

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Rayen School Project

A Student's and Teacher's View of the Rayen School

O.H. 48

FLORENCE TUROWSKI

Interviewed

by

Mark Connelly

on

November 13, 1974

FLORENCE TUROWSKI

Florence Turowski was born in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1904, the daughter of John and Franceska Jesionak Turowski. She went to the Rayen School and following her graduation from there, attended Ohio State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Education in 1925. Four years later she was awarded a Master of Arts from that institution. She had also studied at the University of Warsaw, Northwestern University, University of Minnesota, and the University of Madrid.

Miss Turowski was hired by the Youngstown Board of Education in 1925. She taught algebra and dramatics at Hayes Junior High from 1929 until 1954, when she was sent to Rayen. At her alma mater, Miss Turowski taught French and was the faculty advisor to the yearbook and newspaper staffs. She retired from high school teaching in 1966, although she still teaches Polish in the Department of Continuing Education at Youngstown State University.

Miss Turowski is active in many organizations including the American Association of University Women, the Polish Arts Club, Chi Delta Phi (an honorary speech arts society), and the Mahoning Valley International Civic Organization. She has also been president of the Catholic Collegiate Association, the Ladies of Charity, and the Diocesan Infant of Prague Society. She was the recipient of a gold key in journalism from Columbia University.

Miss Turowski currently resides at 1012 Bryson Street in Youngstown and is a member of St. Casimir Church. Her special interests include language study (she speaks Polish, French, Italian, and Spanish), and travel both in the United States and Europe.

DONNA DEBLASIO
August 3, 1977

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MISS FLORENCE TUROWSKI
INTERVIEWER: Mark Connelly
SUBJECT: A Student's and Teacher's View of the Rayen School
DATE: November 13, 1974

- C: This is an interview with Miss Florence Turowski for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on the Rayen School. It's being done by Mark Connelly at Miss Turowski's residence. The date is November 13, 1974, and it's approximately 9:00 a.m.
- C: Miss Turowski, would you please talk a little bit about your background, both family and educational?
- T: Well, first of all, I'd like to say that my parents had come over to this country from Poland. My father came in 1887 and my mother in 1898. They were young people and were married in Youngstown, at St. Joseph's Church, old St. Joseph's Church. It was really at the wedding of my parents on November 19, 1901, that the first parish for Polish speaking people became a reality, or at least a plan for it, at that particular ceremony when they invited a Polish priest, Father Ruszkowski, to come in from Cleveland, to perform the ceremony. So they were people who were enterprising and known in the community by the time they were married.

My mother came from a family of people who had been school teachers. I remember stories she told of her great-grandfather, who had a class right in his home, and the oppression that they had suffered from the Russians because they were in the region of Suwalki, which was under Russian control at the time. And they tried to teach the Polish language, which was forbidden in the school, when none of the Russian rulers were watching, I should say. But when they did that,

any time they taught the Polish language, they had a student guarding at the window to see that no examiner was coming in. And one time, great-grandfather had somehow or other left one of the books out. They didn't get them hidden under the floor boards on time before the examiner came in and it was found. There were twenty students in the class, so he got twenty lashes for each of the students. A lash for each student for teaching the Polish language, since the book was still found.

So coming from a family of educators, it was natural that I would think of becoming a school teacher. And Rayen was the place to be inspired for college preparation. It was really my dream always that I would go to college eventually. We had no college here in Youngstown at the time giving teacher preparations, so I went to Ohio State University.

Education didn't come too easily for me from the standpoint of financial help, I should say, because there were six of us in the family and all of us were looking forward to being educated. So, in order to supplement my budget, I had to work while I attended Ohio State in Columbus. However, I had a marvelous opportunity there to meet many people through some of the channels that were open to me. I might mention at this time that the picture you see on the wall of Paderewski, which is signed for me personally, was sent to me by Paderewski after a very lovely, I should say, interview I had with him in Polish after a concert that he gave in Columbus, and the reason that I was so honored to have this long interview was because I could speak the Polish language.

French was another language which I loved very much. Miriam Thomas, at Rayen, inspired the love of French in me. And so, when I went to Ohio State, one of my majors was French. Another major just because I loved it was mathematics and everybody laughed at the combination of mathematics and French. However, I have enjoyed both during my lifetime. While still an undergraduate, I found that I had more hours than I needed for undergraduate credit, so I applied for graduate credit on graduate courses that I was taking while getting my bachelor's degree. I earned enough credits that I could complete my master's within two summers' work at Ohio State after that. So I got my master's in 1929 after teaching here in the Youngstown schools.

During the time that I was teaching in the Youngstown schools, it seemed as though every summer I would get an inspiration to do something in the way of broadening my interests, either through travel or through attending universities. And that's how I happened to take up

journalism. One year I went to Northwestern to take some writing courses and one of the professors said, "Well, why aren't you teaching journalism?" And I said, "Well, I never thought of it. I have enough to do with what I've got." He said, "Well, take some courses in it and see how you like it." So the next thing I knew, I was enrolling at the University of Minnesota for a summer in journalism. It was the summer when the war ended, when we had bombed Japan and the war had ended and I remember that I had the marvelous experience of working in the broadcasting room the day the war ended and the excitement we had in our broadcast receiving the news once it came in the morning.

I remember the war was over. Then it was refuted. All day long, none of us ate. We just sat and ran around in that broadcasting room all day trying to get that news across. So anytime we studied, it seemed as though something exciting came up at the time that I was doing it.

