

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Leetonia Project

Resident Experiences

O. H. 773

FLORENCE WILHELM

Interviewed

by

Theodore Carchedi

on

April 24, 1986

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: FLORENCE WILHELM

INTERVIEWER: Theodore Carchedi

SUBJECT: education, athletics, businesses, wartime,  
Depression

DATE: April 24, 1986

- C: This is an interview with Florence Wilhelm for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Ted Carchedi, at Leetonia, Ohio, on April 24, 1986, at 4:10 p.m. This is a history of Leetonia, Ohio.
- W: I moved from Pittsburgh in 1915 to Ohio. After going to a city school, I went to a one room country school and from there I went to a centralized school.
- C: Where was the one room country school?
- W: Bonesville was the name out here.
- C: Bonesville?
- W: Bonesville was the name of the country school.
- C: Where is that at?
- W: It is right out here in Fairfield Township. It has burned down; it is not there anymore.
- C: Why was it called Bonesville?
- W: I really cannot tell you. I don't know. One year in a country school was sufficient. My sister and I were taking all the prizes in writing and booklets and so on. We were farther advanced than what the students were there at that school. I was in fourth grade and then went to the centralized school starting the fifth through my freshman year. We moved to Leetonia when I was a sophomore.

C: What year was that?

W: That was in 1921.

C: What was it like going to high school in 1921 in Leetonia?

W: Well, the whole high school would be in one big room. We didn't have separate rooms. We had about seventy-five students. We must have had three women teachers and about three men teachers. There were not too many. We had a very good curriculum because we had both French and Latin for languages. We had three years of math and four years of science. I took requirements for college. We had four years of English, three years of Latin, two years of French, and three years of history. We took all the subjects we could. Now they are lucky to graduate with a few credits, where we had twenty, twenty-two, twenty-four credits to go to college.

C: You had more than enough?

W: I had sufficient, yes, twenty-two credits. We only had to have sixteen. There was no physical education because we didn't have a gymnasium. We did have a basketball team though. We used to play either at Kelly's Park or else we would play down at St. Patrick's school.

C: This was interscholastic with other schools?

W: Yes, because we would play Columbiana, East Palestine, East Liverpool, Wellsville. We used to go by streetcar to Wellsville and East Liverpool. I can't remember how we went to East Palestine. We must have gone by car. I could drive a car then. I started to drive when I was just sixteen.

C: Is that right?

W: Yes. I used to drive to Kelly's Park. One time I couldn't get the car started and walked home after practicing basketball. We used to practice against Columbiana and then play them in a game. Then after I had graduated from high school here, I went to college. I went to Wittenberg for four years and then came back and started to teach in Leetonia. When I started to teach there were only ninety in high school.

C: You said there were about seventy-five students at the high school and it was all grades together.

W: Yes. Well, that is where we would assemble. We had classrooms that we would go to.

C: Were there other grades in the building?

W: Yes, downstairs. We were in the upper part of the building. Downstairs they had the first four grades. First and second

grades were in one room and the third and fourth in another. Then they had home economics in one room and industrial arts in another. That was the ground floor. Then the next floor would have the seventh and eighth grades. We had classrooms in the others. Even one of the cloakrooms was a classroom. I had an English class with twenty people in a cloakroom. The cloakroom was large because it was for two rooms and it was right above the stairway and then the library was at the top of the stairway. They had physics lab and chemistry lab and another room that was separated there. So there were four rooms upstairs. The largest single room is where we would gather for checking roll and so on.

C: Where was the high school?

W: On the third floor.

C: No. I mean where was it located in town?

W: High Street, right across from the Presbyterian church.

C: High Street?

W: Yes, there is nothing there but trees. William Jones built a house over part of the basement of the North Side School where the high school was on the third floor. The Mowery's built a house on the land at the corner of High and Oak Streets. So there are two houses on the place now.

C: Do you know when the school was built?

W: The first graduating class I think was in 1881. I can't tell you exactly when. This one down here was built in 1895.

C: The South Side School?

W: Yes. I can remember that because I passed it every morning and would see that cornerstone.

C: When was the high school torn down? The one on High Street?

W: About 1939 or 1940, because we moved into the present building in 1938, January of 1938. We started the 1937 year in the old building and moved up there in the new building in 1938. The cornerstone is 1937.

C: There are still a few remnants, if you look close enough, of some old brick or stone.

W: There were huge stones right at the entrance, that is where you had to go in and go up the steps. They were around several different places around here.

C: They are at the funeral home. They are a decorative type of thing.

The fire escapes were shaky. Was that the only way to get up to the third floor?

W: No. There were steps inside.

C: Why did you have to use the fire escape?

W: For fire drills. They were required by the state. There were no toilet facilities or anything. Students would sign out, they would go downtown and you would wonder sometimes where they were.

C: So, the facilities were outside?

W: Everything was outside. Until we moved to the new building, we were not really too modern, were we?

C: Can you tell me a little bit about the teachers as you were going to high school in the early 1920's? What was it like to be a teacher then if you could picture yourself in that position?

W: When I went to school or when I was a teacher?

C: No, when you went to school. Was it different for teachers back then from what you could tell as a young person?

W: Yes, I would say it was quite different. They would assign us homework and we would do the homework. Parents cooperated and if they didn't do the homework, well there were various means. We used to have detention and they would have to stay after school. Of course, most of them were from town. We didn't consolidate until 1931 I think it was. After I was teaching. Even when I first started teaching it was just the high school people. Everybody would go home for lunch. Now, I walked that for years. We would go to school in the morning and we would be at school at 9:00 and then they changed it and it started at 8:30, that was the high school. We would be out at 12:00, and at one time we would have an hour and a half for lunch, because we would always get caught with the train; we couldn't get across. Then they changed it and we would just have an hour. I only had an hour too when I was teaching, but my mother was living then and she always had my lunch ready. If I was late getting back and the students would be late, we wouldn't be counted late because we would be held up by the train. They would open up trains and let us walk across the Pullmans in order to get back to school. They were very accommodating. Sometimes they would take water around here so the train would be here for some time. There was one that went through at 12:30.

C: But if you were late . . .

