the "ain't" and that sort of thing. They knew what was right in school and they were pretty careful about it. What I think is remarkable is that they have all risen about it and have really become good English speaking Americans! We never had as you now have dual language in the schools. I think it is wonderful to teach your ethnic background, but I think that since you are in this country that you should learn the language of the country first. That is my feeling.

O: Do you recall how much money you made as a teacher?

P: My first salary . . . I have a good story about that. This is really funny. One time we were coming home from church. The church was downtown. We swung around and came back on Boardman Street. The police station was there. There were a couple of boys that we had had in school who were sitting out there in front of the police station. We waved to them. We always had a nice relationship with the kids. When I got home, the telephone rang. It was one of those boys to whom I waved down there. He said, "We were just talking about you. You must really have it made." He was speaking about teaching salarywise. I said, "You know, of course, that the profession is open to anybody who wants to go into it. You could be in there if you wanted to. He thought we were getting a great big salary which at that time was about \$3,000. I don't remember that long ago. Anyway, I said, "You must remember that I started at \$1,350". I could just see him turning to the people there saying, "My God, she started at \$1,350!" Then came the Depression, and they took away some of that \$1,350. We didn't get it for a while.

O: How did the Depression affect you then?

P: The banks closed. Of course, we didn't get money for a while. I think we got it in our last pay. I can't remember all of that. I know that the banks did close. Whatever money we had, we had to keep in the house.

O: Were you still getting your checks from the school?

P: We must have gotten our checks. I can't really remember that. I know that we didn't get the \$1,350. We had to take a cut.

O: This would be \$1,350 for the . . .

P: For the year.

O: How did the Depression affect the students in the school? Did you talk about it in class, or was it just part of the times?

P: I can't remember in my classes that we talked too much about it. I rather imagine the history classes covered all of that, and probably the social sciences talked about it more. I can't remember too much about talking about it. I know that we did a lot for families who didn't have very much.

O: What did you do?

- P: The teachers would offer to bring in things and contribute clothing and maybe food and that sort of thing.
- O: You would give it to the students then?
- P: No, we would take it to the office, and they would in turn give it to the needy.
- O: I didn't know that they did things like that. That is good.
- P: Of course, during those years when rationing was in, we always used to have to ration people. We worked on signing people up and passing out ration cards and that sort of thing.
- O: Do you mean the people would come to the high school to do that work?
- P: Yes, to the high school.
- O: Did the Depression affect the budget at Wilson at all?
- P: In the entire school system. As I said, as far as the salaries were concerned, they went down.
- O: Did they have to cut the staff?
- P: Of course, the staffs never were large at any time. We had one secretary in the building at that time. We had a dean of boys and a dean of girls, but that was it.
- O: And the principal then and the assistant principal?
- P: Oh, the principal, sure.
- O: How about discipline problems? How would you handle it, and how would the whole school handle it?
- P: You sort of established it early. I never allowed them to chew gum. I remember that was one thing. Immediately when anybody came to the door, they just deposited their gum right in the wastebasket there. I stood right in the doorway. That was one thing. I just never really had many discipline problems. They knew what you stood for. I almost always settled my problems myself. I never sent too many people to the office. That was what we used to do. We used to send them to the dean's office, but I never really had many problems with that.
- O: Did you believe in physical punishment at all, or was it merely a glance?

- P: Sometimes if you had some who really . . . I remember one class I had in particular. It was a junior high English class. It came right after lunch. I prepared for it like any other class. I can't tell you to this day what would happen. That class so often would go haywire. It just was a group who got together and weren't interested in education. Evidently I wasn't meeting them in some way, but this happens every once in a while. It was very frustrating.
- O: How did you handle it?
- P: I guess I just plugged along. It would go along perfectly for a while, and then one day it would be . . .
- O: Ups and downs.
- P: You would have to completely change your plans. This is something else that I think was interesting. You would have your day all scheduled and all planned. Maybe you had a test, or you had planned to do this or you had planned to do that. Then the fire alarm would go off. Off we would have to go, and that would be the end of the test. Maybe they said there was going to be an assembly for so and so many classes. Well, then what you had planned for that day would have to go out the window.
- O: Do you mean that they wouldn't tell you about assemblies beforehand?
- P: If somebody came in to speak for something, they would call you down there. Usually they were planned, but every once in a while for a special privilege or a special benefit or something, your class would go down there.
- O: I never thought that there would be fire drills that would be interrupting the class.
- P: Yes, if you are right in the middle of the test and the firemen came, they would say that they were going to have a drill that day. You couldn't control it. Sometimes they were controlled, but sometimes they just happened.
- O: Did you ever have a fire? Do you recall a fire at Wilson?
- P: I can't recall. Of course, then during the war when we used to be scared, we would have air raid drills. We would take the class down to an assigned place. Mine was down in one of the inside halls. You had to put your hands over your head and cover your neck and so forth.
- O: Was there a siren?

