

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Youngstown College

Student and Teaching Experiences

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HAROLD JOHNSON

Interviewed

by

Alvin Skardon

on

July 24, 1974

## HAROLD N. JOHNSON

Harold N. Johnson was born in Moline, Illinois in 1899, the son of Erick and Sarah Johnson. After graduating from high school, he attended various learning institutions, such as Augustana College, University of Illinois, and received credit from Chicago University for two or three courses which he took on a correspondence basis. Approximately 1923 or 1924 Johnson entered Youngstown College and in the fall of 1924 he transferred to Ohio State University where he completed his degree in 1925.

After earning his Bachelor of Science degree in Education, Johnson taught at Rayen School and also night classes for the college. While teaching he returned to the classroom himself to obtain a law degree which was granted to him in 1933. Johnson never practiced law but received his Juris Doctorate from Youngstown College.

In 1945 Johnson began to teach Descriptive Geometry at night and at the same time was admitted to the faculty of the Engineering School. He was not, however, a full-time faculty member and continued to teach night classes until 1960 at which time he became full time and taught during the day. Johnson was head of the Graphics Department at Youngstown University and resigned from this

position in 1969. In 1970 he accepted a position in the New England Aeronautical Institute and resigned from there in 1971.

Johnson and his wife, Grace Tracy Johnson, are presently living in Nashua, New Hampshire and have been involved in the publication of various books. Of particular interest is a book called, The Roman Collar Detective, which was published in 1953 and has been printed in Braille and translated into German.

Julie Di Sibio

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: HAROLD JOHNSON

INTERVIEWER: Alvin Skardon

SUBJECT: Student and Teaching Experiences

DATE: July 26, 1974

S: This is an interview with Professor Harold Nels Johnson on Wednesday, July 26, 1974, in Nashua, New Hampshire, by Alvin Skardon. In the interview also is Mrs Grace Johnson.

S: When did you first come to Youngstown State University?

HJ: I first went over there--I think it was in 1922-- and took a couple of courses at night school and I received credits from Hiram and Thiel Colleges. There was no Youngstown State University at that time. I believe it was called Youngstown Institute of Technology, but the profs came to Youngstown from Hiram and Thiel.

Dr. Walker taught education, Dr. Joseph Smith taught history and economics, and Dr. Cannon, French. These profs were from Hiram. From Thiel College there were Dr. Waldron who taught science, and Dean Edwin Barlow Evans who taught English literature. After that I went to Ohio State and I got my B.S. in Education and an M.A. in English. The following year I enrolled in the law school at night while teaching in the Youngstown School System.

At that time, Judge Gessner was the dean of the law school and one of the happiest men I ever encountered. I'll tell you a little story about him that I always remember and I always like. At that time,

the question of an increase in salary for judges was to be voted upon at the next election so he went stumping in the countryside and called on a farmer that he knew. After he had talked to him awhile, he said, "By the way, when it comes up on election day to decide on whether to raise the salary of the judges, I wish that you'd vote for it."

And the farmer said, "Well, how much are you making now?" The Judge told him--I don't remember what it was now--but the Judge's friend replied, "No, I won't vote for it. If you can't live on that salary, you're either chasing women or playing the ponies."

Judge Gessner came to class that night and he told us about it. He thought that was really funny and he laughed heartily.

Henry Church, Hershel Hunt, and Knowles Wyatt were on the law faculty. There was one other but I can't recall his name as I only had him for one course. He was sort of part-time and the other four were the regulars.

S: Did you complete your law work?

HJ: Yes, I earned my degree and passed the Bar. Later on they gave the Juris Doctorate degree, you know.

S: Were you at the ceremony that night when they gave you a change of degree?

HJ: No, no, I didn't get there for that.

S: I see, but you got it anyhow.

HJ: Yes, I got it. They mailed it to me. Among those that I remember from the law classes were, of course, Judge Sidney Rigelhaupt--he was a year ahead of me--you'll find it in the directory out there. Then there was Bruce Black, who also became a judge, and Lawrence Reed, who's still in Youngstown. At one time, he headed a Legal Aid Bureau for people who couldn't afford an attorney. And then there was a Miss Marstellar, who was Secretary of the Board of Education over in Niles. She was the only woman in our class.