- W: We never got counted late. If I was late, the students were late, because we would all be together. It didn't make any difference what the temperature was, we still walked to school. I walked to school when I was teaching for years. I don't know why some of these students can't walk. I think they are spoiled. Look at me, I am still here. It didn't hurt me to walk day in and day out. The only year that I drove was after I had eye trouble. I had all these operations on my eye. The students used to kid me and say why don't you drive your car. I used to tell them that I would rather the car would rust than to have me rust out. So, as a result, I walked.
- C: You stayed a lot healthier.
- W: That's right. Of course my father and I lived here together fourteen years. He lived fourteen years after my mother. He didn't retire right away. He worked quite a bit of the time. He stayed home the last four years. He always cooked the coffee. I told him I could smell the coffee when I turned the corner. I said--For heavens sake, don't let everybody in the neighborhood know we are just going to have coffee tonight. Well, those are just things that happen in the family.
- C: Going back to the teachers here again. Would you say that the parents were always supportive of the teacher?
- W: They were. There would be a case now and then where some mother would think her darling could do no wrong. But most cases everybody cooperated. We had lots more work to do. I didn't have any trouble with calculus when I went to school and I only had school here in Leetonia, and these students today are having a terrible time. It shouldn't be. They should be better prepared.
- C: Why is that?
- W: They are not prepared sufficiently.
- C: Is it because the teachers aren't demanding enough?
- W: I think they are not pushing students hard enough. I don't know of anybody whom I taught that flunked calculus. Now, if I had a good group I would do something ahead of time. In fact, I used to ditto my calculus book for them to do the last six weeks so they would have an idea of what they were going to get into. It helped them. We were assigned things and I think our teachers demanded more of us. They expected us to do more. I think we did more.
- C: Why has it all changed? Why did the parental support and the image of the teacher diminish over the years? The idea of the support of the teacher is gone as well. Why has this all changed? Why are they less demanding?

W: Well, I think there are several things. One of the things, too often the parents are not home; they are both working. That is sad if the children come home and the parents aren't there. I can never remember my mother ever being away when we went to school. She always was there. If she was not there we would know ahead of time. In Pittsburgh, she used to go shopping on Tuesdays, but we had to stay with my dad then. We were not allowed to go home and be by ourselves. I think too often the kids are turning a key and trying to get into the house and there is nobody there. You would think the parents had lost interest in them. So consequently they don't care. On the other hand, I think parents are too easy with children. They don't have enough discipline in the home. I just heard a little six year old talk back to his mother yesterday and he is as cute as could be, a little red head. I said, "Are you going to let him get away with that?" She said, "I'm going to win the round." I said, "I'm surprised at him." He turned around and said, "I didn't see you, Miss Wilhelm." So he knows I don't take it. His brother talked back different times, but he could sit in my house and is as nice as could be and is pleasant. I think parents are not firm. Now I don't mean to brutally beat kids, but I think sometimes a little smack is something they need to let them know who is superior in the family, who's boss.

C: What do you think about corporal punishment in the schools?

W: I think sometimes it is necessary. But the many years I taught I never spanked a student. I did give them backhands if somebody sassed me. I would give them backhands because I think sometimes they need it. One that I gave a backhand went home and told his parents. Then he really got a paddling. To this day he meets me on the street; he'll come up and put his arm around me and say, "You know you taught me the best lesson in the world." I said that you should not be sassy with people. He was old enough to know better. He said, "My mother said you were the one that really straightened me out." I said that I was glad. I had his sons and daughter and they were as good as gold. They knew better. I didn't take their back talk. I don't know why. I think maybe I demanded respect. That is the only thing I can figure out. I noticed the seniors when they come and I'm sitting there. I don't know them and they look at me kind of shyly and they usually behave. But I have had seniors for years and most of them know who I am. I don't know a lot of them. I don't think parents teach their kids respect at home. If you don't respect your parents, how are you going to respect a teacher?

C: I think it has to be a two way street.

W: It does have to be, yes.

C: The teacher today doesn't get that support from home. When the children does something wrong, more often than not it is the fault of the school not of the child. This has really changed since

the 1920's.

- W: I think students are sharper today. They size you up before they will ever start doing anything. When I met all the seniors in homeroom I never gave them any rules. I usually said to them, "I'll treat you the way you treat me. If you want to act like kids, I'll treat you like kids. If you want to be grown up and be adults, that will be wonderful. We will have a good year." No rules. Everybody would come in and I would speak to them, usually say something to them if I knew there was somebody sick in the family or "What's the matter? You're kind of grouchy." It was something like that to kind of relax a little bit. I had the seniors in room 50 which is next to the office. I used to have sixty in there at one time. We didn't have any trouble. The students used to pick up chairs because I would have five right next to my desk. I would tell five boys that if they wanted to sit there their job everyday was to pick up the chairs and put them over by the window. If they didn't want to do it they were to tell me then. I would find somebody who will. I never had one to tell me no.
- C: Do you remember any of your teacher's names when you were in school?
- W: Yes, I think I do. I could even name my first grade teacher. Yes, I could name them all the way through. Would you like to know some?
- C: Just give me some names from Leetonia High School?
- W: When I started teaching Mr. Stonebraker was our superintendent. He was from Wellsville. He was there two years and then he died. Then Mr. Narragon came in. Mr. Narragon was there seventeen years. I taught seventeen years under him. The principal was a Mr. Floyd when I went to high school. Then I taught under Mr. Whinnery. I couldn't forget him. He was a stocky man from Salem; a lot of people respected him.
- C: A disciplinarian type?
- W: Yes, he was a good disciplinarian person. I'll tell you one thing he did. A boy was kicked out of Lisbon. We would get them from Lisbon if they misbehaved down there and they threw them out--they would come to Leetonia. Well, this boy came to Leetonia. This was when I was teaching. He put the end of a compass in the toe of his shoes and he struck somebody. I had study hall and I saw what happened. We were always to send them to him; we weren't to discipline the boy at all. He was somebody we all knew was kicked out. I said, "You go to Mr. Whinnery!" They hated to go to him. He didn't go to Mr. Whinnery. He went out to the restroom and he finally came back and was coming up the steps--I got to Mr. Whinnery before he did because we reported it at the end of the period--and Mr. Whinnery took him by the back of the neck and just pulled him right up over the

steps and put him in the office and said it was where he belonged. He said, "Now are you going to tell me what you did or do I have to go and ask the teacher?" He said, "I'll tell you," and he told what he did. That boy was scared to death because he thought he was going to get thrown out of Leetonia High School too. But he wasn't. He was a football player and he finished high school here. Mr. Whinnery was really stern. Now he didn't paddle anybody very often. But he could park you on the chair kind of hard and talk to you and he would stare at you.

