

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Youngstown College

James L. Wick, Jr. and Founding of Youngstown College
O. H. 9

HARRIET WICK SCHAFF

Interviewed

by

Randall Dicks

on

February 28, 1974

HARRIET SCHAFF

Harriet Wick Schaff, late curator of the Arms Museum, was born on October 29, 1923. Her parents were James L. Wick, Jr. and Clare Mary Dryer Wick, members of one of Youngstown's pioneer families. Mrs. Schaff was a graduate of Chaney High School and in 1945 received a Bachelor of Arts in music history from Vassar College. She did graduate work at the Juilliard School of Music from 1945 to 1947.

Mrs. Schaff was involved in civic affairs which was manifested in her involvement in many community organizations. She has served as president, vice president, and treasurer of the Junior League of Youngstown and also helped to organize the Town Hall Lecture Service, where she served as its first chairperson. Mrs. Schaff was a member of the Volunteer Service Bureau which she helped to form, and also served as a treasurer and member of the board. Another group with which she was involved was the League of Women Voters; she served on its board and edited its newsletter.

Mrs. Schaff's interest in local history was revealed in her work with the Arms Museum of the Mahoning Valley Historical Society. She joined the museum's staff in 1966 as curator and assistant historian. In 1971, she succeeded Dorothy Welsh as its director. Last year she was a member of the Youngstown Bicentennial Commission. She was also a member of the American Association of Museums, the American Association for State and Local History, and the Ohioana Library Association.

Mrs. Schaff passed away on November 5, 1976 from complications following a cerebral hemorrhage. She left behind her

husband, Walter Schaff, Jr., whom she married in 1950 and
three daughters, Emily, Louise, and Anne.

DONNA DEBLASIO
July 7, 1977

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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History of Youngstown College

INTERVIEWEE: HARRIET WICK SCHAFF
INTERVIEWER: Randall Dicks
SUBJECT: James L. Wick, Jr., Founding of College
DATE: February 28, 1974

D: This is an interview for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program with Mrs. Harriet Wick Schaff on February 28, 1974. Mrs. Schaff's father was the late James L. Wick, Jr., first chairman of the board of trustees of Youngstown University.

James L. Wick, Jr., was born at 753 Wick Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio, on January 28, 1883, a son of James Lippincott and Julia Manney Wick, attended Elm Street, Wood Street and Rayen Schools, graduating from Rayen in 1902. He attended The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, graduating in 1906 as a mechanical engineer. As a boy, his summer and vacation jobs included driving a grocery wagon and working as a clerk, working for the Youngstown Steel Company, the William Tod Company. After graduation from M.I.T. he worked for the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, the Crystal Ice & Storage Company, the Realty Guarantee and Trust Company and the Falcon Bronze Company. He retired in 1953. As a member of First Presbyterian Church from 1899, he served as elder from 1921 to 1948 and taught Sunday School for thirty years.

Aside from business oriented activities he was also an organizer of the Youngstown Council of Boy Scouts, of the Friends of American Art, a long-time member of the Buckeye Artists, first treasurer and an organizer of the Youngstown Players, trustee of The Butler Institute of American Art for twenty years, Commissioner of Mill Creek Park for twenty-one years, an

incorporator of the Mahoning Valley Historical Society, member and later president from 1956 until his death, chairman of the board of Youngstown College from 1931 until 1955 when he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree. In 1908 he married Clare Mary Dryer, a Rayen classmate and they were the parents of four children, Dr. Warner Arms Wick, Mary Thompson, Emily Lippincott Wick, and Harriet Wick Schaff. He died March 16, 1972.