Another classmate was William Irwin, who taught school out at Canfield, and then there were Bob Resch and Paul Resch. Fannie Rose Gancfried was in the class ahead of me. Also in my class was Henry Cashell who became a patent attorney for Youngstown Sheet and Tube after he got his degree. While he was studying law, he was tracing patents in Washington for the Sheet and Tube. That's about all I can tell you about law students while I was a student.

S: I see. Would you repeat that about the professors who came from Thiel and Hiram and so forth

HJ: Oh, yes. The professors that came down from Hiram were Dr. Walker who taught education; Dr. Joseph Smith, economics and history, and was later connected with the University and became dean; Dr. Cannon, French. From Thiel, there were Dr. Waldron who taught science and Dr. Evans who taught English literature.

S: It was our impression that Hiram graduates dominated the University when we came there in 1957. Ex-president Jones has denied this, but Dr Behen says the opinion is true. Would you say that?

HJ: No, I agree with Dr. Jones. I think it was about even there. There was, like I say, the three of them from Hiram and two of them from Thiel. And I can't see where there was any predominance.

S: Well, why Hiram then?

HJ: They were all good, commendable men. They were excellent teachers.

S: Dr. Behen tells me that when you applied for credit at Ohio State, they had never heard of Youngstown College or Institute.

HJ: No, they objected to the fact that they never heard of it when I went down to Ohio State to transfer credits--they came from Hiram and Thiel--and immediately the registrar said, "Well, we can't give you credit for this because it's a night school."

So my argument was: What's the difference whether they teach it at night or in the daytime? I said

most of these classes started at four o'clock in the afternoon and most of them were over by seven o'clock or eight o'clock because the professors had to get down to the railway station in time to catch their train. At that time, most of the professors went back and forth on the train.

He said, "Well, in that case, we'll give you the credits." So I got my credits.

S: About how many students attended the school when you were there?

HJ: There were about thirty, forty, or fifty, somewhere around there.

GJ: Well, as I said, in the fall--I think it was 1921, you better verify that with your early school records--Dr. Evans was there and there were only a couple of professors there during the first year. Dean Evans was one of them. The classes that year were held in a couple of rooms. I don't think we had more than two or three classes. They were held on the second or the third floors. We used to go up in the elevator in the YMCA building on Champion Street; that's where they were held. There were possibly twenty or twenty-two students in the English class that I was in. Of course, the second year--I don't recall whether they were there two years or not--they took over a large home on Wick Avenue next door to McMillan Library on Wick and Rayen Avenues. They used that for three or four years. They held classes there for about three years.

S: In other words, the classes were moved from the YMCA itself to the house directly north of the library?

GJ: Yes, we had the same profs then that we had at the YMCA building. I had Dean Evans for about six or seven classes. He was an excellent professor.

S: What is the name of the professor you are talking about?

GJ: Dr. Edwin Barlow Evans and he was dean over at Thiel. Dr. Waldron was also from Thiel. I had classes with him, but he did not teach down at

the YMCA. He didn't come until we were at the other building on Wick Avenue. I had him for biology and there were lab facilities there

S: Were you a student at Youngstown College when it was called that, for just a year around 1923?

HJ: Yes. Maybe it was 1923 or 1924. I went down to Ohio State in the fall of 1924 and got my degree in 1925.

GJ: Well, it was the spring of 1923 that we were in the same class, an education course taught by Dr. Walker

HJ: I was teaching over in Niles at that time and rode the interurban streetcar back and forth. I was there the next year, too. In 1924 I went down to Ohio State because I had enough credits to get a Bachelor of Science in Education in 1925. I had credits from Augustana College, University of Illinois, and I had two or three courses by correspondence from Chicago University. I would say that's the hardest way in the world to get college credit because of the reading you have to do. It is tremendous. You have to read everything, including their instructions. If you get tied up, you have no recourse; you have to puzzle it out for yourself. I had no trouble with those credits down at Ohio State; they took them.

