

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Youngstown State University Project

Maintenance Department

O. H. 365

RICHARD WEBER

Interviewed

by

Terence Lynch

on

May 13, 1977

## RICHARD WEBER

Mr. Richard Weber was born on December 3, 1923, in Ravenna, Ohio. He is the youngest of two children. His father was a steelworker at the Republic Steel Plant in Newton Falls, Ohio. Mr. Weber graduated from Palmyra High School in 1940. When World War II began, Mr. Weber worked at the Ravenna Arsenal. After the war he did fabricating and structural steelwork in Newton Falls.

Mr. Weber acquired his long-standing job at Youngstown State University almost by accident. In 1946 while recuperating from a hernia operation Mr. Weber, in need of some light type of work, applied for a part-time job at Youngstown College. He was hired by Percy Pickard, the business manager to do maintenance work. The department was just a two-man crew at this point with Mr. Weber doing all repair work and painting inside and outside.

The maintenance department has grown immensely since the days of just a two-man crew, and Mr. Weber's responsibilities have grown with it. He currently holds the position of chief of building maintenance and employs a vast number of men. He and his family live at 603½ Wick Avenue behind the Pollock House where Mr. Weber has resided since he began his employment in 1946.

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INTERVIEWEE: RICHARD WEBER

INTERVIEWER: Terence Lynch

SUBJECT: Maintenance, Professors, Administrators

DATE: May 13, 1977

L: This is an interview with Mr. Richard Weber for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the history of Youngstown State University. We are in Mr. Weber's office located at the physical plant and maintenance building. The date is May 13, 1977, at 8:00 a.m. The interview is by Terence Lynch.

Mr. Weber, could you please speak a little bit on your background before coming to Youngstown State University.

W: I was born December 3, 1923, in Ravenna. I got my high school education in Palmyra. I worked at the Ravenna Arsenal during the war. I did some fabrication work at Structural Steel in Newton Falls approximately one year before starting at the university in 1946. There was a two-man crew when I started with three women at night. Shortly after I started, we put on an extra man to work in the engineering building which had just opened at the old Rayen School. This man was hired exclusively to set up equipment for class use in engineering because we did not have the space to leave the equipment set up. It would be set up for a period of a quarter or a semester, whichever we were on at that time. It was taken back down. In some cases it was up for only four to six weeks. His job was entirely working with the students and professors in engineering. No other maintenance work was done by him except for this one building. When I first started my first job was painting. It was only part of my work, but that happened to be my first job. I did repairs on all the equipment that was on campus inside and out. At that time, I even mowed the lawn. In about 1948 there were more buildings added with the addition of barracks put up as classrooms. There was an addition put on Jones Auditorium. There was also another wooden structure known as Central Hall

which was used for the cafeteria and the band room upstairs. Prior to this time, there was only the main building, the engineering building which had just opened up in 1946, the secretarial building, which was a wooden structure just north of Jones Hall, and the Dana School of Music. Oh yes, we had West Hall which had been the home of the engineering department before it was moved to Rayen. It was completely empty at this time and we used it for storage.

L: Could you speak a little bit about your family?

W: I was one of two children, the youngest. I have a sister who is a year and a half older than myself. My dad was a steelworker. He was a foreman at Republic Steel of Newton Falls. He also did construction work; he was a carpenter by trade. My mother was a housewife and a telephone operator. Is there anything else that you would like to know on that?

L: How did you become associated with Youngstown College?

W: It was strictly by accident. I had a hernia operation and I was looking for a little lighter work than structural steelwork, so I put an application in and they hired me. I still got a part-time fill-in job while I was recovering from the operation. I liked the people so I continued on.

L: What was a typical day like for you in the 1950's or in your first years here at Youngstown College?

W: A typical day could be anything from painting, stopping to go repair a compressor motor, or opening or closing valves.

The control system was not as it is today with individual thermostats in every room. The heat was turned on in the morning and shut off in the evening or when it got warm. Or maybe two or three times during this kind of weather the heat would be turned on and off manually.

We took care of the electric lighting, repairing lights, switches, and base plugs. There is a big change in the buildings due to the automatic controls for heating and air conditioning. We had no air conditioning for a number of years, it was all fans and opening windows. Now we very seldom have open windows because of the air conditioning.

At that time we had a part-time crew that we would call in for moving furniture and spading or digging outside if ditches had to be dug. They were like a small contractor who would come in and work by the day and

would bring whatever metal was necessary. We took care of all the inside maintenance. As I mentioned earlier, I did mow the grass. We mowed our own grass, but that was about the extent of our outside maintenance. We did our own snow removal. Of course, at that time, we only had two small parking lots, the one across from Jones Hall and one in the center of the campus. When I started here the enrollment was a little over two thousand

L: What time did your day begin?

W: The day would start about 7:30 in the morning and end anytime after 5:00.

L: Who would have been the outstanding professors and administrators at Youngstown in the years that you have been here?

W: There have been a lot of good professors and especially the department heads that were here were very excellent. They were excellent to work with: Dr. Worleg in biology, Dr. Scuddor in chemistry, and Mr. Williams in the secretarial school.

That is one thing that we had that we don't have now. I was sorry to see us lose it, but there is a state or federal law--I forget which--that was passed where an instructor had to be full-time. And unfortunately, all of our instructors were part-time lawyers, attorneys, judges and didn't want to give up their other jobs to teach full-time. But the record showed that we had one of the best law schools in Ohio because we had the highest percentage of people that passed their bar exam on the first try.

L: Who were some of the outstanding administrators?

W: Dr. Jones was president. At the time I started up to the time that I went, till after we went state, Mr. Pickard was the business manager. He worked directly under the president. He acted in the role of vice president. He was a wonderful person to work with, and that is probably the main reason why I stayed so long. He was one person that was very outspoken, but regardless of what he said, right or wrong, he was right behind you on any judgment he made. He stood right behind you and he made the decision right then. You didn't have to wait for what was going to happen, you knew immediately what could be done and what couldn't be done.

L: What was President Jones like?

- W: He was very good. I dealt more with Mr. Pickard than Dr. Jones because I worked directly under Mr. Pickard. But Dr. Jones was a very easy man to get along with. He was easy to please because he knew what he wanted. He would let you know exactly what he wanted so it made easy working conditions all the way around that way. You did what you were told, and if something had to be done, you knew exactly what to go ahead and do.
- L: How is the university different from what it was when you first arrived?
- W: It is a lot bigger. There is a lot more responsibility. It is more motivated with automatic equipment, which means that you have to have a different caliber of personnel to operate it, to keep it functioning. When I first started, you didn't have to know too much mechanically. You had a few controls, but the wiring diagrams weren't as complicated as they are today. Under automatic equipment you have a number of controls that have to function properly in order to give you your automatic heating and cooling and all the environmental things that we like today.
- L: Do you enjoy working here now as much as when you first started?
- W: Yes, I enjoy it as much now. There is more paper work to be done since we have gone state. Since it is the taxpayer's money, you have to keep records of everything, which is only natural.
- L: What was the general view of the people of Youngstown towards the university when you first came here?
- W: The people always thought that the university was always part of their belonging. They were all very cooperative and still are in trying to help the university in any way that they can, especially business people. If you are in a bind and you call on their help or for advice on things that you don't quite understand, they are always more than willing to help, both then and now. If we are stuck on something and need advice from a contractor, he feels free and open to give us advice. Even though we may be doing some of his work, he is still free with his advice and very open about it. When we need something done, we will call on them to bid on the job before anyone else. They understand that everything is done on a bid policy now. Just because they give us free advice, we don't go out and hire them. But in general, the public has always looked at the university as part of their project. You do run into a few, maybe

two percent that don't agree with the university, but it is fairly minor. I think you have probably noticed it since you have been here, how well everyone seems to be in harmony with the university. It has been that way all the way through.

L: How was the university promoted to the general public over the years?

W: Your public relations, and we try to work hand in hand with any other group, whether it is a church, Boy Scouts, or the YMCA we work back and forth with our facilities, with our advice to one another.

L: Was there any one person that was in charge of that type of thing here on campus?

W: Yes, Rita Flint. She has retired and since passed away. She had a woman who worked with her, started here and worked for a number of years, Margareta Fredrick. She left and became a receptionist for her brother who became a doctor.

L: Do you think that the university as a whole has changed for the better over the years?

W: I would say definitely yes. The reason that I say that is that we kept improving, adding more departments, and it has given a broader scope to the students. I think it has given more to the community in the way of entertainment and the music department, the plays from the drama department and the lab and research work that we do for the community. Yes, I would say that it is pretty definite.

L: Do you miss the closeness of the small college?

W: Yes, that is one thing that I think we all miss that was with the old university. The closeness, when we were much smaller you knew everyone. You not only knew the faculty members and the staff, you also knew most of the students, where today you don't even know all of the faculty as well as know half of the students.

L: What were the students like when you first came here?

W: They would just come up and offer to give you a helping hand if they saw you struggling with something, or if it looked like you were in an awkward position. And that is still true. I think on the whole the students all the way through have been very good and very cooperative with the university.

- L: Do you think the influx of all the veterans after the war made a difference in the university?
- W: I would say that the only difference that it really made was that it made the university grow faster. You needed more space quicker. That is one thing with the old university and still is true, they would not build anything without having the money so there was never any interest to pay on which helped keep tuition down. That was remarkable when we went to state that we still had the lowest tuition in Ohio.
- L: What was spring commencement like in your first years?
- W: In the first years we had spring commencement and baccalaureate, which has since been dropped. It was always on Sunday and it was always held in Jones Hall Auditorium. One of the big things that they always had there was a picture taking on the steps of all the seniors.
- L: What do you think have been your major contributions to the university?
- W: I think just doing my job to keep everything going as smoothly as possible.
- L: Looking back, is there anything that you would like to have changed as far as how the university was run over the years?
- W: No, I don't believe so. I am not a good administrator so I wouldn't change anything. Mr. Pickard was one of the best administrators as possible and with what funds that were available, he did the best he could.
- L: Did Mr. Pickard get along well with President Jones?
- W: He got along well with both President Jones and Dean Smith, and he got along well with all the faculty. He was well liked by everyone. He was a real administrator in my estimation because he could get along with everyone and still accomplish what had to be done with what was available to get it done with.
- L: Is there anything else that you would like to say?
- W: No, I don't believe so. If I have answered all of your questions satisfactorily than that is it.
- L: Okay, thank you, Mr. Weber.
- W: Okay.