- P: There would be a siren in the building. That would be like an air raid siren. You would have these drills. You would have to go down to your station.
- O: Would the kids get scared?
- P: Not really I guess. Well, maybe some of them, probably the younger kids would. In high school the kids sort of accepted things.
- O: Do you think the students ever thought that there was a chance of war coming to the United States that they would be directly involved?
- P: I don't ever remember their saying that they were worried. This might be something that they did discuss in other classes, but never in my class. I was teaching English at the time.
- O: During the war were any of your students drafted, or did they leave school?
- P: There weren't too many of them who were drafted because most of them would be eighteen soon anyway. We had so many as they graduated, that the next year, they would go. Mr. Friend, who is at the vocational school, graduated I think in 1946 and right away he had to go into the service. We had another thing that was interesting. We had permanent homerooms. A lot of the boys whom I got along well with were in my homeroom for four years, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, so you really got to know them very well. When a lot of them went off to the war--many of them went into the navy, the army and so forth--I would write to them. I had quite a large correspondence particularly with those who were in my homeroom.
- O: Yes, you would get close to them.
- P: Yes, very close.
- O: When they would be going to the war, did you ever see them off?
- P: No, I don't remember that I ever saw them off, but they would come to school before they left. We never went to see them off at the trains or anything. So often it was on the day we were teaching, and couldn't go.
- O: You were involved in PTA (Parent-Teacher Association), right?
- P: Yes.
- O: Exactly what was the extent of your involvement? What would you do?

- P: I never had any office in PTA. The person who was the dean of girls was very often the head of the teacher group. We would just go to the PTA meetings, and they would have a social hour. We would discuss the children with the parents. We would often have visitors' day. They would come in the evening. We would discuss the kids' problems.
- O: Did they come with the parents?
- P: Yes, very often the fathers came too.
- O: It seems like nowadays you hear that parents aren't that concerned. Do you think there is any difference? From when you started teaching throughout the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's, was there any change in parents' concern over their children's education?
- P: I don't remember any of this. I left in 1966. Maybe all of this has come on since. That was about twenty years ago. As I remember most of the families in our area were very much interested in their children. Many of the children were first generation. The parents were very much interested in what happened in education.
- O: Do you remember any of the children talking about the problems their parents might be having like their being immigrants?
- P: As I said the language was the big thing because so many of the parents didn't speak English. This made it difficult for the youngsters.
- O: How about economic problems? Did they ever talk about that?
- P: We had economic problems. That was back in the Depression days. Most of our people came from the Lansingville area. If you go down there today, you will find how neat and wonderful their homes are. That was the kind of families we had unless they were out of work. During those years some of them had problems with clothing.
- O: How about dress codes then? Was there a dress code?
- P: Yes, I think there was a dress code. For a while they got into being sort of sloppy with long hair and that sort of thing.
- O: Really?
- P: We went back to a dress code.
- O: Going back to when you were talking about teaching English,

did you ever have any books that were censored because of the content or any complaints about books?

P: The first book that I remember that was really in controversy was the Catcher in the Rye.

O: Why would there be so much controversy?

P: It was homosexual.

O: Who would complain about that?

P: Many of the families complained. Other teachers would complain. I think that many of us felt that there were other books which were just as valuable or even more valuable than that. We just didn't think it was necessary.

O: What would they do then?

P: I don't know. It was never taken out of the schools. Some teachers required it. I never required it. I had a list of books that they could read.