- D: First of all, I have a list of dates and events in the University's history and I wonder if you can think of anything that ought to be added.
- S: I think this is a list of dates that the Historical Society originally compiled and the University got from us. I think those are probably the essential dates. I think that's really it. Yes, the things which we have here at the Historical Society came originally from Dad's notebooks. There are details of when the University bought one building or another or moved from here to there in more detail, but these are the essential things. You do have the details about the YMCA transfer of control to the corporation. That was the long, hard-fought battle to have the YMCA give up control and allow the college to become an independent organization. For years, even after it was the Youngstown College, as far as the town knew, the YMCA still maintained financial control until 1944. This was a long, long fight. I don't think it would really have happened even then, except that accreditation depended on it. Finally, the accrediting boards would have no part of a college whose finances were controlled by a YMCA. That was a vital point in the history of the college, as far as its being a separate organization and master of its own soul. That is about right. The Dana School of Music--you have it here--was founded in Warren way back in the 1800s, but it didn't become part of the college until 1941.
- D: What was your father's occupation or main activity?
- S: He was president of a small brass foundry, the Falcon Bronze Company, from 1926 to 1953. He had earlier worked for the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. He worked for the Crystal Ice Company also, but his longest association was with the Falcon Bronze Company. He went to work there in

1918. He left Sheet and Tube to go there and then he became president and then finally sold it. It was dismantled and does not exist in any form now. Many of the guys who worked for that particular company however, founded their own bronze company down in Lowellville, so there is still a Falcon Foundry, but there is no corporate relationship.

D: What was his first association with Youngstown University or the College?

S: Well, in 1908, he taught mechanical drawing in the YMCA night school classes. I don't know how old he was. He was born in 1883, and was twenty-five I suppose at the time and just married. I don't know how my mother could stand it. Good Heavens, he used to rush off to the YMCA to teach mechanical drawing. He just did. It was the kind of thing he did all his life, really. But that was what he did at the very beginning; he taught those classes for a long time. So he was, in a sense, interested in the development of the educational wing of the Y for a very, very long time, all his life, really. Then he was a member of the Board of Directors of the YMCA, and on the education committee of the YMCA, which, of course, managed the night school. They were the ones who were running the law school, the night classes, and so forth. So he was in on it from the very beginning, from the night school classes all the way along.

D: How big was the night school at that time?

S: Oh, I don't really know. We could find it in our archives, I'm sure. They had quite a healthy-sized operation, I think, and faculty members would even come over from Hiram. I think that was the school that was most closely involved. They would come over, say, two nights a week for a variety of courses. I think that the courses available depended on who was willing to come and teach. They did have a law school and that did work. Local lawyers taught that. I think it was disestablished in the 1940s. Whether that had something to do with the legal profession or the bar association or requirements for accreditation, I don't really know. But that's how he got in on it.

D: How did the college develop from then? How rapid was the growth? How great was the demand for it?

S: I think it was growing all the way along. I think what happened was that industry in this town became aware that this kind of education was a good thing to provide for some of their employees, and they urged it as a kind of self-help. They thought that if you took a course in mechanical drawing or this or that, you would be more useful to their company and you would advance your own career. So, industry was willing, in most cases, and most interested in helping finance and arrange some of these things.

Then, according to Dad, they had a new general secretary of the YMCA. I think his name was Leonard Skeggs, who came to town about 1918. He had this ambition, dream, et cetera. Apparently, the local Y had a thriving education department and Leonard Skeggs, I think, was the first man to have the idea that this could develop into a separate institution. Now I don't know this, but this is what I would suspect. He was apparently a very brilliant man, full of energy, a mover and a shaker. He appealed enormously to Dad. They got along very well.

In about 1930, the YMCA hired Howard Jones to be part of the YMCA staff. I think he was originally assistant to Leonard Skeggs, second in command of the YMCA. He was also, I think, given primary responsibility for the educational program.

Now, the idea was born, probably in Leonard Skeggs' mind, or possibly in Howard Jones' and Dad's--they were all together on it--that this should happen, and I think the first idea was to keep the school going. At that point, I don't think they really thought of separating from the Y, but they felt that the direction of this school, whatever they were going to call it, was toward independence. They called it the Youngstown Institute of Technology. I think one reason they called it that was that Dad went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He had always talked about the "Institute". Their first job was to put the whole thing under the direction of a non-sectarian committee, consisting of Jewish, Catholic, Presbyterian, and atheist members, which immediately got it out from the philosophy of the YMCA. The Y trustees went along with this immediately and so it was set up this way. It really had its own separate board of directors, though it was still a child within the YMCA structure, and they

made Dad the chairman of that group. That was probably in the 1930s.