C: You say your father was a steelworker?

T: Yes. My father worked at Carnegie, Illinois, and he was a tool grinder and had worked there for years.

There is an interesting story. The man in personnel, Mr. Hammond, and my father, started with the Carnegie, Illinois, back in 1897; the two of them started together and each attended the other's wedding. Then, when I began to teach, one of my very close friends became a teacher by the name of Naomi Hammond. It turned out that her father and my father had started working together for the same company and here we were working for the same board of education. That is one of the coincidental things that happened in my life.

C: Where did you go to grade school?

T: Jefferson School was built up here on Jefferson Street and that's where I went to grade school.

C: Now, once you went to the Rayen School, did you find it hard or did your family find it hard to finance your education?

T: Education was free. We paid for our books, but education was free, so there was no difficulty.

C: There was no difficulty in paying for books.

T: No, books were cheap in those days. There were six of us and it seemed as though one could use part of the books used by another. They weren't changed every

year. They lasted for five or six years.

C: Were you the oldest of six?

T: No, I was the second.

C: So, you had some books coming to you.

T: Oh, yes.

C: Did all six of your brothers and sisters go to the Rayen School?

T: Five went to Rayen.

C: What about clothing? Was it hard to clothe that large of a family with so many going to high school?

T: My mother was a very clever seamstress and we were always dressed so well that everyone was wanting her to make clothes for their children that looked like ours. So she managed very beautifully. She would buy material that was good and substantial and she designed her own clothes. She didn't even need a pattern. We were all well clothed and she liked us to look neat at all times.

C: By the way, when your mother came over here she didn't continue teaching, did she?

T: No. My mother was not a teacher. She was a seamstress.

C: During what four years did you go to Rayen School?

T: Actually, it was three and a half years. I started in 1918, in mid-year. We had mid-year in those days, so I went from mid-year 1918 until June of 1921.

C: At that time would you consider the Rayen School to have a very close-knit student body?

T: Very much so. Yes. Within the courses that we were taking, we got to know everybody in our classes because they weren't so large as some of the classes became later on.

C: What was the size of your class? Do you remember?

T: Well, different classes were different sizes. But, on the average, twenty-five was about the average size.

C: What was the size of the graduating class?

- T: Oh, our graduating class was the largest that Rayen had had up to that time. See, it was the post-war period and many young men had returned from war and were completing their education. We had about one hundred and fifty in our class.
- C: About what percentage was that, would you say, of the freshman class that entered with you?
- T: Well, you see it was mid-year. It was very small. Very few entered at mid-year. Most people entered in the fall, but I was one of those that was in the mid-year class. The main reason for that was that I was hard to hold down in grade school, so they would let me do two grades at a time. I would sit in one grade and in another. So I was fourteen when I entered Rayen. Nowadays, they would have enriched education probably and you would go on in avenues within your interest and stay with your class. But in those days, they didn't know what to do with you when you worked so much faster than the rest of the class.
- C: You wouldn't say there were any racial or ethnic divisions within the class, would you?
- T: Well, really, at the time there weren't too many, let's say, black people in this city. The black people came in with the strikes and they were just beginning to come in at the time. There was a colony of them around Westlake Crossing. I remember we used to walk past this colony. Incidentally, we didn't think anything of walking to school. We lived up on Clyde Street and that's near Jefferson School, and we would walk from Clyde Street to old Rayen School downtown and never thought a thing of it. You just didn't think of riding to school. That was out of the question. It was fun because all of the students going to school would be more or less starting out together in the mornings and we just had a grand time marching down to school. Faculty members walked along with students. Two of the faculty members at that time, that I remember used to walk down with us. One was Miss Soller; she became Mrs. Tear afterward. She married Mr. Tear who was also at Rayen at the same time as a teacher. Then another one was Miss Justine Eich. We used to pick up Miss Eich when we got down to Ardale--now it's Wirt Street. We all continued going on, faculty and students together, and it was the best relationship.
- T: Would you say it was a buddy-buddy relationship?
- C: No, I wouldn't say it was. There was always that feeling of respect toward the older person. There was

that respectful relationship between the faculty and the students, but they were very open with us and we did not feel hampered in any way, nor did we feel as though our liberties were being limited by them. We never felt that.

C: What were the topics of conversation as you were going to school?

T: Well, you know, I think most of us in that group, as I remember now, traveling from that section on, read papers. We kept up with the news--not radio. There was no radio. There was no television to distract us. The general news would usually be something around your home town. Then you might be dicussing something within a class of what was going on.

One of the things that I might tell you is that when we had noon period, we could go out on the large steps in front of the old Rayen building. There were twelve of us in this group. It was the Virgil class, I remember very definitely. I was in this in-between semesters and then attended Rayen for three and one half years so I was doing a little doubling up there without going to summer school. I worked summers. As a matter of fact, I worked at the Home Savings and Loan during the summers as a copy clerk in their title searching department. So that's what we did, studied Virgil. As I remember Florence White was in that group. Well, she is now an organist in California. There was George Kelly, from the Vindicator; Kathryn Small, who was with the employment service here until she left that for insurance; and there were quite a few more. We would meet at noon and read our whole Virgil lesson on the steps, each one correcting the other or criticizing their translation. When we got to class, the teacher was overwhelmed. She couldn't understand how everybody in the class had such a good recitation. Another student in that class was Margie Mariner, who had been on TV here for so long with her cooking classes. Marge had a mother who had taught Latin, so she was usually able to correct us on some of our translations because her mother gave her help the night before. That type of a group was in my class. They were really interested in what was going on in their classes and projected that to their relationship with each other. The whole class wasn't at these little meetings, but twelve of us always met every noon. We'd eat our lunch in a hurry. We carried our lunch in those days. There were no cafeterias in the schools and we enjoyed it out on the steps, while the weather was good. When the weather was bad, then we were allowed to congregate in the halls and had just as much fun in the halls.

As I say, studying became fun under those circumstances. I've always said how much fun it was to study when there was a group meeting together and inspiring each other.

C: Would you say the rest of the class, generally, was as conscientious as this group was?

T: No, I wouldn't say that. There was a natural division and of course, there was semester promotion, in those days. So quite often, there were quite a number of failures that would either drop the subject at the end of the semester or take it over.

C: What extracurricular activities were you involved in in high school?

T: Well, Miss Miriam Thomas was the French teacher at the time. She was a great French teacher who combined activity with work. She had a French Club called Le Cercle Francais that would meet twice a month. We would plan plays and write different stories and act them before the group. So we had the experience of not only learning something in French, but trying to make it practical from the standpoint of speaking it. She would go over our little productions to make sure that we had the proper French, and then correct it and we would put it on for the French Club.

Another club we had was the Literary Club. We produced plays. Play production was the great thing in those days--everybody was in a play of one sort or another. We all wrote poems and the better poems were published in the Rayen Record. I remember one of mine was published. As a matter of fact, when I was in college, one day my English teacher called me in for an interview and I thought, "What in the world is wrong?" We had been assigned to write some poems and she had read my poem. She said, "What do you intend to do with your life?" I said, "Well, I'm going to teach." She told me, "Don't you realize America needs some good women poets?" I said, "Well, if my family had a lot of money and I felt they could support me, I might consider writing poetry, but I've got to consider making a living. I know of no avenue where I'd make money writing poetry at this time." So she said, "Well, this is the work of a genius. I've never had a student hand in a poem like this." I looked her and said, "I've got lots of stuff I write like that." She said, "Well, I think you're making a mistake." I said, "Well, I don't see what mistake I could make." From that, later on, I was made a member of the honorary speech arts society on the campus, which has a Greek name, Chi Delta Phi.

C: What type of poetry did you write?

T: Well, I always wrote them about love, flowers, and nature and the woods and so on, and this particular poem was about a walk through the woods in the spring time when things are just beginning to pop up and the inspiration it gave you as you were communing with nature.

C: Now you mentioned what a good relationship you had with the faculty at the Rayen School. Who were some of the outstanding members of this faculty that you recall?

T: I remember Miriam Thomas, the French teacher, first of all. Then Mrs. Peterson was my algebra teacher and advanced algebra teacher, but by that time she was getting to be very old. I laugh about it because to this day, I feel that the idea of putting in a retirement age was a marvelous thing for teachers because she was a very conscientious person, but she would fall asleep during an explanation. We who were ambitious felt we were losing out during that particular year. She was a good teacher, though, and knew her geometry. She had taught beyond her years by the time I had got to Rayen. Then there was Ada Robers. There was Mr. Herr. We called him "Daddy Herr" and he later became principal of Rayen. He was my English History teacher. Kate Smith who taught at Rayen for years and years in Latin was one of my Latin teachers. Isabelle Wallace taught us ancient history. In those days, they had a course called ancient history, which could probably be a part of world history today. Then there was Donald Love who taught English and I felt that was a year of inspiration. He taught English and history, but I had him in English History, and I felt it was a very inspiring year because he had a way of teaching history in which you didn't follow through in dates, but rather in periods. You took a certain period and you saw how that period related from one part of the world to another. That was much more interesting to me than learning dates and figures and wars and things like that.

Miss Louise Boynton was an inspiration in English. I had her for Shakespeare. I think my love of Shakespeare started with Miss Boynton because she really knew how to get Shakespeare across to a student, giving Shakespeare an alive spirit, rather than dwelling upon the words of just a sentence. From her, I have this love of Shakespeare and I go to Shakespeare performances up in Canada and Connecticut, at the Stratford places, because I enjoy it as it was taught to me. I think each of those places, when they produce the play, really

gives it that same spirit of being alive that she taught us.

C: Who were some of your favorite novelists or poets?

T: Well, I've always been fond of Shakespeare and I've always been fond of some of the Polish. I read poetry and other things in Polish and French. I don't stay with one writer. Moliere, I like very much in the French. In the Polish I like Fredro and Krasinski so that my love of poetry and literature extends through the various languages rather than through English alone. I like Keats for sitting back and just enjoying Keats. It depends on the mood I'm in as to what I want.

C: As a student, did you have much contact with the administration?

T: Really, there wasn't that much to the administration. At the time I was a student at Rayen the administration was Mr. Edwin Miller and Rachel Stewart, the secretary. Anything we wanted, Rachel could get. She really was, you might say, the catalog of everything. Rachel, later, married a house decorator from McKelvey's. An interesting thing about that was that about fifteen years ago we saw a picture of their home in a magazine. This designer for Hollywood movie star homes used in the interior of his home a great deal of white, and there in the picture was his wife, Rachel Stewart.

C: What about Mr. Miller? What was your opinion of him?

T: Mr. Miller was, you might say, the typical early twentieth century executive who was there to do a job and the job was the main thing. He knew his students, but you never felt close to him because you felt that there was that barrier between you and the top. But you admired him for his efficiency. As I say, he never let the bars down. They were always up. You were the student and he was the principal. You admired him for his fairness and because he had time for you. He was never too busy. You never had to have an appointment. You merely told Rachel you had something you wanted to talk over with Mr. Miller and she'd say, "Well, that's fine. He's busy right now, but you come back and I'll see to it that you get to see him." You always got an interview when you wanted it.

C: Would you say that Rachel Stewart was the second most powerful person in the school?

T: She certainly was. Maybe she was the most powerful.

C: What were your feelings on the day you graduated?

T: Well, I felt that the world was out there before me. All I had to do was step out and take it. It wasn't as complicated a world as it is today with all these methods of communication and air travel, for instance. Air travel was just in its infancy; certainly there were no commercial lines yet. There weren't as many cars as there are today. You traveled mostly by train. I remember going to Columbus by train, and I felt as though this was it, I'm on my way, and all I had to do was reach out and take it. When I graduated from Rayen, that was the feeling I got. Three years later, when I finished at Ohio State, I had an entirely different point of view of the world. I had found that many things had happened that had changed things. For instance, radio had come in, and people were beginning to get radios in their homes. We were listening with ear phones, but we were listening. We were getting the news of the world through radio. It became a much bigger world and of course, also, through the experience of college education, you broaden naturally to a different point of view.

The Ku Klux Klan had become very active and we found, for instance, that people who were Catholic or Negro or some people with a foreign name found it hard to get jobs. Out of the class in which I graduated, quite a number of Catholics didn't get jobs just because they were Catholics. I had an application in a school for a job where I was accepted and when somebody on the board had read the word Catholic, I was rejected.

C: Where was this at?

T: Oh, I won't name the town because it's so close to here and I don't want the people of that town to be hurt. But this could have happened right in Youngstown. It didn't to me.

This is what did happen in Youngstown: I had put down Catholic on my application and sent it to a man who had been with the schools and was out of the schools at the time. I happened to have written the application for the job directly to him and he was working out of the state at the time. The letter was forwarded to him. He wrote back to me and said, "You'd better get another application. Aren't you a Christian?" I wrote back that I was. In the letter he said, "Apply as a Christian, not as a Catholic. The word Catholic, in the Youngstown schools, might keep you off." At that time, we had the Klan running the city.

C: What year was this?

T: That was 1925.

C: There were Klan members in the Board of Education?

T: There certainly were. I was the only Catholic hired in that year because I didn't write down Catholic, I wrote Christian, and that's how I got in.

Now, that was true throughout the state. Now whether it was true all over the country, I don't know. Ohio had the Klan working very strongly here and it was surprising with what important people. Maybe they weren't members of the Klan, but the same ideas were being accepted by them and they were working on the basis of just qualifying people on the basis of their religion. Now evidently my name didn't make any difference, the fact that it was Turowski. That was acceptable, probably because they didn't know that a "ski" was of Polish descent. I might have been rejected on that basis, but I wasn't.

C: Now, to your knowledge did they find out you were Catholic after you started teaching?

T: Well, within a few years, that all cleared up. The atmosphere cleared up. They probably knew I was Catholic. One of the important members of the board of education was a tenant on my father's farm. I got the protection then from him, for my job. As a matter of fact, there was no job for me. They created a job for me. There were two of us hired at Stambaugh School. I wasn't prepared to teach elementary, but two were hired and I was one of the two. They kept me for the job there through the protection of this other person. So I didn't get the job because they accepted that I was Catholic, but because I had somebody to look out for me on the board. All of this goes to show that the world isn't as honest as it pretends to be.

C: How did you feel when you got the letter from your friend saying that?

T: That was the biggest upset in my life. I couldn't believe that such a thing was true. I had thought of the Klan as working down in the South and that because at Rayen I had never experienced the feeling that somebody had it against me for being a Catholic or for being of Polish descent. I never felt that. Here was the first time in my life when the factor had come up that there are prejudices, that people simply do not accept you,

not on the basis of who you are, but on the basis of a background which you have inherited. From then on, I decided that I was going to forge my way through every angle there was and get where I wanted to, in spite of these people.

C: But they never bothered you.

T: Never. Never. As I say, I had the upset, but that was it.

C: Now, how did you go about getting transferred to the Rayen School?

T: When Hayes School was opened in 1929, that was a junior high school, and naturally, my preparation was for the high school field. The board of education by that time was all cleaned up. The Klanners were gone and we had a new superintendent and things were really on the up and up level, or I would call it so. They were paying more attention then as to what you were qualified to do. So I went to Hayes School to teach algebra. I had a major in both French and mathematics. So there I was. I was in my field, teaching the subject I should be teaching. There again, we all had extra duties. One of the things that I had, when I first went up to Hayes, was a dramatics club as an extra duty. Since I was a member of Chi Delta Phi at State, they thought I should be able to teach dramatics. So that was fun, too. In that dramatics club, I had had Joe Flynn, who died recently. I had had Gray McKendrick, who was so active with the Playhouse here in its days, after he graduated from Rayen, and I had quite a few others who later became active Playhouse people.

C: What sort of plays did you put on?

T: Well, we put on school plays. One of the plays that I can remember is "The Birthday of the Infants" and that was one that went over big. There was a royalty on it. We put them on mainly for assembly purposes, not for making money. I also had them write plays. They wrote one of the cutest plays for the birthday of Washington. I remember they had to fry bacon, so what they did was took dry ice and got the steam from the dry ice going in water; that looked like the bacon was frying. There was a little electric light bulb. In that particular group there was Gray McKendrick. The boys wrote the plays themselves. It was all very well done. It was for the occasion of Washington's birthday. Assemblies were held in the schools. They had half the school come to one assembly and half to the other. They just thought that was lots of fun.

C: Well, what year did you get transferred to the Rayen School?

T: In 1954. I went to Rayen to teach French. Julie Fitzsimmons had been the French teacher there. Oh, meanwhile, I had kept up with my French in summer school and had travelled in France, too. In 1954 Julie died rather suddenly. She had gotten ill on Monday and she died by Wednesday. They needed a French teacher and Mr. Tear knew that I could teach French, so he called me in for an interview. He said that nothing would do, that I just had to come and teach there. That's how I happened to go to Rayen. Mr. Tear was principal at the time.

C: Once you started teaching at Rayen, did anything sort of catch your attention about the school that went unnoticed while you were a student there? Were there any changes?

T: Oh, well, they were in the new building already; by that time, they had been there for years. When I came in, I took over both French and the school paper, and the annual. They didn't have that many French classes at the time. There must have been about three French classes at the time, so I was able to take both publications and work with them. There was this change in the pupil grouping. They were ready to take over many more responsibilities than we probably did, mainly because they were given more freedoms. I'll give this as an example: They had planned a homecoming celebration with the football team at one of the football games. They felt they wanted it at a game where they didn't attract too many people. The students were the ones to figure out we'd have more gate receipts if we had an added attraction. They were allowed to go ahead and vote for their homecoming queen. They had their voting take place in the halls. They planned all this themselves and went ahead with the planning of the whole fanfare on the whole football field. Now, I can't imagine that we would have gone ahead with anything of that type in our day.

Then there was another thing. We had no cars in our day. These students had cars so, so when it came to anything like financing a yearbook, nothing bothered them, because the boys had cars and they would go out to get the ads. You could put out a big publication like that and pay for it. They were never in the hole. They were an ambitious group. I understand they're having financial difficulties with yearbooks nowadays, but they had no financial difficulties then. We had money left over when we got through putting out the annuals.

Another thing I found is that they seemed more mature than we were at that time. They were ready to accept more responsibility. Maybe they were a little harder for parents to handle. I remember one particular student who I won't name because he's a prominent businessman. His grandmother called up. She was taking care of him while his mother was travelling. She said, "I can't get Joe to go to school, no matter what. I know he's got a test today in one of the classes. He just won't get up and go. If we could just get Miss Turowski on the phone to call him and tell him that she has some important work for him on the annual, I know she could inspire him because he lives for the annual." Well, the principal came up to me and said, "Can you take a minute and leave your class and make this call?" This was important because he was an honor student, one that always made the dean's list, yet here he was having all this difficulty with his grandmother. So I went to the phone and I said to him, "You know, we've got some important ads to pick up today and if you don't come to school, I can't get you out on those ads. Get dressed and get out here. I've got to have you here." Within twenty minutes he was at school and ready for his test. He just didn't want to come to school that day. Those are some of the things that we met that we wouldn't have thought of doing in our day, to miss school when you had a test. Fortunately the grandmother was on the ball and got him there. She knew the test was on because evidently he had told her.

Those are some of the things I didn't expect to meet at Rayen, but you had to learn how to handle them by making something else important, draw them in, and quite often, you got them that way. I think if he had been approached from the standpoint of punishment, you would never have got him to class. This was something that he loved and if you put it before him, he was there.

- C: Would you say attendance was a big problem during the 1950s?
- T: No, I wouldn't say it was with the average student. Already you were getting students that were misled on their way to school that wouldn't get there. You might call their parents and find out "Yes, they left in the morning. Aren't they there?" That was already beginning to crop up. There's more of it today than there was then.
- C: What sort of places would they go to instead of to school?

- T: They'd go to each other's homes. With the parents working there was nobody to supervise them or check up on them. A neighbor might notice that within a home where the parents were working, there were students fooling around, and naturally when they get gay, they run in and out. Sometimes we were asked to send somebody out. In those days we had the home visiting teacher, who had that as a sole duty. I think it's working parents that brought on this absenteeism, willful absenteeism. There was nobody home to check. Some of the students whose parents weren't working would get caught in the bull ring because of the fact that they were led astray by their playmates. Their fellow classmates weren't going to make it to school and somebody was planning to have a party at his house because his mother and father would both be working that day. They'd invite the gang over. That was already beginning to crop up.
- C: What year did you retire?
- T: I retired in 1966.
- C: Would you say that during the period that you were teaching at Rayen that there was, on the whole, a dis-integrating home life, above and beyond just the working parent?
- T: No, I wouldn't say that, not on the whole yet. There was a little bit of it creeping in already, but I wouldn't say on the whole. I think most of it was through these particular homes where both parents were working. They were trying to provide so much for their children, which the children certainly don't appreciate or don't want or don't expect. One of the students said to me, "My mother is working and my father makes enough that we could get along, but my mother thinks we have to be able to afford these extras that some of the other students have." He also said, "Do you know what I'd prefer? When I come home now, I unlock the door; nobody's been in it since we left in the morning, my mother and I, I'm the first one back in the home. I come to an empty house. It's a terrible feeling. I'd like to have somebody in the home to greet me when I come in. The students who have their mothers will say that their mother has baked them a pan of muffins or something when they get home. I'd like to have a nice warm muffin and sit down and have my glass of root beer or whatever we have in the house, rather than come home to this cold house. My mother thinks I want all this other stuff. I don't care whether I have a sweater that's made by some name house. I'd just as soon have a cheaper sweater and have her there at home. That's the attitude that my mother has--that we have to wear name brand clothes. It doesn't mean that much to me."

You can see the same thing reflecting in our young people's lives today. They don't appreciate the things that their parents are working for, because they [the parents] didn't have them.

C: What sort of relationship did the students have with the faculty? Was it like the relationship you had with your faculty?

T: No, no. It was a much freer relationship. With my journalism students especially, we got the feeling as though I were their mother or so they felt. I would have girls confide in me a lot of things that they wouldn't tell their mothers. I'd talk it over with them and tell them, "Now you should talk this over with your mother." They'd say, "I can't talk this over with my mother. She'd scream. That's why I'm telling somebody. I've got to get somebody to listen to me." So you'd find that they'd select a faculty member that they thought could listen to them and they'd come in after school and talk to you. That's what I have against bussing today. The students don't have that opportunity. It's being cut. The bus comes at a certain time and you must go. There isn't another relationship for you to substitute for the home relationship you're missing because you must get on the bus or you'll miss your ride. Today, I'm afraid that that relationship, which had been built up and which was servicing the students in the manner that young people need, is lost. They need somebody to listen to them.

I was always one of the last leaving the building because somebody had something that they wanted to talk over. They knew I would listen. Maybe I had no answer for them, but they had a listener. As I say, this bussing cuts that out completely. I can see where that relationship is being cut down to no personal interest at all.

C: Did students approach you often with their problems?

T: There wasn't a night that there wasn't a student that had a little problem, and it might be a problem in getting along with another teacher. They would talk it over with me and I'd try to direct and redirect them in their thinking so they could go back to that classroom and have a different attitude toward that teacher, because they knew that it didn't go beyond me. They could talk to me and nobody ever heard it again. That's the main thing that young people want, someone who they know is a confidant, who's not going to spread it any further than where it is at the moment.

C: Did you notice in the students that you had when you were teaching, the same eagerness to learn as you had or as your class did?

T: I certainly did. I might give you a couple of examples even with names.

There was Tish McKelvey. She was one that could never get enough to do and was always anxious to do a little more. She was editor of the Rayen Record, editor of the Rayen annual. She was the president of the French Club and she didn't have those offices in name, she really did the work. When she had the office, she did the work and produced beautifully in everything she did. I don't know how she could do all she did. She kept her grades up, too.

Another one that was outstanding that way that comes to my mind is Judge Henderson's daughter, Margaret. She was just a tremendous student in the same way in activities.

Another person, Joe Shagrin, was a great one who just couldn't do enough. His grades were always up. Julian Wick I remember as being an outstanding student. One who was also very good was Heather Beck; she's now Mrs. Southwick. She married Dr. Southwick, but keeps up with me. I hear from her constantly. She has a family of her own and is teaching in the Baltimore schools. Her husband is a biologist with Johns Hopkins. She was a tremendous person.

There were outstanding people who just couldn't do enough in whatever they were doing, and they were so anxious to get more, whether it was in French or in journalism.

There was no grade given for publications. Some people say, "Well, they work for grades only." No, there was no grade given for you as editor of the newspaper. There was no grade given for being business manager. These people accepted the jobs and they worked like Trojans merely because they loved it.

C: Did you notice this enthusiasm all the way up to 1966?

T: Well, I was fortunate enough to have it with the students that I had. Even in the French classes I would say that. The French classes became so popular that we had to get a second French teacher and both of us were kept busy with our French work. I had to drop the annual. I couldn't possibly handle the annual, and finally, I gave up the newspaper the year before I

retired because there were so many French classes and both Miss Wary and I found ourselves with our hands full of the French. French became quite popular after we got our students enthused about a foreign language. So many students have an idea that a foreign language is just another subject. They don't realize that through the study of a foreign language, they learn to speak English better because they pick up the rules of their grammar in English through a comparison with the rules of grammar in another language. That makes them language-conscious and they are improving their English rather than losing out on it. It broadens them in their viewpoint, too, because they appreciate how many languages have words in common, for instance, how all languages seem to stem from either Latin or Greek, and that in the long run, there is interrelationship in language.

- C: Would you say that your French students were representative of the rest of the student body or were they more intelligent?
- T: No, I had a cross-section. This might interest you: Some of my black students were the best students in French. There seems to be a natural ability to pronounce the French language from the students of black families. There was a cross-section then of everything.
- C: Do you think it was pretty representative of the class?
- T: Yes, and then we had some of those who were dull in it, too. At the same time, though, they felt they were getting something out of it because they seemed to work at it.
- C: Did you notice any changes in disciplining the students from the time you went there?
- T: From the time I started teaching until I retired, yes. Oh, yes, there was a change, especially in the classes that everybody had to take, for instance, English. Everybody has to take that and a certain amount of math. There was a gradual trend toward being less attentive and thinking up more pranks in class, things of that sort, which wasn't true with the early classes. I think there was more of, shall I say, teacher worship, in the early days, which wore off as time went on. I think at the same time there was this wearing off of the teacher worship, there was a worsening in discipline. If you had a class of parents who were half-educated and felt they had all the answers and probably degraded teachers in their home conversation, discipline worsened. You would find that reflecting back into the classroom. In the early days there was always the feeling that, "Well, she is the teacher and you will follow what she says." You found out later on that there

was more of a resentment quite often toward the teacher and maybe the fear that they were infringing on the authority of the home. As classes became larger we had more of this home visitation and so on. I think that, to a certain extent, was resented.

C: How did the administration or the faculty go about disciplining the students?

T: Well, corporal punishment was completely out, so that was not a factor. The disciplining that took place was mostly in the matter of after school disciplining, which I approved of. In this type we would have them come in after school, but you couldn't do this today in the day of bussing. I don't know what they do today for discipline. That's what we would do, give them a certain number of days of detention. About 1950 a general detention was no longer kept. There used to be a general detention. Every teacher's students were sent to one teacher that stayed that particular night and saw to it that they studied for forty-five minutes. When the general detention idea went out, each teacher would have a detention of his or her own, in their own classroom. I think this was better because you could be of service to them at that time.

You couldn't always help the students with the subject if he was in a general detention, but if you had your own, that was a big help. When the individual detention came in, that was better than the general detention because the general detention lost half of what you were trying to get out of it. You got resentment quite often and at the same time, the student wasn't always utilizing the time for his own good. In your classroom it was always more helpful. What they could do today, I don't know, unless they give them extra assignments because of the bussing situation. That immediately put barriers there. You can't hold a student who won't have a ride home. It complicates things much more. I'm against bussing. I might tell you that because of the fact that I think half of our enjoyment of going to high school was the walking to and from school with the crowd. I was always going with the crowd and it was fun.

C: Would you say the faculty at the Rayen School when you taught there was as of a high caliber as the faculty there when you went to school?

T: I believe so. I believe it was a different type of faculty. They weren't so uptight on many things and there was such a thing as a coffee period. Those that wanted to smoke could go in and smoke or drink coffee. I was never one that wanted more coffee than what I had in the morning. I knew this drinking coffee all day long doesn't get into their free period.

You had a freer moving faculty, but that didn't mean that they were less efficient. I think the efficiency was fair as far as that was concerned. Maybe they didn't measure up to the old standards of demanding that you have absolute silence in the room. That went out of the classroom some time ago because it isn't necessarily the quietest room that's accomplishing something. I felt, when I had my publication students, that they were accomplishing an awful lot. One would be sitting with a typewriter at one corner and typing and somebody next to them would be dictating what they're typing. Another group would be making up ads. That wasn't a room that could be silent. It had to have motion and commotion, If it didn't, they wouldn't be accomplishing things. Today, by our standards, we don't measure efficiency by the quietness of the room, rather by what they are accomplishing.

- C: Do you think Mrs. Peterson would have taught at the Rayen School say in 1960?
- T: Yes, I think Mrs. Peterson could have. She was the type that would take no fuss in her room and those that could not take her way of doing things, could get transferred out. In today's school, if there is a personality conflict, there is that leniency that you can be transferred out. She was strict. She could take no crossing of disciplinary lines. At the same time, the students that admired her way of getting things done would stay with her. She'd have difficulty with some of these students that simply don't adhere to the rules.
- C: Did she ever have to hit anybody to keep them in line?
- T: I never remember her striking a single person.
- C: To get back to more modern times, how many hours a week did you put into your work on both the yearbook and the Rayen Record?
- T: Well, I would say that it amounted to about two hours a day extra, over and above teaching, and many weekends I gave up a Saturday and so did my students because we met in my apartment. If we had something to put out and we weren't going to meet the deadline with the printer, we met here and did our proofreading here.
- C: Would you walk from here to Rayen School?
- T: No, I didn't. I have had a car since 1929.
- C: How many students were usually involved in the annual and also in the newspaper?

- T: Oh, about twenty-five on the publications.
- C: Was it usually the same staff for both?
- T: Not entirely, no. Part of them would work on both, but very few. Tish McKelvey worked on both. So did Margaret Henderson, but as a rule they didn't. The staffs were separate.
- C: Was any student able to work on the publications or did you thin it down to those that you thought would be the best workers?
- T: I let anybody who wanted to, start, then they knew when they didn't want to do anything. Then they could always drop. It wasn't what you'd call a credit course.
- C: So you never had to ask anybody to leave.
- T: No, no. It wasn't a credit course. Therefore, when they saw that they didn't fit in, they would leave of their own accord. By and large, most of those who came stayed. Maybe they had some difficulty in writing, but one of the other students would help them correct and rewrite. They mainly had to learn how to summarize and cut down. Most of them wanted to write volumes.
- C: Do you still keep up with the annual?
- T: In what way?
- C: Do you get a copy of it?
- T: No, since I left the school I haven't bothered.
- C: Are you still involved in any alumni association?
- T: Oh, yes, I do attend alumni meetings. When we had our fiftieth reunion for my class, I was the chairman of the reunion. That was in 1971. We had a very nice turnout of that particular class. I think that quite a few had died, but it was still a pretty good representation. We found that of the one hundred and fifty-four in the class originally, one hundred were still living, which I thought was good.
- C: Now when you went to school, you went to the old Rayen School building.
- T: Yes.
- C: Now, when you came back to teach, you were in the new building. Did you sense you were in the same school?

- T: Yes. I had the feeling it was the same institution. It was a little bit different, but the same. I had the same feeling.
- C: Was it just a feeling or could you pinpoint different aspects that said this is the Rayen School?
- T: Well, I'll tell you why it felt the same: Mr. Tear was still the principal at the time and he had been my teacher. Miss Boynton was still there. As you go through the faculty and still see some of the older ones there, it gives you the feeling that this is the same school, in spite of the fact that it was a larger building. There were many more activities and the student body was much bigger, but you still had the feeling this was Rayen.
- C: So you could say the main point would be the faculty.
- T: The faculty, I think, did it. Seeing some of the faces that I had known before made it feel like the Rayen School.
- C: Now, as you look back on your association with the Rayen School, what one thing sticks out most in your mind?
- T: Well, the one thing that sticks out mostly in my mind, which may not be true about it today, is its protection of academic standards. That was one of the things. We had the feeling, as students, that this is a place where we were expected to produce academically and to measure up to or go beyond what other schools were doing. I think that during the time that I was still a teacher, I could see that being preserved. Maybe it was not preserved so well as the newer principals came in. As a matter of fact, I think that you create discipline problems when you let down on academic achievement. I could see the discipline problems beginning to become enlarged as the time came when I was ready to retire. I retired early. I retired at the age of sixty because I was having trouble with my eyes. Since then, they've been operated on and I have twenty-twenty vision.
- C: So you didn't notice any deterioration of academic standards while you were there. You just started noticing it recently?
- T: I started noticing and I could see discipline problems increasing. I would say your discipline problems increase as your academic standards go down.
- C: In what way were they going down, as you saw it?

- T: Well, [the teachers were] expecting less and promoting students just to have them move on to another area. We all know that many of these students today that get a diploma really should be getting just a certificate for attendance rather than a diploma.
- C: To your knowledge, no student was ever promoted who shouldn't have been promoted, back in 1921, when you were going to school.
- T: Yes, I would agree with that.
- C: They had to produce.
- T: They had to produce and you had to know how to read. Now too many students are in high school who don't know how to read and understand. They can pronounce the words, but they don't know what they're reading. That's because it hasn't been demanded of them. I mean a lot of this goes back to the fact that there is grading in the early years. I think instead of having grades one, two and three, you should have "a process of learning to read." When you have finally conquered learning to read to understand, then you go into a grading system. That would be my idea of an ideal school. This idea that we've got to promote you from first grade to second grade because we don't want to embarrass you, isn't a good one. We haven't yet got the elements of what it takes to read. You're not ready to move on. I had this experience with one boy. Every so often I would ask someone to read aloud, just to see if they were capable of pronouncing. If I felt they weren't able to understand, I wanted to hear them to see whether they had the elements of reading. This boy said, "I can't read." I said, "Well, how did you ever get to high school?" "Oh, they pushed me on," he said. I told him that I wanted to hear him read and I would give him the words in between. He started and soon got tired of my giving him the words and the next thing I knew, he was reading on. I said, "Fine. You can read. What you can't do is understand. We're going to go back and analyze and I'll show you how to read and understand." I worked with him for weeks after school. He could understand afterward, but he hadn't learned comprehension.
- C: What is the one thing that you would change in the Rayen School, if you had the power to change it? This is from your experience as a teacher and as a student.
- T: Well, I don't know what the present situation is. This would be at the time that I was still there.

The one thing that I would change is never to permit a principal to expel a youngster. My one argument with

principals was expelling a student, the easiest way to hand out a judgement that is neither beneficial to the student nor to the teacher under whose jurisdiction he is.

Rather than expel the student I would double the amount of time he has to put in. This is what we come back to. The student is expelled for five to ten days, say, depending on his misdemeanor. He has lost five days of school, explanation, comprehension, exposure. Then he comes back cold five days later. He is expected to pick up. Here's a student who needs discipline. He's been out of discipline for five days. Learning is a form of discipline.

C: How many students were expelled while you were teaching?

T: There weren't that many expelled, but the ones that were expelled made me go and fight in the office for them. They didn't know I was there fighting. Principals didn't like me for that reason.

C: Do you recall any incident where you had to go?

T: Yes, I do. I recall very well and this man later became one of our assistant superintendents and had a federal job and everything else.

He had expelled this youngster for ten days. Well, the youngster had been missing school to begin with. Absenteeism was part of his difficulty. Then, are you going to force more absenteeism on him? Is that going to cure the youngster? That's exactly what I went in and told him. He had a doctor's degree and he didn't like my going in and telling him. I said, "This is a youngster I was getting somewhere with. He was beginning to come to school everyday. I got him so he wanted to come. Because he's having difficulty with the math teacher, you're expelling him from my class. If I'm getting somewhere, let's find out what's wrong with the math class, instead of expelling him from all of his classes. Even in a math class he shouldn't be expelled. Maybe he's in a class that's too advanced. Maybe he should be put in with a group that's moving slower. Naturally, if the child can't keep up with it, he does not understand what it is. A young man's going to be embarrassed sitting there asking question after question. Therefore he should be put into a class that's moving slower, moving at a pace that he can keep up with."

C: But the principal didn't agree with you.

T: Oh, no. I was, from then on, his enemy. It wasn't the principal. It was the vice-principal.

C: Are there any final comments you would like to make?

T: Well, my final comment is regarding all education. Expelling a youngster from a class is not the solution for disciplinary problems. It creates other disciplinary problems because that youngster is loose, especially if the parents are both working. That's giving him just what he wanted, an opportunity to carry on for all he's worth for ten days. Then you expect him to come back into a disciplined room after that and be a human being? He can't be.

C: Okay. Thank you very much, Miss Turowski.

END OF INTERVIEW