O: Do you remember what some of the books were?

P: Most of mine were books that were well-known.

O: By whom?

P: I have a copy around someplace. Very often I would give them a little synopsis of what the book was about.

O: So they could choose.

P: They usually were all American authors.

O: What would they do with it after they read the book?

P: They would read, and then they reported on what they read. Some of the time they did public speaking, so they would report it orally.

O: Do you remember circus day?

P: Circus day?

O: When the circus came to town?

P: When the circus came to town, we had an absence of pupils. They just wouldn't come to school.

O: Where would the circus be at? Do you remember where it was at?

- P: I can't remember. I think it was somewhere over on the west side, but I don't know.
- O: Why would it be so important? Like now if the circus would come to town, they wouldn't let kids go to it, would they?
- P: I don't know. Maybe it is a real dangerous thing to do. Kids today would probably be on drugs and go off and do that. Years ago this was a big thing to go to see the circus unload and see them set up. It was a real adventure.
- O: Do you remember what your students' plans were for the future? Did they intend to go to college?
- P: Many of mine did because I had a college preparatory English which was American Literature. There were other Englishes that they could take, so if they didn't plan to go to college, very often I wouldn't have them. Of course, there were a number of teachers who taught English. So many of them might have other teachers. Many of the youngsters who were going to college I had.
- O: What college would they be going to?
- P: A lot of them were going to YU. Some got scholarships to go out of the city.
- O: Let's see; you went to Youngstown . . .
- P: No, I went to Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania.
- O: Right, but you were taught by professors from the University of Pittsburgh and Youngstown.
- P: Yes.
- O: This was at the board of education, right?
- P: Yes.
- O: What grade did you enjoy teaching the most when you were at Woodrow Wilson High School?
- P: Eleventh.
- O: Why eleventh?
- P: They asked me many times to teach senior English. As juniors they were getting to be pretty much adults. The boys were beginning to wake up whereas in tenth grade the boys were still pretty silly. They really began to wake up and got interested by eleventh. Yet, they didn't have

what I call senioritis. When they were so busy as seniors, they had so many other activities and everything that I just couldn't handle it. As juniors they were really liking it. That was my favorite.

O: What was this about this letter that you got?

P: One of the youngsters that I had in the eleventh grade had enjoyed my class. They really liked it, and we had a really good relationship. They used to write these letters, and I got several of them. They would put them in my mailbox down in the office. They said that if I didn't teach senior English, they weren't going to take senior English. They said that they wouldn't get senioritis. They asked me why I wouldn't teach it, and I told them because seniors get senioritis. I never broke down.

O: It seems to be very satisfying.

P: It was.

O: What then would be one of the most satisfying things that happened when you were teaching?

P: I think probably now when the youngsters tell me how much they enjoyed it. This is your satisfaction. We certainly didn't get a financial satisfaction as the people today-- all thinking about getting more and more money. Of course, I know they have to have more. I think teachers are underpaid, but I don't think we ever thought about that. It was what we had done for the youngsters. We felt that we had helped them and opened their minds.

O: Was teaching a twenty-four hour job then?

P: Definitely. When my sister retired and came home, she said that she never saw me. She said that I was always grading papers. We did a lot of that. That is one of the reasons I decided to retire a little earlier. She came home from New York State because she had retired earlier, too, so we decided that we would do things together. I think the greatest satisfaction was to see the kids' enjoyment and to hear from them later on how much they appreciated their minds being opened.

O: Have you ever met any of your former students at the museum when you were giving a tour?

P: Lots of them.

O: And they remember you, and you remember them?

P: Oh, yes. Just the other day I was in Penney's. This girl came along, and we talked. Going back to this time when we had permanent homerooms, I remember that I had a set of twins. I had always told the kids not to ever come with curlers in their hair. I would give them little motherly talks and so forth. I said that I never wanted to see any of them of the street with their hair in curlers. I said that wasn't the place for them. Years afterwards I was in one of the stores in the mall when I met one of the girls I had had (who was one of the twins), and she had her hair in curlers. She put her hands up over her head and said, "Oh, no, not Miss Pierson!" So some of the things that you told them sunk in.

