

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Poland Schoolhouse Project

Renovation Procedures
O. H. 603

ROBERT WILKESON

Interviewed

by

Michelle Blum

on

November 18, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Poland Schoolhouse Project

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT WILKESON

INTERVIEWER: Michelle Blum

SUBJECT: Poland history, Poland Schoolhouse Renovation,
Poland Historical Society, Poland school system

DATE: November 18, 1983

B: This is an interview with Mr. Robert Wilkeson for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Poland Schoolhouse renovation, by Michelle Blum, on November 18, 1983 at 10:30 in the morning.

Can you tell me how your force in Poland history came about?

W: Dr. Zorn, superintendent of Poland Schools, wrote a book on Poland schools called Triumph and Tradition. He had a number of parents begin to call him--How come you have a book on Poland schools and my kid comes out of Poland High School and doesn't know the first thing about the community of Poland? In turn, Dr. Zorn came to me and asked me, "What's the possibility of taking some materials out of Ohio history and substituting material about Poland?" That's what we did. I eliminated four chapters from this Ohio history book that simply were not necessary. In eighth grade how many times do these kids have to win the Civil War? I eliminated four chapters from Ohio history that they will cover in American history, and then Mr. Sylvester, Poland schools' federal programs director, helped me get a grant, a Title IV teacher grant. He got me \$2,000 and I simply wrote a book about Poland, which I reproduce every year. We also use Dr. Zorn's book, and that's how this whole thing got started. We wrote up the grant; I got the money, and the course started from there.

B: Where did the grant come from?

- W: The grant came from the state of Ohio. It was a Title IV teacher's grant. I was given \$2,000 for one year, and in that year I was to produce a unit on Poland. That was exactly what the money was used for.
- B: What has been the response of the course?
- W: I have had parents and kids on questionnaires at the end of the Poland unit ask me to do nothing in Ohio history but Poland unit. If anything, what I am hearing is to expand the Poland unit. I do four weeks; I am happy with four weeks. I had parents ask me, "How about a whole nine weeks?" My response is great.
- B: When did this start?
- W: In 1977 the first kids went through the Poland unit.
- B: With the little, red schoolhouse project, how much do you know about what is going on there?
- W: At one time in Poland there used to be two totally different public school districts. There was a township public school district; they had their own school board; they had their own schools out there. The only thing they never had out there was a high school. Then the village had their own public schools. That little, red schoolhouse at the corner of Rt. 224 and Struthers Road was actually used as a public school until the year 1915, the middle of World War I. Then they closed the school. Poland Local School Board still owns that little, red schoolhouse. They tried to sell it. The school population is going down so they wanted to sell it. The realtor told them, "That is a corner lot out there; don't take a penny less than \$26,000." Then the Poland Historical Society was formed and finally they made an agreement. Right now Poland School Board is leasing the little, red schoolhouse to the Poland Historical Society for a dollar a year. In return for the dollar a year the Society is restoring that little, red schoolhouse and eventually it is going to be a museum, which I happen to think is great.
- B: Is there any way you can incorporate that into your class work?
- W: Yes. We could easily take a field trip out there, show the kids what is going on. I have a slide show; I've already shown them a slide show on the history of Poland schools, how it fits in, how it fit into Poland education. When we go through Dr. Zorn's book we talk about that school again. It is very easily incorporated.

- B: Could it be used to show kids that history is not dead?
- W: Right. It is the perfect place to go out and see a so-called one-room schoolhouse.
- B: Talking with Mr. Sylvester, I understood that the lease was for three years?
- W: I'm not really sure. All I know is that they lease it for a dollar a year. Mr. Sylvester is Poland's administrative assistant; he would know about that.
- B: The schoolhouse incorporated into the present Poland local school district?
- W: Right. In 1927 the township public school board and the village public school board merged into one public school district. The next thing that happened out there, all those one-room schools were closed except the one on Quarry Road. In 1935 the new Poland School Board closed the Hill School and sold it to the Lowellville Rod & Gun Club. There used to be a one-room school at the corner of Arrel Road and Kansas Road. There was one on Quarry Road, and the one on Rt. 224 and Struthers Road; those were all closed. The last one was closed by the brand new Poland School Board in 1935.
- B: Which one was the last one that closed?
- W: That was the Hill School on Quarry Road in 1935.
- B: How is the renovation project going?
- W: Right now they have fixed the roof out there; they have cleaned the inside of it out; they have cut all the shrubbery and it looks nice for the first time in years. Dues are \$5 a year for society members. Money and people doing volunteer work are a great help.
- B: What is the next step in the renovation project?
- W: Opening it as a museum. That is the goal when they are done. That building was opened in 1858 and used as a public school out there from 1858 to 1915. In 1915 Hill School expanded to four rooms; when they expanded that to four rooms they closed the school at Kansas and Arrel Roads and they closed the Center School at Rt. 224 and Struthers. In 1927 the two schools merged into one Poland school district and in 1935 the Hill School was sold to Lowellville Rod & Gun Club.

B: What type of education system did they have for the little, red schoolhouse?

W: I can't tell you.

B: With the remodeling and additions that were made to the schoolhouse in the years that it was used, I've heard that it was a one-room schoolhouse and I've heard that it was two rooms.

W: There are actually two rooms there. I believe the one room was simply a classroom and the other room was like a cloak room or bathroom.

B: The renovation, is that going to take it back to its original . . .

W: If I understand correctly, this is what the goal is, to be able to show the people of Poland how an early schoolhouse looked.

B: With the renovation is there some type of specification that has to be followed?

W: I don't know.

B: How did Poland get its name?

W: That is a hotly disputed story. The founder of Poland was a man by the name of Turhand Kirkland. As a matter of fact, he has two women in this town who are his great great great great-granddaughters. He still has relatives living here. Mrs. Charles Guiraud and Mrs. Franklin Bennett in Poland Manor, they are the granddaughters four times removed. George Bishop is also Turhand Kirkland's grandson four times. There are two stories. One story is that in 1795 Kirkland was the founder of the Connecticut Land Company. They drew lots here in the Western Reserve. In 1795 Connecticut announced that the entire Western Reserve would be sold. There was a company formed called the Connecticut Western Reserve Land Company to buy the land; they bought the entire Western Reserve. Then they drew lots to see who got what land. Turhand Kirkland's land when he drew his lot was Poland. In 1798 he actually came here and surveyed, laid out the boundary lines of Poland Township, and they haven't changed until this day except with two exceptions. There are two theories on how he chose Poland: One is that he chose Poland because it was an odd name and no other township in Ohio was called Poland. The other story is, and the one that is usually accepted, in the American Revolutionary War there were two foreign generals, Pulaski and Kosciuszko. They were both from Poland. Turhand Kirkland, supposedly,

also said he wanted to honor these people who helped us against Great Britain. Rather than slight one, he said he would name it Poland and honor them both by naming it after their country. This town is actually named after the country of Poland; that is the one that is usually accepted.

B: That's about it.

END OF INTERVIEW