

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Education in Youngstown Project

South High School

O. H. 344

GERTRUDE BEEDE

Interviewed

by

Bernice Mercer

on

February 10, 1978

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: GERTRUDE BEEDE
INTERVIEWER: Bernice Mercer
SUBJECT: Secretarial Work, KKK, Educators, Discipline
DATE: February 10, 1978

M: This is an interview with Mrs. Fred Beede at her home, 7366 West Boulevard, on February 10, 1978, at 2:00 p.m. by Bernice Mercer for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program.

Tell me about your parents.

B: My father and mother were both born in Sweden. My father was eighteen years old when he came. He came to Jamestown, New York, because he had friends there. There were a lot of Swedish people that lived around Jamestown, New York. My mother's family settled in Ashville, New York, which is near Jamestown. She was six months old when her parents came. She was born in the northern part of Sweden and my father was born around Lake Vattern in the southern part of Sweden.

M: In Sweden they wouldn't have met?

B: No, they wouldn't have met in Sweden because of the difference in the places that they lived.

M: Language too.

B: Yes, language too. I know that my grandfather Johnson, my mother's father, went back to Sweden in 1912. He sent cards at that time about the sun never setting and all of that sort of thing. That was a great thing in our lives to have grandpa go back and be able to tell us all of that. We never learned much about my father's education. My father died when he was 51, but my mother lived to be 89.

M: Her education was here, of course, but tell us about his education.

B: I don't know anything about my father's education.

M: What was he able to do?

B: He was able to do many things. His writing was very good and his figuring was very good. We think he must have had some background in education in Sweden, but we didn't know exactly. I suppose my mother would have known if we had gotten to ask her, but we didn't think to ask her.

M: He was able to help the children and so was she?

B: My father was very much interested in education, and he always said that if it weren't for the degree, he could do things that other people did on the railroad. He worked for the Erie Railroad as I had told you. He always said that if it weren't for the infernal degree that he would be able to do what other people did. He was very much interested that my brothers go to college, and they did. Fortunately, there was a college in Meadville, Allegheny College. My brothers went to Allegheny and both my sisters went to Allegheny. I was the only one in the family that didn't go to Allegheny. For some reason or another I didn't go, but I think it's because my father had died before that and when I went to high school it was the thing to do to get into something that you could do right away.

M: Secretarial work?

B: I took the teachers' training course and I taught shorthand and typing for a number of years in New Castle before I came to Youngstown. In Youngstown I taught one class and I got a teacher's salary, but the rest of the time I was in the office. Mr. Eaton wanted somebody who had more than just a high school education.

M: Did they have another secretary too?

B: Yes, we had several secretaries that were under me, so to speak.

M: I was wondering about this earlier, whether the secretarie's work was just one person's entire responsibility the way it is now. This was at South High?

B: Yes.

M: That was the first place you taught?

B: Yes. I came to South High because of Jean Fry; she was a teacher there. She was Dean of Girls. She knew my family, although I had never known Jean Fry, but she knew the other members of my family. My sister worked with her sister, and Jean Fry had taught in high school when my brothers were in high school so she knew the family. Although, I had never met her until I came to Youngstown.

M: She wouldn't by any chance have been a science teacher?

B: No, I don't think she was a science teacher. She taught history.

M: Was there quite a large section of South High that had commercial studies at that time?

B: Yes, I think there was because not too many people went to college from high school at that time.

M: A lot went and took the commercial and got into business then?

B: Yes.

M: Describe what South High was like when you first came.

B: It was a very nice building.

M: It was new?

B: It was fairly new because it was built in 1911, but it had gotten bigger than the original building so the wing to the south had been added. I think the wing to the north was added later.

M: The thing we're interested in about the secretaries is how in time you became full-time secretary.

B: I always taught a class when I was at South High.

M: Even after you had full responsibility?

B: Yes. I had charge of the school funds as well as secretarial work.

M: That was a lot.

B: Yes. Every day I had to take the cafeteria money to the bank right after lunch. I couldn't do that nowadays because people would know.

M: There was a cafeteria in South High early on?

B: Yes, there was a cafeteria in South High at that time.

M: Talk about the principal a little bit and also the method by which you really knew almost all of the kids.

B: Mr. E. J. Eaton was the principal. He liked to have a secretary that had more than a high school education so that was why they came to me. It was through a letter from him and a letter from Jean Fry that I came to Youngstown. My brother lived here at that time, and so I came to Youngstown and was interviewed and stayed with my brother. In the fall of 1923, I came to Youngstown and knew a good many of the students and kept track of the records of many of the students. I knew many people personally because they came into the office for various reasons.

M: You would know all of the teachers?

B: Yes, I knew all of the teachers.

M: Quite well?

B: I knew the teachers because they came into the office in the morning, and I was part of the teaching staff.

I never taught more than one class.

M: Just one?

B: Yes.

M: How did it come about that you really were able to be acquainted with almost all the kids?

B: I had to work on their records, so I knew. That was something that we did in the summertime. I worked eleven months out of the year.

M: The teachers all left and you had all of that compiling to do.

B: Yes, we had a lot of records to keep in the summertime to put on the permanent record cards.

M: You wouldn't remember about what the total population was of South High at that time?

B: At the time that both Chaney and East were opened in 1926 the enrollment went down considerably at that time. Before that it had been fairly high.

B: Chaney also is that old?

B: Yes. They were both opened at the same time.

M: Both of them drew from South?

B: Yes. East drew from Rayen, I think, and Chaney drew from South. People on the other side of the river went to Chaney.

M: Everyone that had any problems that required coming to the office you had to deal with?

B: Yes, I had to deal with them. I have one very funny story that I would like to tell about Mr. Zidinger, who was one of the English teachers. He was a very literate man. You didn't question him about things because you got into a great deal of difficulty if you did. One time a colored boy came into the office and he had been late. He had written down on a sheet that Mr. Zidinger brought in later that he had assisted a fallen woman. (Laughter) I didn't dare tell Mr. Zidinger what it meant to me because if that boy had assisted a fallen woman he had assisted somebody that had fallen down. That was the way that Mr. Zidinger took it and that was the way that the boy meant it. To me it meant something else, but I didn't say that to Mr. Zidinger.

M: The pun would have been lost.

B: He took things so literally that it would have been a great loss. I would have spent the rest of my time explaining what I meant. He was a fine man, but he was very literate.

M: You had to deal with all kinds of emergencies?

B: Yes. Many of the children came in when they were in trouble, and I had to refer them to the dean and do that sort of thing.

M: Who was the dean?

B: Herbert Jones was the dean at that time.

M: Before he got with this you probably did the emergency.

B: I never had to deal with people definitely.

M: You knew all about what the things really were?

B: I remember one red-haired boy, Oliver Ripple. I remember him very well because he said over his shoulder, "You're a hard, harder Hanna." He said, "I think it should be hard, harder Gertie."

- M: I'm interested in the matter of the troubles, the problems that the children had, their financial situation, their dress. Was clothing a problem sometimes?
- B: Yes, it was. I learned many of those things from Jean Fry because she was the Dean of Girls. She often went into homes and found out, or people would come to her and say I can't do so and so because my mother doesn't understand. She would go to a home and find out just what happened or why the mother wouldn't understand. There are certain things that they had to do that had to be done a certain way. The mothers couldn't understand because it hadn't been part of their experience.
- M: Sometimes languages too?
- B: Yes, there was a language barrier too. Sometimes the child would have to be the interpreter because the child would understand English but the mother wouldn't.
- M: These would be mostly . . .
- B: Italians in those days.
- M: To begin with Italians, but then after Polish and Russians?
- B: Yes, I think so.
- M: Did they have trouble buying proper clothes?
- B: I don't remember whether they had trouble buying proper clothes. I can't remember the children that Jean Fry talked about particularly. I can remember the people who dressed well and came to school. There were many American families who did even as early as that, who brought their children up to high standards. They had high standards of dress and so forth.
- M: Did that create a social problem?
- B: I don't remember. I don't think that it did, but maybe. I can remember that you wouldn't go out with a boy that had a name that was different.
- M: There was sort of a barrier between the Italians?
- B: Yes, I think so.
- M: Do you think it was both ways?
- B: I don't know whether they did or not. In the time that I grew up we were trying very hard to be Americans even though our parents had come from another country. You were trying very hard to be American. Many people

changed their names to American names at that time. Nowadays they don't do that so much.

M: Attitudes have changed?

B: Yes. Girls had trouble at graduation time because all of the girls had to wear white dresses. The parents couldn't understand why the white dress. Maybe it was a hardship to even get a white dress and maybe it wouldn't be something that you could wear again.

M: Everybody was in white?

B: Everybody had to wear white at graduation, that was before the days of caps and gowns. Now you can put anything under a cap and gown and it doesn't make any difference what you have on.

M: Was there a special dress for the boys?

B: I don't remember anything about the boys.

M: Jean Fry was concerned with the girls?

B: Yes. I think the boys wore suits mainly, and ties and collars in those days.

M: Was there a good deal of absenteeism?

B: No. There were not many absences in those days, except for the children who didn't want to come to school. There were always a few of those. They were made to come to school and maybe they didn't want to come.

M: This was true even then?

B: Yes.

M: Did the school supply books?

B: Yes, the school supplied books. We had a supply store where you could buy things at a lesser price than you could buy someplace else.

M: The students didn't have to buy books?

B: No. That was one of the big things that we had to do too, to keep track of the books.

M: That size school, that would be a large job?

B: Yes. It was a big job.

- M: That was done during the summer?
- B: Yes.
- M: There was a cafeteria and they had cooks?
- B: Mrs. VanFossen, who was a home economics teacher, had charge of the cafeteria, but they had regular cooks that would cook the meals. She was in charge of the cafeteria and saw that the food was prepared and bought ahead. I can't remember anything beyond that.
- M: Did most of the teachers eat there?
- B: Yes. Most of the teachers ate there as far as I knew.
- M: Did you feel that the lunch was very good, very nourishing?
- M: I thought it was a good lunch.
- B: You don't remember any of the names of the cooks?
- M: I remember Maggie was one cook, but I don't remember what her last name was.
- M: She also had something to do with serving?
- B: Yes.
- M: We mentioned earlier the role of custodian. Did they have the same janitor for a long time?
- B: Yes, Mr. Croal was the janitor for a long time at South High. He was a tall, thin man. I don't know that that makes any difference.
- M: He really had quite little contact with the children?
- B: I don't think he had quite as much contact with the children as he had with the people in the office. We would send for him if there was a breakdown of any kind in the rooms. Lots of times there were people that had difficulties in the rooms and the teacher would send for somebody from the office. Very often I was the one to go. I remember one particular girl who had fits. We used to stretch her out and send the rest of the class out someplace. I can remember her name was Doröthea, but I can't remember her last name.
- M: Was it this way the entire time she was in school?
- B: Yes, I think it was.

M: She didn't improve at all?

B: No. I think that now things would have been different because they give all kinds of medication to people like that.

M: She probably would have had it so she wouldn't have this problem. The teacher wouldn't be frightened?

B: She knew what to do.

M: This could happen in any class?

B: Yes, it could happen in any class that Dorothea went to. I remember it particularly in Latin class. The teacher was an older teacher and she knew what to do. She would send the children out someplace, maybe she would go with them, I don't remember, and I would take care of Dorothea.

M: It was just a matter of waiting?

B: Yes. Waiting until that phase was over.

M: Then she would be pretty much herself?

B: Yes. We would send her home usually because she would be depressed for the rest of the day or something of that sort. She wouldn't feel like herself for the rest of the day.

M: I wonder if she was terribly upset by this?

B: I don't know.

M: The attitude of the teacher would have a lot to do with it.

B: Yes. The attitude of the teacher would make a great difference. Children at that age can be very cruel.

M: Yes, that's what I was thinking about.

B: I don't know whether they were hard on Dorothea because of that or not. She apparently married later in life. I never knew what became of her.

M: It's hard to tell whether people were always cruel or whether there is a difference.

B: I think they were always cruel as far as that's concerned. I can remember incidents from my own childhood when people would make fun of you for one thing or another. I remember walking to school one time in front of some girls and this other girl said, "Their father works with

Italians." That was supposed to be a putdown for us, but it wasn't.

M: You didn't take it that way?

B: No, we didn't take it that way, but I suppose we felt badly.

M: They might have envied you for some reason?

B: Maybe they did, I don't know.

M: You came here in the 1920's. Speaking about the Italian children in high school, do you happen to remember anything about the Ku Klux Klan Era?

B: I do remember something about that because Mr. Stilson and Dr. Evans were both embroiled in that. I don't remember them building any crosses, but I remember one time coming out to what they used to call Dead Man's Corner, at Market Street and Midlothian.

M: That was their farm, wasn't it?

B: Yes. There was a place out there where the Ku Klux Klan gathered one time. There were no buildings there at that time.

B: They had a picnic ground and things like that.

B: Maybe so.

M: Did it affect the high school students?

B: I never knew that it did. Maybe it did inadvertently. Sometimes things like that you weren't aware of. I suppose I was more aware of myself at that period than I was at any other time.

M: What was the Ku Klux Klan's main opposition?

B: I don't know exactly. I never got embroiled in the Ku Klux Klan because none of my family was embroiled in it.

M: It just didn't affect you that much?

B: No.

M: You did know these people?

B: Yes. I knew the people that were part of it and I knew about them even though they were on the board of education.

- M: Did you know anything about the churches having any part in it?
- B: I didn't know, I never heard that the church had any part in it.
- M: In some places they had a great deal. You were in church here in Youngstown and your church took no part in it?
- B: No, as far as I knew it didn't take any part in it. I remember asking Mr. Eaton when I came to be interviewed for the job, "Do you want me to watch Miss VanCuren?" She was the secretary before I was. He said, "No, this is your job and you do it the way you see fit." I thought that was a very good piece of advice.
- M: Maybe he wanted you to do things neater?
- B: Maybe so. I found out afterwards that Miss VanCuren had been a person that was very hard to get along with. He wanted no part of that. Maybe she had higher standards than he did or something like that.
- M: Do you remember things that were taught? You understood what was going on in the commercial thing. Talk about Mr. Beede. When did he come?
- B: He was already there when I came.
- M: He taught mathematics?
- B: He taught mechanical drawing at that time. Later he taught mathematics. He was the only mechanical drawing teacher that they had, but they had one after that that taught some mechanical drawing. I think that was when Greg went into the mathematics department and later became assistant principal.
- M: There was a science club?
- B: Yes. We had a good science department. We had biology, physics, and chemistry. The people that were in that department were very, very helpful people.
- M: Their classes were popular?
- B: Yes.
- M: English, of course, they went all through?
- B: Yes. Mr. Zidinger was the head of the English department. I mentioned him before, he was the man who was so literal-minded that he couldn't take a joke.

M: He was in the wrong occupation.

B: There were many people that I knew that were in the English department: Ella Wajung, who is a retired teacher now, and Ethel Milligan was one of the teachers of English, and Mr. Johnson. Herbert Johnson was a teacher of English. He was well-known, and well-liked.

M: There was a good deal of a requirement for writing and composition?

B: Yes. There was a lot of composition work at that time.

M: Besides literature.

B: And grammar and that sort of thing. It was demanded. You had to be able to do certain things.

M: Would you say that there was anybody coming out of high school at this time that really couldn't read and write?

B: I wouldn't think so. I think that people who came out of high school at that time were well educated. They didn't always go on to college, but if they had the ability, they found jobs in other ways.

M: When they had the diploma at this time in the 1920's those diplomas really meant something.

B: Yes, that's right.

M: You say people didn't drop out that much?

B: No, not that I knew of.

M: There were some that had low grades?

B: Maybe they dropped out before they got to high school, but I didn't know too many that dropped out.

M: There weren't any great number that had consistently low grades?

B: There were a few, but I didn't have much to do with them because they didn't go on to college at all. I wrote all the transfers for college; I had to do all that sort of thing.

M: I thought that there were a lot of things that we weren't thinking about. Did they have to take tests to get into college then?

B: No, they didn't. If they had a transcript of credits

that was all you needed.

M: They looked at your credits and that was it? They didn't have college entrance exams?

B: No. College entrance exams are fairly new.

M: For all the time that you were there they had no college entrance exams to contend with. This matter of getting those transcripts, there would be about how many in the graduating class?

B: I don't remember exactly how many.

M: There would be maybe a hundred?

B: Maybe a hundred, around there. Sometimes we had as many as five hundred graduating.

M: That was a big job to do all of those.

B: Most of them went to Ohio colleges. I sent transcripts of credit to most of the colleges in Ohio. Many of them went to Oberlin. Many of the people who have taught in the Youngstown schools went to the Oberlin classes for kindergarten teachers. They had a class for kindergarten teachers at that time.

M: Oberlin tended to start things?

B: Yes. I know at least one person who is retired now who went to the Oberlin Kindergarten School. They had a music course that was very good at Oberlin, too.

M: What's the Presbyterian School, Wooster? Did people go there?

B: Yes. They went to Wooster and Ohio Wesleyan.

M: Was Kent much of a college at this point?

B: Yes, it was.

M: It was started already?

B: It was started already.

M: Was it a state school?

B: No, I think it was a normal school, but I think it was a state owned school.

M: They tended to go to Kent rather than to Pennsylvania?

B: Yes.

M: People didn't go to Pennsylvania to school?

B: No, people didn't go to Pennsylvania. In fact, I was the only person from Pennsylvania that came to Ohio.

M: That school was not in New Castle?

B: No. The school was at Indiana, Pennsylvania.

M: That was quite a ways, wasn't it?

B: It was quite a ways from Meadville. I had to come to Youngstown and then go to Pittsburgh and then go to Indiana from there. The reason I did that was because they were opening the course in commercial subjects at that time. The woman who lived across the street from us thought that that was a good field to get in to. I had taken some commercial work in high school and she thought that that was a good chance of me getting into the teaching field and not having to spend as many years as you did.

M: There was money coming in from athletics and you had to manage that?

B: Yes, I had to take care of all the money that came in from athletics. I remember that we had some big games in that time and sometimes the money would have to be put in the bank after the game.

M: They had football?

B: They had football, basketball, and track.

M: Baseball?

B: I don't think we had baseball.

M: Besides that there were concerts?

B: Yes. There were concerts and dramatics.

M: Those both involved money that you had taken care of?

B: Yes. I don't think I had to do anything with the money until it was in lump sum and was transferred to me.

M: It was all part of your responsibility?

B: Yes.

M: Were all of those things well attended?

B: Yes, they were very well attended. The students attended them, and their parents attended too.

M: It was really a whole neighborhood thing?

B: Yes.

M: Plays and everything?

B: Yes. There were not as many things going on in those days.

M: Outside of the school?

B: Yes. The school was sort of the focal point for many things.

M: We were talking about the attitude that the board had in this period of time.

B: Not only the board, but the superintendent sometimes.

M: About a degreed person.

B: Yes. A person that had a degree could go on and on, but a person that didn't have a degree was not considered for many jobs.

M: Moreover, when the job had been achieved, work that had been done didn't always get credit.

B: That's right. That's the thing that bothered my husband. He felt that he could do all these things. I think that's the thing that bothered my father too, he knew that he could do all of these things, but he couldn't do them because he didn't have the degree. Fred had a B.S. degree and he had taken courses beyond college, but he didn't particularly want to get a degree in education.

M: Education courses that early on?

B: Yes.

M: He took the things that he needed?

B: Yes, he took the things he wanted to take rather than the things that were prescribed for a masters degree.

M: He also told about a counselor that worked for him.

- B: Yes, Jodi DeGennaro that went to California. Because he had had some work with Fred in the field of counseling he was able to get credit from a university in California.
- M: If it was Mr. Beede directly, not . . .
- B: No, it wasn't from the powers of B.
- M: That was the entire thing, that the board of education who he had worked for refused to give him credit?
- B: Yes.
- M: I remember at Hillman Junior High when it was new, your husband was principal. We want to have a description as well as we can. I'm sure you'll remember those. You went to those wonderful concerts. Not just concerts, but wonderful family nights in that auditorium. Would you mind remembering some of those things? Those auditoriums would be packed. Do you remember the things that they used to have?
- B: I remember something about them, but I don't think I remember enough about them.
- M: Would you say they had plays?
- B: I don't remember whether they had plays or whether they had more concerts.
- M: A lot of singing and things?
- B: A lot of things that involved a lot of people.
- M: Not just musicians?
- B: No, not just musicians.
- M: Wouldn't they have acrobatics?
- B: I can't remember exactly.
- M: Maybe I ought to put this into it because I remember pretty well.
- B: I remember that everybody took part.
- M: It seemed like it was the most terrific evening.
- B: We tried to get as many people involved in it as possible.
- M: I remember even the boxers would come out as part of the

music. It would be a part of the show.

B: I can remember that. Maybe I wasn't there at the time that you recall particularly.

M: Everybody was involved in it and everybody came too.

B: Yes, they were well attended.

M: The school was the showplace at that time.

B: It was the newest school that had been built.

M: It was built so well.

B: Yes, it was well built.

END OF INTERVIEW