I had this one homeroom that I liked so much. I had them for the four years. I would tell them some of these things, and they would say, "Yes, mom." They would all call me "mom" or something similar!

O: That would be nice.

P: That way you really had a nice relationship. I don't think they have anything like that today, not too many people.

O: I know that when I was in high school, as for homerooms, we always had a different one every year, so I could see where permanent homerooms would be an advantage. You would get to know them.

P: You really do.

O: What would be some of your jobs as a homeroom teacher? What would you have to do?

P: Well, we would have to check attendance, of course. We had to do report cards. Every morning you had a homeroom period. Sometimes we had a little ceremony of some kind over the loudspeaker. We were almost a mother to them and gave them a few manners and pointers on behavior and that sort of thing.

O: What place did prayer have at Wilson High School?

P: We always had . . . Well, I won't say always, but it stands out in my mind that we had an opening exercise in which there would be a reading from the Bible. Very often we said the pledge to the flag. We never said the Lord's Prayer or any prayer at all, but there was a Bible reading.

O: Do you think that the classes have changed now that they have taken the prayer out of the school?

P: I believe so. I think it came from the parents or maybe

the community. There has been an awful lot said about it that it was against their rights or something having prayer in school. It was just accepted and done at that time. I never heard anybody objecting to it.

O: Were you in a union?

P: No.

O: Was there a union?

P: No.

O: If you had any kind of grievances, or did you ever have grievances? How would you approach that, not you personally, but any teacher?

P: We never had any grievances as far as I can remember. Sometimes you would object to the classes that you were given. I would just go to the principal and talk to him. I always found that it seemed to be so often that the class that they gave me I liked better than the one I was supposed to have and thought I wanted.

O: How many classes would you teach?

P: We had five classes and a study hall and a homeroom. Then we had extracurricular activities like cheerleaders. There was no extra pay for it. Lunchroom duty was something else, and hall duty which we very often had.

O: Was there much of a difference in the pay scale between women teachers and men teachers?

P: I think there was for a while. I think when I was teaching, it was the same.

O: There was no discrimination at all?

P: No, I don't remember that there was any. You were graded more on your education. Every year you got \$100 increase automatically until you went up to what was the maximum salary. The maximum salary, I think, was \$3,000.

O: Was this whether or not you had a master's?

P: Well . . .

O: You were saying about being in the homerooms.

P: Yes, the homerooms being permanent homerooms were almost like a family in that you would know their problems. They would sort of bring their problems to you. I remember one

girl particularly who started coming late. Her daily program had been so much different than it had been before. So I just waited until we were alone, and talked to her and learned that she was pregnant. She was worried about life at home--her mother had died. I told her to let us know about it, and then I took her to the dean of girls, who took it from there. Those things you did discover.

O: That is part of education too. The teachers and the students get to know each other.

P: Yes.

O: What about teachers' strikes; they never had any strikes at all?

P: I don't think so. I don't think I could have gone out on a strike, but they didn't have any when I was teaching. I know I couldn't have gone out on a strike.

O: Do you recall some of the teachers offhand throughout the years, their names, that you worked with?

P: With whom I taught?

O: Yes.

P: Oh, definitely. There was a Miss Alice Higley who still lives in Youngstown on Broadway. There was a Miss Gladys Arnold who was the librarian before Miss Luebben. She lives in Youngstown. Miss Helen Judge, who also taught English, lives in Youngstown.

O: You mentioned Morris Slavin.

P: Morris Slavin, I taught with him. There was a Mrs. Shallen Berger who is no longer living. She was in the history department too.

O: Mr. Glasgow was the principal all the time throughout those years?

P: Practically all the years I was there, and then the man who had been the dean of boys, Paul Wachter, was our principal. He has retired to Bellville, Ohio.

O: What did the dean of boys do and the dean of girls?

P: A lot of it was discipline. The kids were supposed to be able to air their problems to the dean.

O: Did they have guidance counselors also?