I was born in 1923, the youngest of the family. We always talked at the dinner table, everybody always knew everything that was going on and I remember when Howard Jones first came to town. He and Mrs. Jones would be invited for dinner. All the little pitchers with big ears had dinner with everybody always, and I remember hearing them talk about this. I feel as though the University is my sister. We grew up together.

I don't know how the structural part of it went when they set up this non-sectarian board of directors, or board of governors, or whatever you wanted to call it. But it was probably about then that they maybe made Howard Jones specifically the director. I don't think they called him "president" of the college yet. I don't think they thought of themselves in that aspect yet. But I think Howard Jones did not perform specifically YMCA duties; I think he was exclusively the director of the college.

I do know that Dad and Howard Jones were devoted friends, they just took to each other. They had a very warm, affectionate relationship throughout the years.

I used to feel that if I had been a businessman when they were going around raising money, I wouldn't have let them in because they were unstoppable. They simply were persistent, terribly optimistic, enthusiastic, determined, and I think they bored people to death. I'm sure they did. I know they did, these two guys with this one-track mind. But they were able to accomplish great things.

Businessmen liked Howard Jones because he was a very able administrator. I think fashionable, intellectual, academic circles now probably wouldn't be as complimentary, but the whole approach and framework is so different. He was primarily concerned with the budget, with meeting costs and finding buildings and making do and figuring out how to do it all. There was a certain group in town who simply thought they were out of their minds and absolute lunatics to think that they could do a thing like this. Some of this came from the old conservative establishment. In some educational circles around town they also

thought, "Well, you're just out of your minds. Don't bother. This isn't going to work and you're crazy." But Dad and Howard Jones apparently didn't mind being thought of as crazy or perhaps they were used to it. They persisted.

There was one thing I know that irritated and frustrated my Dad. The college would make money, but then the YMCA would take the profits to make up the Y's deficit rather than allowing those profits to go back into the college to buy another building or another couple of books for the library. This is the other terrible problem that they had. Until they separated control, totally, they couldn't get too far. This was absolutely vital for it to survive as an institution. I don't know what sparked the enthusiasm and the drive for this thing but it was a consuming, lifelong interest of Dad's. He worked his head off for it for years and years. He got a lot of satisfaction out of it, I'm quite sure.

- D: Did the reaction in the community start to change eventually?
- S: I think it did. It became more and more of an accomplished fact. I think it was terribly embarrassing to some people, for they didn't really want to admit that that place really was down there on Wick Avenue and they really were granting degrees. There is still--I'm sure you're aware of it--a sort of snobbery about it in some areas. But I think that this is dying, dwindling. Now it's a state university and I'd say it's a healthy adolescent with many problems still to solve, but it's well on the way.

Dad was a great biblical scholar. He taught Sunday School, too, and often said of the critics, "Oh, ye of little faith." He got very irritated, but then he'd laugh and go ahead anyway.

- D: What were the other problems before the college became independent of the Y? What were the problems of the faculty and the students?
- S: Well, I don't know much about the problems of students. In the early days, I don't think calling it a trade school in its early days is quite fair. This kind of thinking has led to the critics' snobbery about the place. As it grew from its origins in night school courses, it was used almost as an

employment agency for guys who wanted to get ahead in their jobs. It was so little and it was so intimate. Business colleagues or anybody else around in the community would call up the college and say, "Do you have a good guy who's good at something, and who's gotten his credits in such and such?" Westinghouse and Sheet and Tube would call when they needed somebody.

They were very interested in helping the local guy get ahead. And then they also knew that nine times out of ten, they had somebody pretty good. So they called Howard Jones or they called Dad. You know, it was a pretty tiny little operation in the sense that everybody knew what was going on.

Faculty members, I didn't really know and I don't have any specific memories about them. Mother was busy just being Dad's wife. She was very active in the Friends of the Library, getting a library established. They'd hold auctions and various money-raising things and an annual drive in order to acquire a decent, at least respectable, library, and I think she knew more about the faculty through faculty wives and tea parties than Dad did. That wasn't his cup of tea. I don't remember too much about that, but I do know that they just worked so hard, all of them, to start something, to establish an atmosphere and build a sense of pride in the early student body, a feeling that they were going to a school of which they could be proud.

I think the curriculum may have developed lopsidedly in those early days, because originally, it was mainly for business and law. The liberal arts grew and these other sides branched out and came along later. Dad wrote to my brother--my brother was and is a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago. When they took over East Hall from the Hugh Wick estate, the idea then was to make it into a kind of student lounge. I remember Dad writing to Warner and saying, "Okay. What do you need in the student lounge?" This was not natural to Dad, having gone to MIT, which was, in his day, a tough school and strictly a kind of scientific technological experience with very few frills. And there was his son, who was a philosopher and not a foundryman! He had the tradition and experience of the liberal arts and the humanities while Dad had been

busy trying to get through MIT and earn some money --he didn't know what a student lounge looked like. I don't think MIT had one in those days. MIT had not yet moved out of Boston to their handsome campus on the Charles River. It was a place "where men went to work, not boys to play"! This is an example of how they used anybody who knew anything; they tapped everybody's brains, everybody's experience, just to pull it out of the air and work something out.

D: What about financing, aside from dependence on the Y? Who were some contributors? How did the community respond?

S: Well, we had a great many very good friends. I'd say L. A. Beeghly and Mr. W. E. Bliss and John Tod were very generous. Also, Ward Beecher and Walter Beecher, the people whose names are on the buildings now, were very generous and very helpful. But I think they were generous because somehow they were sold on the idea that this was a good thing. It would work and it could work. Philip J. Thompson was another person who was very quietly generous and would come through. There were large bequests when they needed something such as the time they desperately needed steps for the old Rayen building. They had turned it into an engineering building and if they didn't get some money to fix the steps, they couldn't have opened it, you know, and there was this kind of response, too, to a definite emergency. The people would come forward. It was kind of a hand-made operation as opposed to and so very different from state money or federal grants. All the state systems are so anonymous. A federal grant from some federal agency does not have the emotional investment that a personal campaign produces.

D: What were the reactions to the change from the college to the university? Was it mostly a change in name?

S: I don't think I really know too much about that or if that made much of a dent as far as Dad's experience went. He was chairman of the Board of Trustees for about twenty-five years, I think, retiring in 1955. How those dates went, I don't know, but by then their battle was won. I don't think it seemed reason for a great celebration; it wasn't a case of "Whoopee, we're a university now." The big battle

had been fought and won long before and this outcome was inevitable. If anything, I would imagine that he felt, "Oh, heck, it's a state agency now," you know, with private control gone. Being a lifelong conservative Republican businessman, this was not about to be appealing to him.

D: What were some of the big battles?

S: I think achieving independence from the Y was the big one and I think it lasted for seven to ten years really. The people had foreseen it seven to ten years before it was generally realized and it was accomplished.

The school's acceptance in the community as a worthwhile institution, with its own integrity, was a major problem. The public had to understand that it was going to be a real school. I think those were the two things to combat: overcoming a kind of intellectual snobbery and achieving independence. Those are the two things that I can remember our dinner table being pounded on [at times/].

The legal counsel for the Sheet and Tube, J. C. Argetsinger, was a tremendous supporter of the college and he served on the first board of trustees. Frank Purnell, president of the Sheet and Tube, worked very hard. They gave us a great deal of support. It wasn't the business or industrial community that dragged their feet; it was the social community, the establishment, that didn't believe in the University. I can't come up with anything special there.

Good Heavens, when I think of how they fought to get some money to buy some books, and how now, with state funds, department heads can order books and they can order tapes and slides and this and that, I find that difference amazing. It's all so marvelous. It's just great.

D: The changes in the University from the time it became a state university must seem considerable.

S: Oh, yes, I think so. Well, of course, the tap got turned on for funds and this makes an enormous difference. I don't know how Dad would feel about this. He had a way of thinking that when he was finished with something, he was finished with it. He's been

dead about two years, but I remember way back in the old days, oh, around the 1930s and the 1940s, he talked about how this north hill here should be the cultural center of Youngstown because there's Butler Art and the college and several churches. I think he knew that Butler Art would be a historical museum at that point because Mrs. Arms had kind of intimated it. Now to see the campus just taking over this whole area he would sort of think, "Well, hurrah." Lots of people said, "Oh, don't be silly. You're out of your mind." Yet here it is, and I think it's marvelous as far as the town is concerned. It's going to turn a slum area into a campus. Of course, it's coming off the tax duplicate, but I don't know what kind of tax revenue they got on some of these properties anyway. It's too bad somebody didn't tape Dad when he was around. You might have wanted to edit it; it would have been interesting.

D: What was his reaction to the expansion that had taken place by then?

S: Oh, he thought it was great, just great and up until he left the board, he was still very, very busy acquiring properties like the Ford House and Pollock House and Clingan-Waddell Hall and so forth. I think, in one way, he was the right man in the right job because he was related to the families here. So many of the people were his cousins or connections or something or other. So I think he had an entree where another individual would not have had that kind of entree. It was simply a happy chance that his enthusiasms and desires belonged to a man who was as connected as he was. He knew so many potential donors. Where Jones Hall is, of course, was the John C. Wick house, which was, I think, the first building they went to as soon as they moved from the Y. I think it was the first property that they bought. John C. Wick helped Dad go through MIT and Dad remembers, as a boy, being in Mr. Wick's house.

When they laid the cornerstone for Jones Hall, I remember him telling about how, when he was eight or nine, he saw the old Logan Rifles Company go in and out of John C. Wick's house because President McKinley was there for dinner. And there was Dad, I don't know how old, a boy, a kid, just being so excited and I gather the Logan Rifles had a jazzier uniform than even the United States Marines. They

had red jackets and were very dapper and it was very exciting, as you can imagine it would be to a little kid. He was born and brought up on Wick Avenue himself and he had this long, sort of intimate family feeling about the area to begin with, and I think he felt about it as he would have felt about a child.

D: Well, he certainly was with it from an early age.

S: Yes, he was indeed. The remarkable thing, too, I think, was the degree of affection and rapport between him and Howard Jones. They made a marvelous pair. They really enjoyed each other, I think, loved each other dearly, and complimented each other, and were able to work together so well. That was an enormous factor in getting it going.

D: What about the administration in general? What were its problems and concerns?

S: I don't know if I can tell you too much about that.

D: Was it a matter of finances or community reaction or increasing student body?

S: Well, I don't remember particularly hearing that there was much of a problem in increasing the student body because I think it just kept growing. I think the problems were accreditation and increasing the number of faculty members with advanced degrees to upgrade quality which is continuous in the school.

D: Was it difficult to attract faculty?

S: I don't think so. The teacher that was going to come here was not the teacher that would be hired by Harvard, in those early days, obviously. But I think that it was a challenge and an opportunity and very exciting for many people to come, because one beauty of starting a new place is that you can do it your way. So I think that that was appealing in many cases. I have to rack my brains to remember along those lines.

I do remember my father and my brother arguing every once in a while. You know, Dad's natural inclination was to view the school the same way he viewed the foundry, as a business operation. My brother's natural inclination was to view it as an educational institution. So they sometimes argued, not necessarily without

mutual understanding, but their philosophies were different. I think the one thing that was essential to get started was the businessman's point of view. It was essential at the time to get it on its feet. After that, I think you can move on, and I don't think Dad was ever reluctant to have this development. Good Heavens, that's what he wanted to happen.

D: What about improving the quality? Did that lead to a better response from the community or did a better response from the community lead to any improvements?

S: Oh, I don't know. It's like one thing knocking the other.

D: Once things got started, did they move quickly or was it a slow-going process?

S: I think once they were established as a separate institution, things moved very much more rapidly.

D: Once things separated from the Y?

S: Right, it moved very much more rapidly. I think the other thing that helped promote acceptance within the Youngstown establishment was the auxiliary organization of the Friends of the College Library. The people that were supporting that were in a position to make it socially respectable and fashionable to help the college. They were always so fortunate in having people who really were supporters, such as Mr. William F. Maag, Jr., Argetsinger, Clarence Strouss, and lots of people that I can't remember now. Some of the ladies' teas were vital, that kind of thing.

There was great concern, too, in the early days, that the young female students should have a lounge and facilities and sort of a house mother, although I don't know if they had dormitories. But I do remember Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Argetsinger, mother and others organizing teas for the freshman girls and faculty wives. I don't think the trustees' wives do this sort of thing much on the average college campus these days, but it was done then because they were the only ones to do it.

D: They were very much involved.

- S: Right, they were very personally concerned with some of the things. I forget who the first dean of women was; I don't think it was Mary Smith. I don't know who it was, but I should remember.
- D: When the college became independent of the Y, the reputation changed. Did people, then, view the college as a real college and not in connection with the Y?
- S: Oh, I think they began to, really. That was the beginning of the break.
- D: Do you think that because the school was a part of the Y, it was a problem for many people?
- S: They didn't think it was real.
- D: They continued to think that it was a trade school or something like that?
- S: I think they did a little bit, yes. I remember one of the faculty who was respected in town a great deal and whom people were very fond of was Karl Dykema. I think he was the first academic dean. He may or may not have been. I think linguistics was his field and I think he was a very helpful person. He had a good deal of charm and was a sound scholar. He was also the first professor that people in town were aware of, and he made them realize that it was not just a technical school for engineering or preparation for industry, but that there was going to be a more well-rounded curriculum. Mother was very fond of him, I remember.
- D: Did most of the development in non-technical areas take place after independence?
- S: Well, I'm not sure. I don't think you could say that, because in order to achieve independence and accreditation, they had to have broadened the curriculum before that anyway. But I'm talking about acceptance in the town, that sort of thing. Judge Ford is another man who was very helpful. He was very much an individual just as my father was and I think they irritated each other often, but I think they also worked together very well and accomplished things. They had a good healthy respect for each other. It was kind of an affectionate antagonism; I don't know what to call it. They liked to needle each other.

D: Now, your father saw and you've seen the change in Youngstown University from evening classes to day classes, from the institute of technology to a small private college, then to a state institution. There have been many changes, but what were the greatest ones?

S: Well, I suppose the change from being a private institution to being a state university. The great state college systems, in this country, are one kind of education. Private institutions are another kind. They have many of the same problems, but there is a difference. I think that's the greatest change, really. Now, I think that it was essential that this particular institution become part of the state system. I don't think this town could have supported a private institution. The amount of endowment necessary would be just absolutely out of reach, and particularly now with private colleges struggling as they are--my golly--it would have been in real trouble. It was a very good thing that it happened.

D: That meant both for its survival and for its development.

S: Right, oh, I'm sure there are many things that I'm glad that Dad wasn't around to know about. I mean the last ten years of his life were pretty depressing. It was his given point of view. All the union troubles and labor troubles and so forth, he would have found very distressing and he would not have been able to cope with them. His mind set was of the golden days. He told me once that he never liked any president since McKinley. That was so. Some of those things would have been difficult to take. Fortunately, he was on the scene when his talents and point of view could produce positive results. He had left the active scene by the time all those problems had come along, which would have been frustrating, baffling, and very hard for him to take and to work out. So it was a good thing that he was around when he was for his own peace of mind. It was a good thing that he wasn't around later. He would have had a regular case of hives.

D: Thank you, Mrs. Schaff.