

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OEA Union History

O.H. 2221

JoAnn Hartley
Interviewed
By
Heidi Lynn Scott
On
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INTERVIEWEE: JoAnn Hartley

INTERVIEWER: Heidi Lynn Scott

SUBJECT: OEA Union History

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P: This is an interview with JoAnn Hartley, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on OEA Union History, by Heidi Lynn Scott, at Hocking College, Nelsonville, OH, on May 3, 2005. At 11:20 a.m.

S: Good morning.

H: Good morning.

S: Thank you for doing this interview.

H: You're welcome.

S: Today we're here to discuss your involvement with the union at Hocking College.

Before we get into that I'd like to get some background information.

H: Okay.

S: Could you tell me where and when you were born?

H: I was born at Lockbourne Air Force Base, which is right outside of Columbus, Ohio. So I'm an Air Force brat, and my date of birth was January 5th, 1954.

S: What was your childhood like?

H: Well, it was sort of different I guess because my dad was in the service and so we moved around a lot. I can remember every first day at every different school I went to. But I guess it was just like any other kid growing up in that time frame. We lived out on a farm. Pretty close. Fought with a passion, loved with a passion, that kind of thing.

S: Your father was in the military.

H: Yes he was.

S: What did your mother do?

H: My mother was a homemaker but she also worked outside the home. She worked at the base. I guess you would call her an administrative secretary because they had what they called an NCO club, the Non-Commissioned Officers Club, and she did all the payroll, and all the accounting, and all the paperwork dealing with that. And then when my father got out of the service he bought a tavern, it was a restaurant-tavern, and of course they worked together.

S: Besides from moving to school to school I imagine, what else was your educational background?

H: Well, after I graduated from high school I went on to Ohio University in Athens. And I got a Bachelor's Degree in Education. I was certified to teach of all things, political science, history, and government, nine through twelve.

S: So prior to coming to Hocking College, what work experience did you have?

H: Well, I did some substitute teaching of course, but at that period in time there weren't a lot of job opportunities. And I was married, and my husband then was an athletic trainer, so a lot of times where his position was there wasn't job openings for a female history teacher, so I started to work at a bank. And I worked there for about five years, and that led to the applying here at Hocking College, and I've been here quite a long time.

S: What position were you originally hired for here?

H: Well, it had a weird title, it was called "Red Carpet Coordinator." It was the first effort or attempt to do just that, roll out the red carpet, I think, was the philosophy, to prospective students and their families. But it was the first effort of the college, I think, to extend service in a recruiting fashion to families coming into the building. They had a lot of services in one place. They had a walk-up counter for the traditional students already

on campus, but then in this area that I was like the office manager of, they had evening division, and financial aid, and admission and veterans' affairs, and things like that. Before the renovation that you see now and all the new buildings that you see today, a lot of things were in pretty close proximity to each other. Cashiers and records was just down the hallway, and so forth. So it was really an office manager. It was a new position, and I worked real closely with admission, and eventually I went into a professional position here on campus, and I've done a couple of different things, but always within the area of admissions and financial aid.

S: When did you first come here, what year?

H: I remember the date. It was in the middle of winter, January 10th, 1983.

S: So then you've had different positions but none of them actually teaching?

H: Not here at the college. As I said, I was a substitute teacher for a couple of years.

That's a different experience.

S: What's your current position?

H: Well, they've changed my title but the position is the same. I was always known as a financial aid counselor, but they've changed it so that all of us are called I think financial aid associates. I think that sounds like you work in K-Mart, so I introduce myself as a counselor.

S: Moving on a little bit to your involvement with the unions. First, why do you consider unions important in higher education?

H: Well, it's simple but maybe complex to. I guess I feel that it's important so that you have protection. Protection from a lot of things that you know that if there are budget cuts, because when you're a state facility, whether it's a college, or high school, or whatever it happens to be, that if there are budget issues, that jobs can be cut, and you want protection in terms of how that happens, how that takes place. So I think it's very important in education because we all rely on state funding and the tax issues of your local community. Even if you're a private school, it depends on your enrollment and so forth. But protection is a broad term, but for that.

S: More in particular, why do you think unions are necessary at Hocking?

H: The reason that I think they're important here is fairness. I think that's what finally brought me to wanting to join. I wasn't one of the first founders, but very close to the first founders, I'm the longest dues-paying member in the professional unit or the non-professional, the support staff they call it, on campus. And I came to it because I thought there was a lack of fairness in the building. There never was a question of money for me. It was always that you weren't treated fairly in some ways, that seniority didn't seem to

matter for anything, that you didn't always get a lunch when you needed it, that they weren't going to necessarily provide the benefits that should be provided to a faculty person or a support staff person in a college setting. So that's what brought me to it, fairness.

S: So just the basics. Hocking College has two unions?

H: We're all under OEA. But there's a support staff unit, which generally is anyone who's non-instructional. And then there's the professional unit, which is mostly faculty. But then there's the small group of individuals like myself who are not support staff. We're paid at the professional level and so forth, but we're not instructional, and that would be personnel working in the library, admissions counselors, financial aid counselors, we do not necessarily meet either one, but we're in the professional unit.

S: Now what are the proper names of the unions?

H: Hocking College Education Association.

S: Both professional and support staff are under that title, just in separate branches?

H: Just separate units. Where it's Hocking College Education Association.

S: Do you remember what year were they formed?

H: I was trying to think of that the other day because it's been a long time. I want to say that because things were in litigation for a long time for the professional, probably in court longer than any place in the United States, probably, I want to say back in the mid-eighties. This was when the first meetings, and meeting at peoples' houses, and prior even to that there was a group on campus, I don't know if you want to call it a faculty senate, it had different names at different times, and I was a member of that. I would go to those meetings and try to make things better, or more equitable, or whatever.

S: Both of them are associated with the OEA and NEA. Do you know why the OEA was chosen as opposed to a different union?

H: Well, the original core individuals who first started sending out the questionnaires when the idea of unionization took place were faculty members. So it stands to reason that it would be an education association of some kind. And there were questionnaires, and surveys, and OEA came, and I can't remember the name of the other one, there's another teachers' organization union, I can't think of it.

S: Teamsters AAUP.

H: No, it's like Federation of Teachers or something, I don't know. And so there were a couple of different groups that came to campus, and I think what they offered – the fact that they had already been through another college had been successful in unionizing a

college. That was really in their favor. But it was along time ago so I don't want to act like I remember all the details, because I don't. I just think that the wealth of experience that they've had was the reason, and just the reason that it would be faculty. And then also they were willing to unionize and bring in support staff as well so that you didn't have two different unions on campus, two different organizations.

S: No the OEA is often thought of as primarily a k through twelve organization, do you feel that higher ed. fits well with it?

H: Yes I do. I think a lot of times that you do have different needs if you're a support staff person or you're a professional non-instructional. So you just have to be careful that your contracts are separate from support staff to professional, and that your needs can be met both ways.

S: Why did you join and get involved?

H: I think anybody that joins a union or is against unions, it's a personal issue. I felt that I wasn't being treated fairly, that I wasn't afforded rights that you have as an employee, long weeks without a lunch because you would be so busy, and not being compensated for hours above and beyond the forty hour week. Seniority didn't seem to come into play. And just a person in their mid-twenties when I started here just thinking that it's got to be better, you don't have to leave to make something better, you don't have to go to another job. I don't want to make it sound like I was down in the bowels of the basement or something like that because I wasn't, but I just didn't feel that...at the time I was a support staff person, and department secretaries, it just seemed like there was no continuity. It depended on how your office was run, and I thought there was just too much expected of my position, and you know, insurance and things like that. And I started hearing about the meetings and saw some of the surveys, and thought that if I'd gone to all of the faculty senate meetings or college senate or whatever they called it at the time, and nothing was happening, it was just a place to go and – they'll probably bleep this out, but BITCH, and complain, and venting is good, but it wasn't fixing anything. And when you would hear the instructors talk you felt like you weren't the only one in the building that felt like it wasn't right to work more than forty hours in a week. That you were supposed to have lunch, you were supposed to have a break, you weren't supposed to have x number of contact hours, and that there had to be fairness.

S: So you were active right from the start?

H: Not from the very start but pretty close thereafter. There were faculty persons who did all the leg work, who did all the research, and I started going to some of the meetings, and eventually the meetings were held a couple of times in the little house that I rented, and I was a part of writing contract language and negotiations. I was there and was president for a brief time before we actually became a formal union for the support staff, and you had to have officers. So from close to the beginning but not at the very beginning.

S: So it's my understanding, and correct me if I'm wrong, that both faculty, professionals, and support staff, wanted to unionize simultaneously?

H: Yes.

S: But because of litigation the support staff actually ended up organizing first?

H: Well, they all organized at the same time. When I met before we got the union in and before the elections, it was faculty, it was professional non-faculty members and support staff. Everything from housekeeping to me, I was this office manager, and faculty. We all would meet together, and there's a lot of common language that you can hammer out that's the same to both contracts, but the history of things is I was in the support staff, and when we had our very first election, support staff, we unionized, OEA was our representative, but the professional was in litigation for years.

S: That's what I read. I was surprised. So what positions have you held throughout the years in the union?

H: Well, the very first one was what they call a red carpet coordinator, but that was an office manager. After that admissions counselor and then what I do is financial aid counselor.

S: Do your unions have officers?

H: Yes.

S: What office positions in the union have you held?

H: From the time we formalized the support staff, none, because I switched from...right when we've got a first contract, I changed jobs, and it was now in the professional unit. And I might have in the early days, but I don't remember...I was never a secretary, or treasurer, or vice-president, or anything like that. I might have been like a union rep. I don't know if that's the right term, where someone would come and talk to you if they had an issue or whatever.

S: What was that like? Did that take up a lot of your time?

H: No, not really, because by this time I'm in the professional unit, and there's no contract yet for a lot of years, so you just kind of hang out in limbo. And the case would come up at different times and it would rule in our favor and the college would get a court injunction, and things would be on hold. And then it would come up in court again and the union would win, and then there was always something that was happening to postpone everything. So there really wasn't any officers to speak of for a long time.

S: That's an interesting start.

H: Yea, they spent a lot of time and money to prevent eventually having two units on campus.

S: Do you know what events really preceded the organization?

H: I don't know what you mean.

S: Were there any specific events that were really the catalysts for everyone?

H: The straw that broke the camel's back?

S: Yes.

H: I don't know that there really was. The faculty members that you talk to might be able to tell you something from their end, but I think that it was just always thinking that something was unfair, you thought it was unfair, but you must be the only one that feels that way. And all of a sudden there were these meetings, and I think it was sort of like spontaneous combustion sort of, that people started to talk about whatever they were upset about when nothing was happening through the faculty senate or whatever. It just seemed the logical next step. I just think it was like building. It wasn't like someone got mad, because "Mary Jones" worked here twenty-five years and they fired her for no reason. It wasn't like that at all. I just think it was people thinking that there are things that aren't working the way they should, it's not fair, they're thinking they're the only one that must feel that way, and finally when people started talking, it had built.

S: This is a little bit off of where we were going, but just for reference, how big is Hocking College? What's the student population?

H: It varies of course from quarter to quarter, but I would say between 5,500 and 6,000.

S: How many employees does the college have?

H: Full time employees I really don't know because it's grown so much over the years, but I'd say we have faculty, quarter-to-quarter people, we probably have three, four, five hundred people. It may be even more than that, I may be totally way off.

S: Are most of them part of the union? Are most members?

H: I think that we have a majority. I couldn't give you exact numbers. It grows. From the very beginning the numbers increased in support staff and they've increased in the faculty, but you have to keep in mind that the quarter-to-quarter people and the faculty, my understanding is they're not eligible. So I think sometimes when you have an increase in student population you might have positions that are taken by quarter-to-quarter people, but I'm sort of talking about an area that's not really my area. But we have enough that we're still a union.

S: Do you have the – and I apologize if I'm saying it wrong, the Fair Share aspect of the contract, where even if let's say you're not a member of the union but you still have to pay dues?

H: I don't know, are you asking me if I agree with that or do we have that?

S: Do you have that?

H: We don't have that. I think that you join of your own free will, and I think that's the best route.

S: Because that's the way from my knowledge, it's a pretty effective way to get people to join, because they figure, "We're paying anyways."

H: I sort of think that doesn't make for a happy marriage if someone's conscripted into it. I personally have never been an advocate of Fair Share, but others disagree.

S: Now have you been directly involved in the negotiations process?

H: Not recently. Not last contract. But in the very beginning, yes.

S: Could you tell me what that first negotiation was like?

H: Oh, it was scary, nervous, and I felt like Norma Ray! I felt like I helped accomplish something that was really important, that people down the road... I mean it wasn't a sweatshop here, that would be the wrong thing to make people think about Hocking because that isn't true, but I just thought it was really important. When they started opening the envelopes, there were a lot of contested ballots that day; we purposely picked a day when we thought a certain number of faculty that might not necessarily be a proponent of the union would be off campus. But they all were given a release time to come in, and we ran out of envelopes because there were so many contested ballots for the professional part of it. People that we felt were ineligible to vote, people they didn't think were eligible to vote, and it sort of really was like Norma Ray, only there wasn't cotton floating around in the air. I remember my mouth getting dry, and them opening the envelopes up, and that there was more "for" than "against," and just feeling really good.

S: So now was that the first vote to decide whether the union had people supporting the union were in the majority, or was that after accepting the first contract?

H: That was the very first to be unionized. And then there's been quite a few contracts since then.

S: And you've been involved in that bargaining process?

H: For a long time I was, and then I personally reached the point where I had married again, and I had a new child at an age when you shouldn't be having children, and I just

felt like I couldn't dedicate the time. And then to be honest I felt it was someone else's turn. And I didn't really even do as much work as a lot of the people that are still very active in the negotiation part. The officers that we've had have been doing it since its inception, and they're still doing it, but I just felt for me that I still would always be a member, and I'd be supportive, and I'm the first to call if I don't think somebody's following as it pertains to me, or others in the office. But I just didn't think I could dedicate the time, and it does take some time and commitment.

S: How often do negotiations occur?

H: Our contracts are normally for three years. Sometimes we're longer than that between contracts but if things are moving along, negotiating in good faith, and so forth, maybe by the time you get to your next contract it's really more like four years or whatever. But normally they're for three years.

S: How smoothly have negotiations typically gone?

H: I have been in the negotiation procedure the last couple of contracts, but we get our new contracts right on time, there's sticking points, and things like that, but I think all in all from listening to the negotiation team members talk that its gone pretty smooth.

S: What are some of the most important issues negotiated?

H: For me, seniority. Agreements procedure, course load, there's a phrase for it, "recall" is the only term I can think of that in terms of if there are layoffs, how that happens. Those are the things, non-money things, usually. A big money thing is not necessarily salary as it is benefits, hospitalization, sick leave, all those kinds of things. But the major core of any union contract has to be how you're hired and fired, recall, and seniority.

S: Could you describe any strikes that have occurred?

H: In the history of our unions there was a one-day strike, I think that's what it was called, but it was very effective and it was done by the support staff. And there happened to be a pretty good size program going on, with speakers and things from all over the country dealing with the faculty, and they were quite dismayed. One person didn't want to cross the picket line, and they had been working I think well over a year without a contract. So they had a one-day strike. That's all it was set up for was just one day, and the contract came around pretty shortly after that.

S: Do you remember the issues in particular?

H: I wasn't part of the support staff at that time, but if memory serves me right, money was a big issue because there were people that worked for years and years that were barely being at poverty level it seemed like, or just above poverty level. But money was a big issue.

S: Do you know what year that was?

H: I want to say around '89 maybe.

S: Since you've been part of the support staff unit and professional unit, could you tell me what are some of the similarities and differences between the two?

H: Well, the rate of pay of course, is different, but the level of work expected is different. The things that you have in common are seniority, and grievance procedures, that's pretty much common language. Vacation time is different, and how you earn it. So some of the benefits are different, but there are things that are unique to our area that they don't have similar things in common. Like I don't have in common with faculty contact hours, but I gave in common that they want you to come in, or meet with a group, or work on a Saturday, so its work in kind I guess. So there's a lot more that's similar than you think, but basically it's some of the money issues are different.

S: Why do you think there's a need for two different units on one campus?

H: It's the nature of what you do. The educational background you have to have in order to do it, and just as administrators are paid more than faculty, you do have differences. I'm not saying that support staff jobs aren't important, a lot of times they're more important, that's the wheel that keeps everything turning. But I guess educational background and the nature of the position that you have. If you're counseling someone it's different than if you're a receptionist.

S: When bargaining occurs, do the unions, since it's under the same heading but two separate units, does the bargaining occur separately?

H: Yes. We have two separate contracts, and actually the period of time the contracts are for is different, so our contracts don't end together, which would be the most ideal.

S: Could you discuss a little bit the current state of the union?

H: I think it's strong. I feel comfortable in that it works and that I'm getting my money's worth. I think it would be nice if we had just everyone want to join and we had a real, strong union. I think it would be good if you could work in people that are quarter to quarter. I'd like some of the language changed in the contracts in terms of management rights, but who wouldn't? I think that the union is working very well for the campus.

S: Why do you feel there are people who don't want to be involved in the union?

H: I really don't understand why not. I really don't know why. I don't know if they feel that they are restricted in terms of what they can do or can't do, or that they would get better treatment if we weren't here. I'm not sure why because I think they have everything to gain and nothing to lose. By joining I feel they're protecting themselves, and especially newer people, I really don't why. Why are some people Democrats and

some people Republicans? I think it's just how they were brought up, or what they think unions represent, or don't represent, or have hard feelings about from a grandfather, or something. I don't know.

S: Whatever is negotiated in the contract, do the other people who are not members of the union reap those same benefits?

H: Yes.

S: So they're getting benefits that they're really not having to work for themselves. They're not involved in the process but they're getting every advance that union members do. Even though they're not members they're getting that same advance?

H: Yes.

S: What do you personally consider to be the union's greatest achievement for its members?

H: The best thing was the equity and treatment. Because an administrator in one area might have more money to work with and they used to be able to offer higher salaries. Well, that's not fair to someone who's in another department, who works just as hard, whose educational background is the same, to be making less. The fact that this person was able to negotiate a better contract is not equitable. So I think that it created a level playing field.

S: How are the unions protecting Hocking College employees today?

H: In terms of workload, what you can and cannot be told what you have to do. It protects us in terms of seniority rules with the state budget crunch crisis, I mean you don't know, and everything's driven by of course enrollment to a certain extent, but funding from the state as well. You need the protection for the person that is most senior. I keep going back to that because I think that's the biggest thing to me. It might be something different to someone else but that's very important to me.

S: That's a very common answer. I've done quite a few of these same types of interviews and that really comes up, just everyday protection and job security. So overall how would you rate the success of the union?

H: Well, if you gave me a one to ten, I haven't always gotten what I wanted so it's not getting a "ten," but I'd say at least an "eight" or a "nine."

S: And what do you hope the union will achieve in future negotiations?

H: To keep doing what they're doing. To not forgo the "holy triloggy" of the contract, and I would like to see them involve more members if they could, and that we'd have more younger people in, the new ones that come in. But I think that's who is joining. I think

the holdouts that we have aren't the new people that are coming in, it's the people who never joined to start out with and who've been here a long time.

S: One last question. What would you say to someone who doesn't think there's a need for a union?

H: They needed to work here twenty-four years ago. Or where they are now, do they feel secure in terms of they've worked eleven years, and someone who's only worked three gets paid more than they do. Or money's tight and the position has to be eliminated, do you want it to be yours? I think you have to look down the road. It's not just the paycheck that you take home everyday, there's other things that have to be considered. And nobody is indispensable, and no job necessarily is secure, but being in a union, having a union, brings you as close to that as possible. That's how I feel.

S: That ends my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

H: If I'm slumped over, edit that (laughter).

S: With that, this concludes the interview.