- P: Yes, they had a guidance counselor. It was Miss Robertson. Miss Eckert was a guidance counselor following Miss Robertson.
- O: She taught French and Latin.
- P: French and Latin. So many of us taught so many different things. I taught history. One time I taught civics. Of course, that was related to history, but I think having that liberal arts background enabled me to teach so many things. I think I even taught geography at one time.
- O: When school was out during the summertime, did you ever have any contact with your students? Did they ever have picnics or anything like that or get-togethers?
- P: No, not that I remember. My home was in Meadville. The first few years I went back to Meadville for my summers. Then our mother came here to live. Then we would go to New York State. Many of my summers were spent up there. We always went to visit our relatives in New York State too. I never had much connection with the students during the summertime.
- O: Did they have teacher conventions?
- P: The teacher conventions were always in October. I think it was the last weekend in October. It was in Cleveland. We used to drive up to Cleveland for those teacher conventions and would stay in a hotel.
- O: Do you remember who you would go with?
- P: Yes, I remember. There were two teachers who you wouldn't know, Ruth and Helen Cooper. They both are no longer living. Miss Eckert went too. Then later on Miss Luebben, when we got to know her. Many teachers lived out of town, so you wouldn't even know them, but there were others who went with me.
- O: Where in Cleveland? Do you remember where it was at?
- P: It was
- O: And what would be the convention's name, or who was putting on this convention?
- P: It was the Northeastern Ohio Teachers Association, and we had our meetings often in the Cleveland Auditorium. There were speakers. There would be a general meeting, and then you had a program (ahead of time) so that you could go to whatever meeting interested you. It was sort of a lark along with the education. It was always cold, and sometimes it snowed. It would be a terrible day.

- O: They have these national tests that they give the students, placement tests or aptitude tests. Did they have that?
- P: Yes, they had aptitude tests. That usually would come out of an office of . . .
- O: The guidance counselor?
- P: The guidance counselor who would give the tests.
- O: Did you think they were important to have aptitude tests?
- P: Yes, I did.
- O: Why?
- P: I think it sort of spurred the kids as an achievement thing more than anything else in those days. I jsut thought it was something to be done.
- O: Did they have the actual commencement at Wilson?
- P: Each year you would sponsor some class. It wasn't every year, but usually you would sponsor the senior class at the beginning of their junior year. You would go to all of their functions and be an advisor to them. My particular duty when I would have one of these classes would be the baccalaureate service. I would have to work with the committee and get somebody as a speaker, arrange for the auditorium to be decorated, the music and the rest of it. For this again, you got no extra pay. Then on commencement day, one of the teachers would be in charge of commencement.
- O: Who would be some of the people they would have come to speak at commencement or even like at assemblies as you have mentioned when you mentioned they would have people coming to talk?
- P: They would be industrialists, and ministers, priests . . .
- O: Do you remember any particular names?
- P: And the mayor of the city or a member of the council.
- O: During the elections . . .
- P: Yes, the candidates would come.
- O: To talk to the kids?
- P: Yes.
- O: Did they ever come to the individual classes and talk, or would it just be an assembly?

- P: Yes, I think they came to classes. I think again it would be to the history classes.
- O: Have you seen any major changes in the educational system here in Youngstown throughout the years?
- P: Oh, yes, definitely.
- O: Could you name some of them?
- P: It is going downhill.
- O: Really?
- P: Yes.
- O: In what way?
- P: Well, I don't think that the standards are what they should be. The standards have been lowered, and I think that is wrong. I think that if you make the standards high, people are going to reach those standards whereas if you lower them, I think they are going to lose them.
- O: Well, how do you think that they could bring them back?
- P: For instance, take English. Of course, that is the thing I taught and that I am interested in. I think they should go back to the good old basics where they have to read and write. I think the only way to do it is to have practice. In the eleventh grade at the end of the year I used to always ask the youngsters on the last day when they didn't have any books or anything and when they had a lot of time what they thought they had really enjoyed in the class and what they had not and so forth. One boy who was not a very good student said that the thing he enjoyed the most was learning how to write a letter--in eleventh grade! This was just a review thing as far as grammar was concerned; it should have been, but he said that he never really knew how to write a letter until he got to eleventh grade! As far as he was concerned he felt that he had really learned something that year, so if he didn't know much of anything else, at least he felt that you had taken him where he was. I think that was the thing that we tried to do, take them from where they were and go on one level.
- O: Looking back then over the years when you were teaching, were there any changes that you would like to have seen done?
- P: I always felt that it was too bad that there were not things that were really required in each grade and wouldn't have to be repeated in high school. Then we could spend more time

on the literature, but we had to repeat so much of the grammar. They just didn't get it down in some lower grade. Of course, when I was teaching, progressive education was just beginning to come in, so you wouldn't hold a youngster back if he didn't get anything. You would say that he had gone through the grade; he would be pushed ahead so that he wouldn't have to repeat anything.