C: You got the idea.

W: You got the message. You didn't have to do much more.

C: Would you say your teachers at that time when you were in high school were disciplinarian or authoritarian types?

W: I think disciplinarian. I had a Miss Renkenberger from Columbiana for physics and she was stern. A tall person, well built, carried herself well. She came by streetcar and walked over the same as we did. That's it, they walked like we did. We thought they were all right. There was a different feeling about them. If they would do the same thing we did and would ask us to do things that they themselves would do, but if it was an impossibility then we would begin to think they can't do that themselves. I don't think teachers did back then. I think teachers gave them tests that they would do themselves.

C: Did you have men teachers?

W: Yes, we had Mr. Shupp, who was principal part-time and also the football coach. We always had a football team. You know that. We are noted for that. Miss Strickler was our Latin teacher, from Columbiana. She was not only Strickler by name but strict otherwise too. Then we had a little dolly girl, Miss Bailey, who was the French teacher. You know French people. They were always kind of fragile I would say. She was like a little china doll. She was pretty and so everybody thought she was cute. She was little. That is the sum and substance of our outfit mostly.

C: The way teachers were expected to behave, was it different then? Was it something that would be looked at as ridiculous today?

W: We wouldn't dress the way they dress today. We would have never been allowed to go in slacks. I can hear Mr. Whinnery getting us together and saying, "I expect you to dress neat and up-to-date, but let's not get crazy with frills. No red dresses, nothing red or flashy." I remember they said we couldn't wear a red dress. I thought that was something. My mother made my clothes.

C: This was when you were teaching?

- W: This was when I was teaching. We were always, I would say, more reserved. It wasn't that we couldn't wear different things, we did, but we were more reserved. Nothing flashy. Afterwards I started wearing earrings and jewelry and so on because at first we didn't.
- C: You were not permitted to? Could you be expelled?
- W: No, they didn't expel you. If Mr. Whinnery didn't like anything he would call you in. He would never embarrass you before the faculty or anything. He would call you in and mention it to you if it was something. That was the way it always was. But then that was the only time when I was first teaching they ever said anything.
- C: Was it a little bit different for your teachers? Was it even more strict, do you know?
- W: It was for ours, yes. It was more so for ours when I was going to high school because it seemed as though they were beginning to let up a little bit. You could be your own self for a little bit more a little later.
- C: Yes, because I was reading something the other day. It had to do with a school in New York back in 1879 and the teachers were only allowed to court once a week. If you were seen going to the barber shop or a hairdresser your integrity was up for questioning. Smoking was not permitted. Did any of those things happen?
- W: There were places locally here that we were told we were not supposed to go to. We would have never gone to the OSI.
- C: That is the Sons of Italy, a bar?
- W: Yes, any of those places. Of course there was no American Legion at that time. That has only been in existence recently. Our reunions of different classes are there.
- C: You couldn't go to drink?
- W: No, no you didn't go any place like that. Well, of course my parents were not permitted in either because they just were not the type of people. My sister was a teacher too. She had taught at Mineral Ridge. They were kind of strict up there too.
- C: If you were a male teacher could you do those things?
- W: They probably could get away with a little more than we could because we were supposed to be people that were respected and looked up to. Parents didn't expect us to do various things like that. They always invited us to their different homes. The first thing in Italian homes, they offered you wine.

They were just trying to be hospitable. We never participated because we didn't want them to think that we were going to do something different. Now people go and don't think anything about it. I've been in any number of these homes and they have always been very friendly. I just don't drink so naturally they just don't think anything about it. If they offer it to me I say, "No, thank you." They don't feel offended. They know.

- C: Was it permissible for teachers in the 1920's, particularly the females, to marry and still retain their position?
- W: No, no you couldn't even get in the building that you're in now. If you got married that ended your contract.
- C: How late are we talking about?
- W: Fifty years ago you couldn't get married and continue teaching. I would say maybe it would be forty, around forty years. After World War II that changed. When World War II came along there were so many things that changed because we didn't have hardly any men in the faculty. They were gone.
- C: They had to accept the fact because they needed a teaching supply.
- W: That is how I got started keeping score. I paid my way into a basketball game and Mr. McBride came to me and said, "I need a scorekeeper. The game is ready to start and I don't have one. You can add and subtract, get up there."
- C: Mr. McBride was who?
- W: Mr. McBride was the principal and he was also the coach because Mr. Mather had been gone. He started the year but then he had to go and then Mr. McBride took over the basketball.
- C: As a young girl going to high school you said you played basketball?
- W: I played basketball even when I was teaching too.
- C: What were some other forms of entertainment you could do as a young girl in Leetonia?
- W: Well, in high school we had a French club and a science club and we went to those things. We always had football, so the boys were always out for football.
- C: Besides the school activities, in town what was there?
- W: Well, we used to go skating down where it is now Route 344. When they put Route 344 in they changed the stream that we used to go skating on.

C: A pond?

W: Yes, and we always played tennis. I played tennis for years at what is now the South Side School. They took our tennis court after we worked so hard to make it. There used to be a tennis court right over here at Weikart's on Pearl Street. We used to play tennis there. That is where I really learned to play.

C: Were there business establishments you could go to occupy your leisure hours?

W: Well, we used to roller skate around here and play hop scotch and things like that. We always played ball right out in the street. I always played with the kids too.

C: Was there a movie theater?

W: Yes, we had movies. What is now the laundromat used to be the movie. The other one is down on the corner of Bear's Den. That was a nice movie house operated by Pat Kelly.

C: Where exactly do you mean?

W: Do you know right where you start up the hill?

C: On Chestnut Street?

W: On Chestnut Street. That building on the right was the movie. That is a shame they let that building go like that. Nobody wants it. There was Kelly's Park. He had the park and he owned the movie. Then of course he died. I don't know who owns it right now, but they are not doing anything to it. We even had high school plays in there at one time. Kelly's Park is now the entrance of Route 11 from Route 344.

C: The plays, was this when you were in school or when you were teaching?

W: No, when I was teaching. That was when I was teaching. But when I was in school, the movie was up on Main Street where the laundromat is. There is a different building there now. On the corner there was the bakery where we could stop and get baked goods. You could buy baked goods for a nickel then. But you can't buy like that now. We had a five-and-ten across the street. Where Vallone's is was the post office and right next to that was a place where you could buy liquor. Right next to that was the five-and-ten cent store. We used to always go to Stewart's Five-and-Ten. The daughter was in my class so they were very friendly there.

C: Was it literally a five-and-ten? Everything was five and ten [cents]?

W: Well, I would say five, ten and a dollar possibly.

- C: We still call some stores today five-and-dime's.
- W: Yes, but they are far from that store. You're lucky if you can buy anything for a dollar. Well, you could buy most anything at five-and-ten. We would buy pencils, paper and ink and pens and so on.
- C: Who owned that particular business?
- W: Stewart's. They owned the building too.
- C: What other businesses were in the business district?
- W: There were a couple of grocery stores down there. We used to have Raueh's and Stambaugh's. We had an Islay's store; that's where that one building is. A drug store, we used to go and they played music in the back and we danced there. We could go meet people there. It was kind of a place where the kids could gather.
- C: Who owned that? Who owned the drug store?
- W: Joe Burick. Well, it was Paul Johnson who first owned it. His grandchildren and great-grandchildren, their name is Hertel. Their great-grandfather owned that building.
- C: Where was that located?
- W: Now where Spatholt's Hardware is.
- C: On Main Street?
- W: Yes, on Main Street. Next to that was Beilhart Shoe Store and next was the drug store and next to that was the bank. Now it's donuts and baked goods. I used to know everybody on Main Street because we walked through there all the time. I go downtown and I sometimes don't know anybody on Main Street. I can't believe it. But that is how it has changed. Now Spatholt's used to be where the post office is now.
- Another thing we always did in high school and even when I was teaching, we had a science fair or we had to display what students made. They don't do anything like that. Wood working, home economics, chemistry notebooks, physics notebooks, anything that you could display. They don't do anything like that today. Which means that students don't have projects. I think in the grades they might have a little bit of something, but somebody asked me not too long ago about projects. They don't do things like that. I think the students are not given enough work.
- C: I know there is art, they have . . .
- W: Yes, we never had art.

- C: They do display some things at the high school, a lot of the departments do that. But I think that it's true; I think there could be a lot more of this done.
- W: We had an orchestra as well as a band. They don't have that anymore. Some students played violin and they would have like an orchestra as well as a band. Now they stress the band.
- C: They are really one in the same?
- W: Yes and no. Orchestras have string instruments but bands don't.
- C: When did you graduate from high school?
- W: 1924.
- C: 1924?
- W: I graduated from college in 1928.
- C: Just in time for the Depression. What was it like when you came back to Leetonia and the Depression hit? What was it like in town?
- W: Well, at first it wasn't too bad. I really got to teach here because somebody had resigned and they had a vacancy. I didn't know I was going to teach here until August. I had another job out of Akron and I hadn't really gone to see too much about it. But they had offered me a job and so on. My sister was married to a Holt, and his father was the president of the school board. Of course, we all went to the same church and he said to me, "Why don't you put an application in? We need a teacher." That is how I got the job. I was picked up at the last minute.
- C: That was in 1928?
- W: That was in 1928. It wasn't too bad in 1928-1929 or 1929-1930. Then in the next two years it got to be real rough. 1931 was good yet because a chemist at the furnace lived up the street and I was teaching chemistry. You probably never realized that I taught chemistry and physics besides math and English.
- C: I didn't know that.
- W: Yes, I taught physics until 1963 or 1964. Chemistry would be about 1952 or 1953. We didn't have that much math. Then somebody would come in and teach algebra and I would teach the algebra II and I could do that with the chemistry and physics. At one time I had two physics classes. No one will ever believe that. That was in 1945 and 1946. I had two physics classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, besides the chemistry class. Usually I had two chemistry classes. I can't understand why they don't have those. I would be teaching trigonometry

and that would be my schedule. Lots of times I went eight periods a day. No free period. I had to do everything outside.

C: No planning period?

W: No planning period. But then in the 1930's when the Depression came that is when they really cut down the faculty. There was just enough for us to really go. We were not paid for seven months. Well, I was at home so it wasn't bad for me. But two of the teachers lived down the street. The people kept them. They said eventually they would be paid. That is how they did it. Everybody took care of everybody else. Eventually we got our money, but we had to wait until summer. We suffered; we survived. You could survive on literally nothing.

C: What about the people who had families?

W: Well, that is how we lived in a house this big because my sister and her family and two children lived here, besides my other sister and me. So there were eight of us who lived in this house at one time. We survived.

C: It was an extended family.

W: Yes, they didn't have any place. You don't turn your family out. You looked after your family. I was teaching and my dad was working. But my brother-in-law wasn't. He worked at the furnace. That was when the furnace was shut down.

C: Cherry Valley?

W: Yes, Cherry Valley. Then eventually he got in to something else. He started to work over at Jones and Laughlin in Youngstown. That is where he worked until he died in 1965. It was in the 1930's sometime when he started to work there. He was working and didn't get to go to war. He was old anyway. Neither one of my brothers-in-law went to war. They both had responsible jobs and they didn't have to go. They were older too, as far as that was concerned, and they had children.

C: When you started teaching in 1928, how much did you get paid?

W: We got a hundred dollars a month and they took four out for our retirement. Our retirement system was in existence then. The teacher's retirement system started in 1920 because my sister paid into it when she started to teach in 1922. They took four dollars out for that and they took two dollars out for dues for the National Teachers Association. We had no teachers organization in Leetonia.

C: There was no local . . .