The only thing they argued about was the fact that they wanted to call this work in Youngstown a night school. They had written to Youngstown College saying they would accept the credits from there--from both Hiram and Thiel. When I told him this, he said that he'd have to look into it, and he did. He went back into his files and got the letter out and he said, "That's right. We had written to the authorities up there and we agreed that we would accept their credits."

S: I'm particularly interested in this because President Jones had a tremendous battle to get Youngstown College accredited. This does not appear on the surface--there's really not much mentioned in the documents--but in the tape-recorded interviews we have of a number of people, they tell about this fight that he had to get Youngstown College



accredited for the same reason: It was regarded as a night school.

HJ: But you didn't have any trouble at Miami University, did you, Grace?

GJ: Well, I didn't take any credits from Youngstown College. I took credits from Hiram and from Thiel.

HJ: That's where mine were from.

GJ: Yes, I know, but I'm saying that there were no questions whatever at Miami. Of course, I had gone to school all summer at Thiel in 1924. I had a course with Dean Evans and a couple of other profs. I was going off to Miami in the fall and I wanted to be near Youngstown that summer. But there was never any question of credits at Miami. I mean they took Hiram's and Thiel's credits because they were both reputable institutions. I don't recall when it was that Youngstown started granting a degree other than their law degree. I don't know when they started the Arts College.

S: Where did you get your law degree, sir?

HJ: At Youngstown, in 1932.

S: I see. In what year did you go down to Ohio State?

GJ: You got your bachelor degree from there in 1925.

HJ: I got my degree from there in 1925. Then I started studying law at night at Youngstown. The building for the law school was a house right next to the main building on Wick Avenue. All the law classes were held in it.

S: Until the main building was built, I see. What did you get your degree in at Ohio State? What was your major subject?

HJ: Well, my major in the B.S. was English, and I have my M.A. from Ohio State also in English. I also had a major in industrial arts. I could have had a major in that too, or math.

S: Well, after getting your M.A. at Ohio State, you came back to Youngstown. Is that right?

HJ: Yes, the reason that I never went into law was that it was a depression year and when I graduated, I talked to Judge Wygant who was the speaker at our commencement. He was an attorney with a big law office up in Cleveland, and I asked him, "What do you think my chances are of starting out in law now?"

He asked me if I had a job and I said, "Yes."

His reply was, "Well, keep it. We're not making enough up there with five of us working in an old established law office to pay the salary of our stenographers." He was a Supreme Court Justice.

S: Did you teach school in Youngstown until you got your law degree?

HJ: Yes, and for twenty-four years after that. I taught at Rayen School and also at night classes for some years. During World War II, I taught National Defense classes every night from six in the evening to midnight.

They had to have people who could lay out steel plates for artillery, tanks, and landing craft and things like that. I also worked at General Fireproofing Company teaching precision instruments to the inspectors from three to five in the afternoon. They were building airplanes.

After the war, I was in the Engineering building at Youngstown University one afternoon and saw Dean Deitz and asked him if he had part-time work for me. He said, "I've been wondering when you'd ask me that because I've been wanting you, but did not like to go out and get you as we have been accused of recruiting teachers from the public school system." I started teaching Descriptive Geometry that night.

S: Who was the dean then?

HJ: He was Dean Deitz and he was a fabulous fellow.

S: Approximately what year was this?

HJ: It was in 1945 or 1946 Dean Deitz had been over in Russia before the war putting in industries. He was a hydraulic and electrical engineer. He

also had a tremendous experience down in the Southwest. I think it was a Rockefeller who owned several thousand acres down in the desert in Arizona and wanted to raise crops on it. Dean Deitz had to supervise the dragging out of the mesquite bushes and huge, log-size roots that were buried in the ground. Then he had to build an irrigation system and a pumping plant. After he got all these things done, he supervised planting alfalfa and they hoped to get, I think, three or four crops a year. The plants grew to about four or five inches, wilted, turned brown, and died. He couldn't figure out what caused this until one day when he stuck a thermometer in the ground and it registered above the boiling point. He knew then that he was cooking the alfalfa. So he called up the owners and said, "You might just as well forget this project; you can't raise anything here. It just cooks up."

Dean Deitz worked day and night at the University. You could go down there just about any time at night, up to midnight, and he would be working there installing equipment. The Engineering School at that time, had behind it Westinghouse, Sheet and Tube, Bell Telephone, Youngstown Boiler and Tank, and possibly some other plants.

Dean Deitz could go to any of these plants and tell them what he needed in the line of equipment and they would see that he got it. They not only got him the equipment, but sent up their millwrights to install it. They did a great deal for the Engineering School.

- S: When did you come on the faculty of the Engineering School?
- HJ: Well, that would have been around 1945.
- GJ: He was not full time. He was there at the University night school, but continued to teach at Rayen until 1960.
- S: You taught at night from 1945 to 1960?
- HJ: Yes, and in 1960, I went there full time during the day.

- S: You were there when I was there too, because I came in 1957. What were you teaching at the University?
- HJ: I was teaching Descriptive Geometry and Engineering Drawing.
- S: When did you resign from the school?
- HJ: I resigned in 1969
- S: In 1969, we began this program, writing the history of the University. Dave Behen at that time gave me your name and address as a person who should be contacted. I think I've gotten down the essential information that I wanted, but I am particularly interested in your experience there as a student in the 1920s and also the fact that you got your law degree there in 1932. You said you met Mrs. Johnson down there?
- HJ: Yes, I met her the first year that I was there.
- GJ: He met me in Dr. Walker's class.
- S: How long were you at Youngstown College, Mrs. Johnson?
- GJ: Well, I took courses the first year they had the college. Then the next year I went, I took a Monday and Wednesday class and a Tuesday and Thursday class. I was teaching second grade at Gordon School in Campbell, and I was planning to get a degree to teach high school. I had Dr. Waldron for a biology class from four to six-thirty. I had another class from 7 to 10 p.m. I continued that through 1923 and 1924 and then I went down to Miami and finished up down there. I had been at Miami all through the summer of 1923 and over at Thiel in the summer of 1924. In 1925, I got a Bachelor of Science in Education from Miami with majors in history and English. At that time, one was required to take thirty hours of education courses which was, as I have said many times, a total waste. It would have been much better if I had had that work in my major fields. I think you only need seventeen hours of education to get a degree now to teach, which is an improvement over the old days.

S: Yes, I guess so. Well, I think I've gotten the essential information. I certainly appreciate this. Mrs. Johnson, you were telling us about Katherine Edmunds.

GJ: She was principal of Elm Street School for years. Everybody in Youngstown would know Katherine Edmunds and also Elizabeth Evans who was principal of Harding School and had been in service there for years. They took courses at the college and it was a delightful experience knowing them.

When I first went down to the college, I was eighteen. I had been out of high school for a couple of years. I had finished at Rayen High School, but I had to work awhile to get some money to go to college. Taking these classes right in Youngstown was a boon to me.

Another student I remember now, who became Dr. Claire Raven, was in my biology class with Dr. Waldron. She is widely known as a pathologist.

S: You said you were on your sixth book, is that right?

GJ: We're doing research on it.

S: What field are you writing in, sir?

HJ: Well, we have written in many fields.

GJ: That's all been in the Jambar, right? Kay Ann was our first book.

HJ: McGraw-Hill put that out. That's for teen-agers.

GJ: Our second one was a mystery novel, published by Bruce. Then our third one, Courage Wins, was brought out by Dutton. Our fourth one was another historical, A Hand Raised at Gettysburg, also published by Bruce. Our fifth was another mystery, also from Bruce Publishing.

S: You're getting your feel of history, I see

GJ: We're working on an adult history now.

- S: I want to get this all on record: Kay Ann, by Grace and Harold Johnson, published by McGraw-Hill in 1951; The Roman Collar Detective, by Grace and Harold Johnson, published by Bruce Publishing Company in 1953; Courage Wins, by Grace and Harold Johnson, published by E. P. Dutton in 1954; A Hand Raised at Gettysburg, by Grace and Harold Johnson, Bruce Publishing Company in 1955; A Broken Rosary, by Grace and Harold Johnson, Bruce Publishing Company in 1959.
- HJ: The Roman Collar Detective went into Braille and was translated into German.

END OF INTERVIEW