O: What do you mean by progressive education?

P: That was what they called it, progressive education. The idea was that a youngster should never repeat a grade.

O: And you don't agree with that?

P: No, I felt sometimes that the youngster knew that he wasn't going to have to repeat. He just went through it. I think sometimes you have to put forth more effort. There was something else that I used to always advocate. I felt there should be a dual diploma.

O: What do you mean by that?

P: I felt that some youngsters at this time were just coming and sort of occupying the seat and still getting a diploma. I felt that those who had good grades and had really accomplished a great deal should have a diploma. Those who had just been there sitting and occupying the seat should have a certificate of attendance.

O: I never thought of that.

P: I felt that this would spur those kids on who were just sitting there if they knew there was a difference. When they would get out of school and had only a certificate instead of a diploma, it might make a difference when they went to get a job. I know once the state supervisor came to inspect us. I put this idea up to him. He blew his top; he thought it was terrible, but I still think it is a good idea.

O: What events that happened--I know this is going to be a really broad question--stand out in your mind as very significant? Was there anything that happened that was very important to you as you were teaching throughout the years?

P: Just the satisfaction of it. I think that you have more satisfaction as the years go by and the kids come back and tell you how much they appreciated it. At the time I think they don't really appreciate it so much. When they got older and when they had class reunions, they will come back and tell you how much they enjoyed it and how much it meant to them.

O: Did you ever go to any of the class reunions?

P: Almost all the time.

O: Really?

P: Yes.

O: Would this be the class reunions from when?

P: Thirty years ago. 1939 had their first class reunion a few years ago and the 1940's classes all have had reunions.

O: You belong to retired teachers organizations?

P: Yes.

O: What do they do when you go to meetings? What do you talk about?

P: They talked about particular things that interested retired teachers like pension and legislation but just getting together and seeing people that you have taught with.

O: I was talking throughout the years of what was going on.

P: Yes. Again you get with the people with whom you taught because you don't see them often and you are always so glad to see them and talk with them.

O: Did you know that quite a few of the guides that work at the Arms Museum are retired schoolteachers. How many of them have you actually worked with?

P: I was there a long time ago when we were only getting \$1 an hour. I think I started out at \$1.35 or something like that. When I first started, my brother-in-law, Mr. Beede--who had been the principal at Hillman Junior High--had been the assistant principal at South before becoming principal at Hillman. When he retired, he went to the museum to work. At that time there were very, very few of us.

O: Miss Hall?

P: Yes, Miss Hall was there and my brother-in-law Fred Beede and Miss Minturn. Of course, the museum was not very well publicized at that time, and there were very few people who came. It has grown over the years.

O: So then you really started because of your brother-in-law?

P: Yes, my brother-in-law. At that time too the person who was in charge was Mrs. Walsh. That must have been about 1965. Then Harriet Schaff came.

O: You have taken some of the Arms holiday tours, haven't you with the fifth graders coming through?

P: Oh, yes.

O: Do you see a difference then in these students than from when you first started teaching in elementary school in 1927?

P: The school where I taught was over on the northwest side.

O: This would be Tod?

P: Tod. It was out on West Federal Street. Those children were primarily of Italian background. There were more discipline problems. I remember one kid came in one day with brass knuckles. I didn't even know what a brass knuckle was at that time. I think I took it away from him. I took it to the principal and asked him what it was. I had never known anything about it.

O: Why did he bring it? Do you know why he brought it in the first place?

P: He brought it from home. I suppose it had to do with something about his family. I don't know.

O: He might have beaten somebody up.

P: They used them, but I didn't know what they were. I had quite an introduction to teaching. There were some pretty wild kids in those days. Some of them were just perfectly darling, especially in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. They were so cute; they were so darling.