- W: No, we had no local one. We did no griping. Whatever they gave us, we just accepted it.
- C: You didn't gripe back then?
- W: No, you didn't. You were just glad you had a job, particularly during the Depression. We didn't have tenure. Mr. Narragon eventually got us tenure. I didn't have tenure until 1942 or 1943. Of course at that time I had a life certificate as far as that is concerned. And he suggested to us to go and get our Master's. I got my Master's degree in 1936. I got it through Pitt. I would go to the extension in Youngstown and then I was on the campus two different summers. Of course I had relatives there, a place I could stay all the time and go to school. But he said, "Go to school and get your Master's. It will be worth it." I still have my life certificate. There are still a few of them left in the state.
- C: Yes, there are still permanent certificates out there. When did the union get started, the local LEA get started? Do you remember?
- W: I would say in the 1950's. I should remember because I was secretary for so long, keeping all of those records. I would say it would be in the 1950's, because we had PTA and I was secretary of PTA and secretary of that and I said, "Who has time to write minutes?" That was as far as I ever got to be, secretary. Then I said I didn't want any more because I had seniors and went to basketball games and I had other extra activities and so on. As far as going to basketball games, I provided my own way. We used to take the boys. I would keep score so usually I had the reserves and would go since they played first. I would have five boys with me. The players were nice. We never had any trouble. Then finally they got to go on the school buses. They were always nice kids. We never had any trouble with our players. I know we went to New Waterford one time and they had a fight with one of the players, and I had five reserve boys that night. Someone said, "You would go with those bully kids." I said, "Yes, I would. They are utterly harmless." Larry Duko's father was one of them with me and he sat right next to me and said, "I'll sit right next to you in the car and if anybody goes to touch you, I'll jump and hit them." It was all a case of kids pushing. They had to eventually stop the game.
- C: Going back to the union for a second, do you think it was very effective when it first started out?
- W: No, it was just an organization, that's all. We would get together and it didn't amount to anything.
- C: Not much negotiating then?
- W: No, no negotiating. In fact, I think it was kind of useless.

Why can't they really reason with the teachers as they are and pay them according to what they do. I'm still for that. I think they should be paid for what they do.

C: Merit pay?

W: Oh, I think there should be a merit pay, I really do. I never lived through it but I think if a teacher has done a good job they should have an increase in salary. If somebody has been loafing on the job, why should they be paid that well? They need to work and I think they need to go to school in addition. I think they are forcing teachers to do too much in the education line. Of course, some of the education courses didn't do you one particle of good when you get into the classroom. They would give you an ideal situation; you never had an ideal situation

C: They give you a lot of theory.

W: Theory that you can't put into practice. They make it so perfect and students aren't. Everyone is different. They are so different at times. Students are the same way. Some days you feel perfect and you feel you can do everything right and students are the same way. They are up and down. I think we need to have a little more encouragement to the students. I think the teacher has to be a parent and a teacher anymore. I found that out even in the last few years I was teaching.

C: Probably even more so now.

W: I think even today it seems worse. Because you have more divorces and working parents. Things that they would tell me I just couldn't believe would happen in the homes. They would come in with no breakfast. I would ask them why they didn't have any breakfast. "Well, my mother and dad were arguing this morning. How could we have any breakfast? They had to have another fight." Well, I think there is too much turmoil in the home.

C: The students would tell you about their home life?

W: Well, of course I knew a lot of the parents anyway. I had even the third generation. So, I would know a lot of the situations. Living here I would know what was going on in the home. It wasn't up to me to tell them, but to try to guide their kids to do the right thing. We haven't had very many kids that have gone bad. When I think about it, well I had one who lived down the street, but then that poor kid was beaten half to death by his parents. He served some time in the penitentiary. Then I had another one. I just can't believe that boy. He used to tell me what happened at home. I think his home situation could have been better. He could be still in the "pen" but I don't know. I only know those two. I don't mean they all were perfect; I don't mean that. They could be devilish. But pranks and things,

I can tolerate that. They used to ride through my yard and tear up my yard and I would be provoked but I would find out who it was after a while. One of them came and told me. I said, "Now, why did you do that?" "Ah, just to tease you," he said, "I knew you would fix it and nobody would know." And that's true.

C: Kids are kids.

W: Yes.

C: When you were teaching in the 1930's and you saw people living through this Depression and the kids coming to school, I imagine there were a lot of kids that quit school.

W: Yes, there were.

C: What was that like, teaching in the 1930's, during the Depression?

W: That was hard because you would get somebody that would be out for six weeks and then decided to come back. I even had a situation in the 1950's of somebody that was furious at me because I disciplined him, in fact I backhanded him. He went to the army and the army wouldn't have him because of an injury. He had to come back and be in my homeroom or he couldn't graduate. That was a bitter pill for somebody to have to come back. The president of the class came to me and he said, "Well, Joe wants to graduate so he is going to have to be in your homeroom this winter. What are we going to do about it?" I said, "What's Joe going to do about it? I treat all of you just the same, you know that." He said, "Joe wants to come and apologize because he wants to come back and play football." I said, "Well, fine, tell him to come in and act like a gentleman and he can be in my homeroom." He was a gentleman. I went to Lisbon sitting with Lisbon teachers, because I knew the teachers around here. Some man behind me just tore him apart, said he couldn't be any good on the football team or anything because he was over age and the army didn't want him and this and that. I turned around and said, "He is in my homeroom and he is not nineteen until the last of October, so he is eligible because he was eighteen in September." So for the last half of the game I went over and sat with the band. I thought--I'm not going to get into any situations like that.

C: Was it sad seeing a lot of these kids, their home lives being destroyed? Did you get a lot of stories being relayed to you about this?

W: Yes, you would hear of different things that were happening. The divorced homes are the worst I think because the kids are torn. They don't know what to do. I think it upsets them physically and mentally. Naturally they do a poor job. That is going to happen as long as we have people.

C: Did you and your family make it okay then from those years of the 1930's?

W: Yes.

C: Your father was working?

W: Yes. Well, my brother-in-law had a tool company here so he gave my dad a job.

C: What tool company is this?

W: That's Holt's, the Leetonia Tool Company.

C: Right, you told me that.

W: That's my brother-in-law. Of course, he gave my dad a job when he was out of a job. As long as my dad had a job, my dad was the kind if he had a nickel he would make sure somebody got it. He would take care of the family. So, he took care of us. My other brother-in-law would try to do odd jobs and he helped around here. He did some repair work and things. You don't let the family starve.

C: Everybody was supportive?

W: Yes, that's right. That was true in a lot of families here.

C: What was it like not only for the faculty but the kids as well, the students, as you moved into the new high school in 1938 after the WPA built the new high school in 1937?

W: Oh, we thought that was just heaven. We had something wonderful. We were so proud of our new building. It was so clean, you could have eaten off the floors. You didn't walk on that gym floor! You stayed off the gym floor that was just perfect. You were only allowed to walk on it with gym shoes. We used to have parties after the football games and basketball games and no one wore their shoes. I didn't either. Our shoes were lined up. If it were seniors that would sponsor it, then I would have to stay. I always wore pumps; mine stood there along with the rest. We danced with the kids. We always enjoyed ourselves. When it was time to go, everybody went. I never heard of our kids getting into too much trouble. Most of them went home. Maybe they would ride around a little bit; there would always be somebody who would ride around.

C: That was quite a milestone in the history of the town because that seemed to be a focal point. The school was always a focal point in the town.

W: The only basketball games would be on Friday night of course. We didn't have them on Friday if we had a game on Tuesday night.

The football games were also on Friday night. We would have at least five or six football games so there would be that many dances. We would have about nine or ten basketball games. Somebody always had to be there. Most of the time I was there, because it would be seniors that would be sponsoring it. We might charge the kids a nickel to get in or a dime. I think we got to a quarter. I think at the last we would charge a quarter. Then the juniors might take over. They would ask other teachers, because we would have more than one teacher there. I wouldn't be the only one there.

- C: In 1938, when you moved into the new high school, what was your salary then? Was there much of a change?
- W: Not much of an increase. I got more than a hundred dollars as I taught. We didn't get much of an increase until after World War II. That was when we really got a decent increase. I think I was making six or seven thousand maybe by 1945. I never did make the salary you people are making.
- C: Oh, we are making big money these days, yes. (Laughter)
- W: I think when I retired I was only getting ten or eleven thousand dollars.
- C: Yes, but look at the cost of living then.
- W: Yes, there is a difference there.
- C: Tell me about teaching as World War II approached? What was it like?
- W: It got to be pathetic. In my trig class I had had fifteen or seventeen--I can't remember--I ended up with two. They always had to go.
- C: Did they volunteer?
- W: The age, as soon as they got to be a certain age, they had to go. They were seniors, or most of them were seniors. They had to go when they were eighteen.
- C: When did they go? Was it before they graduated?
- W: The first one that went . . . Did you ever know Joe Driscoll who was the superintendent over at Crestview for some years?
- C: No.
- W: Well, he graduated in 1943. He went in February because he was eighteen then and he had volunteered for the Navy and they picked him up. He was the first one who had to go. He wasn't there

for commencement.

C: Did he have to finish?

W: He got his diploma but he didn't go to school after February. He was in the Navy. The rest of them were so close they would be in May and June. Joe Weikert was gone, but he got to finish because he was in that same class.

C: He finished out the year?

W: Yes, he got to finish out the year.

C: I don't know if you can envision this or not, but what did the kids feel like as this was coming on, knowing that they were going to be going to war? Here they are still in high school . . .

W: You cannot imagine how some of them felt. They would say, "What is going to happen to us?" It was hard to try to suggest to them because we didn't know ourselves what to say. "Well, I don't know. You are going to get to see another part of the country," I would tell them. I would try to get them to think of the nice part

C: The positive.

W: Yes. Positively instead of negatively, but you never knew what was going to happen. When they came back, it was a sad situation. There is one that lives right up beyond the schoolhouse there on the left hand side. He was a pilot.

C: What was his name?

W: Wayne Shive. He bombed Germany quite a bit. He came to see me about the second day he was back. He would just walk and keep looking out the window. I said, "Wayne, what is the world is the matter?" He said, "I'm wondering when the Germans are going to come over here and bomb. You just don't know what that is like. He was on about fifty-some missions and he cracked up on the last one coming back; that is how he was able to come home. He said, "You don't know what it is to drop bombs and you don't know whether you are killing people or whether you are really bombing the works. We were supposed to bomb the Krupp works and we mistargeted. We came home on a wing and a prayer." That is the way he talked about it. Some of them were relaxed and would say something, some of the rest of them wouldn't say a thing. Some of them have talked to me and said some things and their wives would say, "How did you find that out?" I said, "We just started talking about what it was like." My niece's husband was in the Pacific and he was in the invasion of the Philippines. He said you just can't imagine what it is like. I said that I went to the Philippines and what were they fighting for? They weren't even worth it. I wouldn't live there if they gave me all the islands. We even had to have an escort to go to

the airport. It's not safe there. It's alright to go to see what it's like. Yet Japan--I've been to Japan--they treat you like royalty. That is just the opposite. They are very friendly and very nice to you. However, some of the things that have happened you wonder how they treated people. Of course, I'm not for war. I think we should stay home and mind our own business. My opinion doesn't mean anything.

C: I'm all for that. So a lot of these kids that came back, I imagine many of them were killed?

W: Yes, we had numerous ones that were killed.

C: Can you name any of those people from town that were killed as boys

W: All the ones of Vietnam were the worst. Vietnam veterans, I don't know what is wrong with them, but there is something wrong. The girl who lived next door to me, her boyfriend went to Vietnam. They planned to get married but he was killed there.

C: What was his name?

W: Dan Ferry. Joe's brother. Too bad things happen the way they do. It changes everybody's lives. World War II, things were a little bit different. My niece went on to college, and all the time she was in college, he was at war. My nephew was in but he was a Navy man. He really didn't see any action. He was on the USS Midway and it couldn't go through the canal, so they were here in the Atlantic.

C: What about the Korean conflict? Does that stir any memories for you?

W: I don't think it effected too many of them. Jim Stelts was in that. Several of them were in that. I don't know of anybody that was killed in Korea, but there were several in Vietnam. Some of them were wounded. Stouffer, do you know who he is?

C: Yes.

W: Well, that's a sad situation. He was at the bottom of the list in his class. He really wasn't a very intelligent kid and he really didn't have too much either because his mother and father were divorced, and then to go and be handicapped the way he is. The government can't give him enough money each month as far as I'm concerned because he is really just battered up. I really never thought he would ever live. When he first came back to school to visit, one arm was off, one hand was off, and he was in a wheelchair. He has a lot of things all fixed up; he doesn't look as bad as he did then. He gets around fairly well. He gets about a thousand dollars a month or more, maybe it's eleven hundred. The governemnt can't pay him enough as far as I'm concerned, for being battered up like that. Even

though he wasn't very intelligent, I think he could have done better in school than he did, but he was just one of those carefree kids. He didn't care about school. That is the way a lot of the kids are. World War II took a lot of our boys. That was rough to have so many out of school. We tried to keep going. Naturally, we tried to have a football team, a basketball team and there was not much there . . .

C: Did they cancel any of the seasons?

W: No.

C: They kept them going?

W: Yes, they kept them going. They were poor. We didn't get along very well, but we made it.

C: What was it like teaching in Leetonia after the war years?

W: Well, the end of the forties and fifties . . . The fifties were enjoyable.

C: They were?

W: We really enjoyed school in the fifties. I don't know, when did you go to school?

C: I graduated in 1972.

W: Oh my, you didn't go then. You are a mere child, aren't you? The fifties were a lot of fun. We had a good football team, and a nice basketball team in 1950. Those students were little but they were so nice to work with you couldn't help but like them. They are a nice bunch even today. They are always very friendly and so on. The one rollercade that was put in recently, well his dad graduated in 1950. He was on the basketball team and he's not too big. We got to play at South High and Don Gardner was the announcer for WKBN and that was just heaven. We all enjoyed that. I sat next to Don Gardner and told him who the players were. It was fun for everybody.

C: It was a nice period of time.

W: Yes, it was a nice period.

C: What about the 1960's?

W: Well, the 1960's were not too bad. I would say the ideal class I had was 1957. There was no class that was any more ideal. Dr. Nicolette's son Charles, Pat Less, a group of them. Everything they did was wonderful. We had a dinner over at the golf course and left there at 7:30 and came in and had commencement at 8:00. It just went off like clockwork. It was just beautiful.

C: So it was a good experience?

W: Yes, it was. Those students did everything well.

C: In the 1960's with all this . . .

W: Now, the 1960's were getting a little bit upset.

C: A little more rebellious period? The students were growing their hair long. There was a lot of racial hostility. There weren't a lot of blacks in Leetonia?

W: No, we never had a situation. We did have a black family in the 1930's. We had another one, the barber's kids. Carey had a barber shop; he cut hair.

C: There were not too many of them?

W: No, no we never had more than one in high school at a time. We did have two here recently but those students were not too bad. They seemed to be alright. They were the Brooks.

C: They were nice boys.

W: The older one I knew; the younger one I didn't know quite so well.

C: Would you say in the period of the 1960's the students were a little more rebellious to authority?

W: I think they were beginning a little bit, but now we didn't have too many situations. We would have a little controversy now and then but not really too much. Some of the parents were getting to be like, "My kid has to play ball and my kid has to be on the basketball team and my kid has to be on track." We did get a little of that, but it was as though we could keep it under control. The 1970's, that was only four years I taught then. Now the 1970 class was an ideal class too because again Dr. Nicolette's daughter Jean and Jean Stambaugh down the street were in it. I always had some of my neighbors in class. They were always cooperative. I could call a parent of somebody that was doing poorly and I had cooperation; it would change. I only had one family that ever had any trouble, and they thought I wasn't fair to their son. But that you get along the way sometimes. If you didn't why there is something wrong with you. It is strange if somebody didn't disagree with you. I had one family too that came one time, but we got to be very good friends. It was a case of the student just didn't want to tell the truth. But then the other one, the boy didn't turn out very good. I wasn't wrong so I didn't feel badly about it.

C: You talked about the high schools, the South Side School. Do you know when that was built?

- W: Do you mean the little one here or the big one that used to be there?
- C: The old South Side School.
- W: In 1895. I passed that day in and day out. I can still see that cornerstone there. It was a little round iron piece on it that told us what our altitude is here. On Somer Street we are 1,058 feet above sea level. Somebody dug that out of that building when they were going to tear it down. We used to look at it time and time again.
- C: What grades . . .
- W: All eight grades down here.
- C: When was it torn down?
- W: I would say about 1940 or 1942. That was a shame. They had to use a big ball to bang and bang that thing. That big thing couldn't knock it down. It just wouldn't go down. So, it was sturdy. Then they put the little one up there. They took our tennis courts. We didn't like that.
- C: Were there any other buildings used as part of this system, as part of this school system?
- W: Well, when Washingtonville came in in 1930 . . .
- C: They consolidated?
- W: They consolidated then in 1931 and of course they kept that building because they bussed from that building and then Orchard Hill came into existence.
- C: Now that, at one time, was Washingtonville. That was a separate high school?
- W: Yes. Yes, because my brother-in-law went two years there and came down to Leetonia two years later. He graduated in 1921. They still had their high school over there. We had some that came in as juniors into high school when I was teaching. That would be because of 1931, that was the first one that went through Washingtonville. Of course, they never had any more than about two or three teachers. It was always a small place.
- C: What did you say was the first graduating class at Leetonia?
- W: I think 1881.
- C: Do you know how many people were in it?
- W: About seven.

C: When you graduated in 1924, how many people were there?

W: Twenty-three. The class of 1962 had ninety. That was the largest class we have had. Now there is no class that has gone above it yet. They have had eighty-nine. I had eighty-nine one year too.

C: I understand that next year we are getting a freshman class of ninety.

W: I wouldn't be surprised.

C: It seems like it is starting to level out.

W: Yes. This year is small. I don't know how many there are this year but one boy told me when I was at the National Honor Society that there were fifty-seven that were going to graduate for sure and eleven on the "I don't know" list. Yes, they may not graduate. I said, "Eleven!" We would have one or two or three or four maybe, but never that many.

C: It is amazing the people that are failing that I know of because I have them in my class and they just don't care. They could give a hoot. They don't want to do anything.

W: I don't see passing people just to have them gone.

C: I refuse to do that.

W: It isn't fair to them.

C: It's not fair to everyone else either.

W: It's not fair to you.

C: Right, and I refuse to lower my standards.

W: Oh, you teach history?

C: Yes.

W: Senior history. So you get everybody; you get all kinds.

C: Yes, so I am getting all different people.

W: A variety. You have those who will work and those who will play and you will have those that will just sit, and you can't do much about them.

C: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the town?

W: Well, I always felt safe here. You can say what you want to but I used to come and go to basketball games. The bus used to leave me off at Columbia Street. I would come over and the church lights

would be on and I would go in the church and turn out the lights. Today I wouldn't do it. Not that I am afraid, but if there was anybody in there that would scare me I couldn't move as fast. I live alone here. My dad has been gone since 1952, but I don't feel afraid.

C: But what about the boys in the mafia? The Black Hand as they called it.

W: Oh yes, we have all kinds around here.

C: Weren't you afraid then?

W: No, not actually. I went to school one morning when my dad was still living. I got out here and I saw blood in the snow. I came back and I said, "Dad, that noise we heard last night. There is blood out here. You had better check around to see what is going on." Here they tried to take the car next door. That boy had come in--I think he worked and had just taken his car in. They didn't do anything to him, but they waited until he got in. He didn't close the garage. They tried to get his car, but they couldn't get it started. They went over in front of my sister's. The keys were in the car and they took the car and left. I had tracked it down the street where they came through the yards and I got to the filling station. There was blood there too because that is where the shooting was. I didn't think anything about it. I wasn't afraid. There were things that have happened at different times, yes.

I had one escapade myself, but the basketball team--I still say--saved my life. I still say that. It was in 1953 or 1954. I always met them at Columbia Street or Lisbon Street. They didn't have to come up here because we would be on our way. They knew I did that. I was to be at Columbia Street. But what happened previous to that, my furnace had gone bad. I was changing over to a gas furnace. This was during basketball season, so it would November or December. It would have to be December. It was December because my Christmas tree was up, but no ornaments were on it. The old furnace was out here and somebody from Rodger's--I can't say for sure now--an elderly man, came up to school. Nobody ever came to school to ask anything. He wanted to know if he could have the pipe in the garage. I said, "Yes." He said he would give me a couple of dollars for it. I said he could just take the stuff. It was alright with me. I said I had put part of it in the garage and it was under my car. We never locked the garage then. My girlfriend lives up the street. I told him to go to the second house up and that she would open the garage for him. Well, he got the stuff out, but the night of the basketball game I was getting ready and Detmar Weikart had the bus and they always would meet me out there. I was getting ready and never thinking about it when this rap come at the door . . . I had this dress on with a zipper in the back and I was trying to get the zipper shut. Then I went to the door

and here was this man and he barged right in. People don't do that to me; that was unusual. I had a porch all around the front at that time; I had that porch taken off since. He demanded money and my pocketbook was laying there, but I didn't have much in it. I never took much money to the basketball game. I said, "I don't have any money to give you. We haven't been paid." There was the Christmas tree and it was up. I said, "It's not decorated. I have to buy lights and ornaments." I had the lights upstairs, but I was talking fast because I realized there was something wrong. I said, "I have to get ready. I'm not completely ready. I have to go to a basketball game." He said, "I want money!" Well, he saw my pocketbook. He was going to take it. He could take it but the keys to my homeroom at school and my home were in there. I didn't know what to do. I knew there was a truck outside and it was running. I could hear that. I said, "Well, the basketball team is going to be here any minute and I'm not ready." He started to grumble a little bit. The basketball bus appeared right there in the intersection waiting for me and Detmar got out.

C: Who?

W: Detmar Weikart. He got out, came over, and that man went out, got in his truck and left. He said, "What was going on here?" I said, "I don't even have the zipper to my dress zipped yet." He zipped the zipper to my dress and he knew I was upset. I said, "That man was demanding money and he's the man who took the pipe to my furnace." He said, "What did you do?" I said, "I talked and I talked. I'm scared to death, but I'm ready to go to the basketball game." The players said, "Miss Wilhelm, how come you are late tonight?" Det turned around and said, "Somebody tried to rob her. Let's keep quiet." There wasn't a sound in that bus. A couple of days later one of the boys asked me about it. I said, "I don't know what he was going to do but I figured next he was either going to slice my throat or take my pocketbook." That is the only time I ever was scared. I talked my way out of it. I still say the school bus saved my life. I will always say that. I know a lot of the people and they say don't pull your drapes open. I say no. If they want to look in, I'm not doing anything that I'm ashamed of or that I shouldn't do. If they want to look in what difference does it make? You don't find too many up here. We do have a simpleton, but he is in jail now. That crazy family lives on the back street back there. I do lock my garage now. I have an automatic door and then I lock the rest of it. I don't lock the car, but I lock the garage.

C: So you would say Leetonia has been a fairly safe community?

W: Yes. There have been robberies. However, I think when robberies are committed, somebody knows about it. I was sitting there watching the television and they robbed the gun case across the street. The door was left unlocked; that was one thing.

They were all at the girls basketball game, so they were watching and somebody knew that. They would have to know that. They stole the videotape out of the church. But then somebody knew that too. I had told them about this kid that lived up the street. I wouldn't trust him; he was not a member. Well, they never paid attention to me. They thought I was talking I guess. The next thing the videotape player was gone. I think they were dope addicts. I would still say that. Kelly McGath, do you know her in high school? Well, don't trust her farther than you can move a piano. I have talked to her; she knows who I am. I caught her writing obscene literature down here on the sidewalk. I said, "I hate to think that I taught school in a place where you're going and you do things like that." She never said one word back to me. She speaks to me every day, but that's all. She has never done anymore writing on sidewalks since then. I see her smoke and so on. I think she was a little bit involved in that. But I don't really know. Things happen but you are not really sure unless you have evidence. So now they lock up the church where I used to go in at 11:30 at night and turn the lights off. Now it is just different.

C: It's not quite as safe . . .

W: Not as safe, no. I think you have to be cautious. Now I don't think of going out at night.

C: Is there anything else you would like to say about the town?

W: Well, I don't think we are as progressive as we were. I think at one time people worked together better than they do now, but then that is my opinion. Why should we have to have a crime group? I go to those meetings occasionally. That shouldn't be necessary. But it isn't just here, it's the world over. People have changed radically, and it is too bad. I think we, as the United States, need to settle down a little bit and take care of our own problems, without trying to solve the problems of the world. We just can't do that. We have too many home problems and too many people to help at home. Instead of doing that I think we could do a lot more good at home. Of course that is my opinion. I think politicians get too much and do too little.

C: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW