

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Poland Schoolhouse Renovation

Poland Schools Involvement

O. H. 612

GORDON WILLIAMS

Interviewed

by

Michelle Blum

on

December 5, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: GORDON WILLIAMS

INTERVIEWER: Michelle Blum

SUBJECT: Poland Schools, lease agreement, funding,

DATE: December 5, 1983

B: This is an interview with Gordon Williams for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Poland Schoolhouse renovation, by Michelle Blum, on December 5, 1983, at 9:00 in the morning.

Mr. Williams, can you tell me how the school board got involved in the little, red schoolhouse situation?

W: The history begins before I was on the board. I've been on it for seven years. Periodically, according to Dr. Zorn, the board had asked for bids on that particular property. It was property that hadn't been used for forty to fifty years, perhaps more. It was just an asset there which wasn't producing any income. Nobody had any interest in taking any care of it or updating it. We were leasing it for a dollar or two a year to an individual who was using it for storage. In exchange for his dollar he would also take care of the property, the outside part of the property, cutting the grass. In 1979 Poland Township trustees initiated interest in the property, which brought it back to our attention. Their plans were uncertain at that time as to where they wanted to locate, but they did express some interest in taking it over and perhaps converting it into office spaces and also getting some volunteer service from the community to restore it. At that time, the legal machinery required us to go out for bids, which we did and we received no bids up until that point. We had several appraisals from local realtors that varied anywhere from \$15,000 to \$30,000 value for the property. Again the property was continuing to deteriorate. At that point, we started procedures to find out what we could do with the property as far as transferring it to the trustees, selling it or leasing it to them, and going through the bidding procedure.

At such time it was reported to us that there was a ground swell of interest by various members of the community to restore it. The organization that they formulated was not a formal organization. They call themselves now the Poland Historical Society. They continued to express interest and began a fund raising project. At that point, the board decided to take cognizance of their interest. However, it is required that they become a corporation, a formally chartered corporation, so we could enter into a lease agreement with them. This went on through 1979 into 1980 when the Society was formulated. It was sometime in late 1980, 1981 that a lease was entered into, a dollar a year, to the Historical Society. From that point forward they solicited monies and have applied for governmental assistance in completing the restoration and the completion of the public property. Their progress to date I am not sure of.

B: The school board could have gone in and found a buyer who would have provided more traffic to the schools. Why did you settle for a dollar a year?

W: My original thought on it, and I think also the members' of the board, was that there was an asset here that was non-income producing and was providing no benefit to anyone of any kind, whether it be monetary or nonmonetary. At that point the Historical Society began formulating itself. It indicated it could be an overriding benefit, perhaps in an excess of a dollar monetary value to the community in providing an historical landmark. It might be of interest to a number of residents of the community and also the kids as experiencing a one-room schoolhouse. I understand there were perhaps fifteen, one-room schoolhouses in the area twenty-five years ago and this is the only remaining one as I am cognizant of. I think it was a nonmonetary benefit to be derived, and that was the thought of the board at that time.

B: What are the terms of the agreement?

W: As I recall it was a three-year lease agreement initially. This could be verified with Mr. Sylvester or Dr. Zorn at the board offices. They were to provide, as an exhibit to the lease, a plan of action. At such point we would evaluate their progress in accordance with that plan of action. If it, in fact, was a three-year lease, it would be coming up for review this year. From what I've seen of the Poland Clarion there has been some action started on it. I presume they are fulfilling the terms of the lease at this point.

B: Are you satisfied from what you've heard and seen of the project?

W: I'm not fully up-to-date on it. I really don't know what

developments have occurred as far as the total restoration project.

B: What are some of the possible uses for the school?

W: The use for it would be primarily revolving around the historical significance going back to the one-room school-house days. The restoration project, as I recall, was going to cost roughly \$50,000 to \$60,000. The use of it, I suppose it could be used for small meetings. At the present time I've heard of no completion date, grand opening, or dedication ceremonies.

B: I understand that there are plans to use the schoolhouse in conjunction with the Poland history course.

W: I think it would be very appropriate.

B: Since the schools will be, to some extent, using the schoolhouse, has the school board been approached to fund some of the restoration project?

W: No, they haven't, not at this point.

B: How would you feel about that?

W: I would be probably very hard-pressed. Again, I can't speak on behalf of the board as a whole. I would be very hard-pressed to appropriate monies at this time for that project.

B: Is there just a certain segment of the population taking an interest in the project, or does it seem to be the community as a whole?

W: The initial reaction, I wasn't at the board meeting. I believe it was November of 1979 when there was an overwhelming amount of people who came to the board meeting. It seemed to be a cross-section of the community with a number of older residents who had a particular affinity for the historical value of Poland, and a large number of children involved also. I know the Society's fund raising approach has been to involve a cross-section of the community and I believe they have been successful in gaining that. I know a number of prominent businessmen are involved. Dr. Zorn is involved. I would say it is pretty much a broad cross-section.

B: Thank you very much for your time.