O: Is there a difference, do you think?

P: I think there is a difference.

O: In what ways?

P: I really think the young kids today are more knowledgeable generally than they were in those days. Of course, I remember doing the field trips with those youngsters too, when there was a language barrier because they spoke Italian at home and English at school. I just think all youngsters today have a much wider knowledge thanks to television.

O: Would you say thanks to television?

P: I think that generally their knowledge is greater. I think they are much more aware of the world around them than before. Now they are pretty much interested in everything.

O: Do you think this is an advantage or a disadvantage?

P: In a way I think it is an advantage; I really do. But still I think there are a lot of things they are not getting that I think they could get--like the language. I really don't believe they get much literature in schools today. I don't know.

O: I don't know what the curriculum would be like.

P: What about your . . .

O: My own background I got more of the literature in high school when I was a junior. I think I had just one literature class; that was American Literature. I had Mrs. Hopkins at Ursuline. That was the only literature I was ever exposed to.

P: Did you ever have any English Literature?

O: No.

P: That was what they always taught in senior English, English Literature.

O: No, I did not. At that point Ursuline was going onto a modular system. It was supposed to be more like college. You got to choose the kind of courses you wanted. I believe they had English Literature, but I don't think I took that. I just took one literature course. I was into reading, so I had read even before that. If I didn't enjoy reading, I wouldn't be exposed.

P: Of course, right now youngsters are allowed to choose which English they want. Most of the youngsters who were going to college went on and took the English Literature course. That was what I would have taught if I would have taught senior English. I think it was a state requirement for many years. I think they have lowered that now so that you can take many different kinds. You don't have to take English Literature. I don't believe in some schools that they even teach it because there are so few who will sign up for it.

O: What would registration be like? Who would determine what they took?

P: They would go to this guidance counselor, and she would come in very often to my class. She would sign them up for the next year. She would tell them what was open to them. They could have what they called Modern English. If they were in the commercial course, they would have an English that would be . . .

O: Like Business English or something like that?

P: Business English.

O: Is there anything else then that you would like to add about education in Youngstown or anything?

P: I would like to add that both parents--mother and father--were definitely interested in education. My father died when I was ten years old. All of us worked to help ourselves and each other through college.

Since my brothers were the oldest they had completed their college education before my father's death. The sister, who had had one year at Allegheny, completed her education at Columbia University in New York City after working several years in between. She then taught in the Great Neck (Long Island) New York system. The other sister graduated from Indiana College of Pennsylvania and taught in New Castle before coming to South High School in Youngstown (to teach) where she met and married Fred C. Beede. Since New York State did not require a master's degree but would accept the equivalent, my sister, who taught in New York State, took extra work at New York University and also at Westminster College. The point of taking extra work at a master's degree was not only to aid you in your field but also gave you an increase in salary. Both brothers were successful in their chosen field of engineering as were both sisters in their field of education.

My father insisted that all of us get our degree from college. He did not have a degree and felt that promotion was not given to him, although he had the knowledge because he did not have that "degree".

I think I have told you a lot.

O: You certainly have. I really appreciate that. One more question. I asked you about what the most enjoyable part about teaching was. Was there anything negative that you felt about teaching except, for instance, maybe the language that you had a harder time?

P: Do you mean as far as the youngsters are concerned?

O: Well, anything.

P: I don't know. I have always enjoyed it. Of course, I used to brag about our classes and that sort of thing. That is an everyday thing.

O: Would you ever want to do it again if you were teaching? Would you want to be a teacher again?

- P: I imagine I would because I really like youngsters. I really like to be with them. There are three little kids next door, and I just have a great time with them. I think I would probably teach. However, I think that you have so many more opportunities today like teaching abroad and that sort of thing. There was never anything like that. I just think there are many different fields in education that are open to people now that we just never had. I enjoyed it. I grew up with the idea that that was what I was going to do because my friends went into teaching. We grew up with the children whose parents were college professors, and we just grew up on education?
- O: I think it is a very good profession; as long as we keep having more teachers like the ones I have been interviewing, I think we will be doing very well. Again I would like to thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW