

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Youngstown State University Project

Physical Education

O. H. 364

BERTINA LABORDE

Interviewed

by

Terence Lynch

on

May 10, 1977

BERTINA A. LABORDE

Bertina Laborde, the daughter of Salvador and Helen Laborde, was born on February 18, 1926, in Ithaca, New York. Her family moved a number of times when she was young. Miss Laborde attended grade school in Pittsburgh and high school at Shaker Heights near Cleveland. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Education from Ohio University in January of 1948 and her Masters from the same institution in September of 1949.

Following her graduation Miss Laborde was asked by President Jones of Youngstown College to set up a women's physical education program at the school. Having never married, Miss Laborde has devoted 28 years to her teaching at Youngstown State University and has taken the women's physical education program from nonexistence to one that can compete in the same level with any other institution in the nation.

Miss Laborde currently resides at 9659 Mahoning Avenue, North Jackson, Ohio. She is a member of Kappa Delta Pi Education Fraternity, the American Association of University Professors, and a member of Physical Education Societies.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Youngstown State University Project

INTERVIEWEE: BERTINA LABORDE
INTERVIEWER: Terence Lynch
SUBJECT: Women's Programs, Bowling, Archery, YWCA,
Administrators, Faculty
DATE: May 10, 1977

TL: This is an interview with Professor Laborde of the physical education department at Youngstown State University on the history of Youngstown State University, by Terence Lynch at Professor Laborde's office, on May 10, 1977, at 4:30 p.m.

Professor Laborde, would you please speak about your background previous to coming to Youngstown State University?

BL: I was educated in the public schools of Pittsburgh, Youngstown, and Shaker Heights. I attended the Ohio University for my bachelors degree and masters.

TL: What was it like when you first came here?

BL: (Laughter) The campus was small; there were perhaps six hundred full-time students. The physical education department was just becoming established on campus, and my responsibility was in the area of the women's program. We had 125 students in activity classes in the fall semester and 75 in the spring. This was almost the entire full-time women's enrollment of the college at that time.

You might be interested to know what they were able to have. Since we owned no equipment, it was necessary to start all of the classes in bowling since that was the nearest available activity. After the semester was on for a month or so, the first of the equipment began arriving on campus and that happened to be the archery equipment. So we set up an archery range at the back of the Butler Art, with the Indian behind us. Each

of the classes would put their time in, attempting to hit the targets. On occasion an arrow would go astray. One day, Dr. Jones came out his back door, leaned over and picked up the arrow as it landed at his feet, came over, and presented it to the class. (Laughter) This was one instructor who would have just as soon left right then. (Laughter)

TL: Was there anything special to the college or area that influenced your decision to come here?

BL: My primary reason for coming was that I would have the opportunity to set up a program and a department from the beginning. There had been no department. It was my responsibility to put it together. And this is what caused me to decide that this was the position I would be interested in.

TL: How did you feel when you were chosen to be a member of the college community?

BL: I had previously taught at Ohio University so that was pretty well taken care of. It was a transition from one type of campus setting to a commuter college. That was the main adjustment.

TL: What was a typical day like when you first began here?

BL: We, at that time, rented the YWCA facilities, the gymnasium and the swimming pool, and we also had our field activities down at Harrison Field. Classes started at ten in the morning, and weren't through till four. Then we had intramurals from four to six. As things got started, we had intercollegiate, and that meant whatever time the gym was available. The students were free to practice, but we played our games, whatever contests were involved, on Saturdays.

TL: Was there any one place where everybody congregated?

BL: As far as the college as a whole?

TL: Yes.

BL: I would say probably down by Jones Hall. At that time the cafeteria was in the barracks building just behind Jones Hall where I believe the new library is now. It's where the book store and the music practice room previously were. I think the space out behind Jones and the cafeteria were the main congregating places.

TL: Who were some of the outstanding professors and administrators over the years at the university?

BL: When I first came here, Dr. Jones was president; Dr. Joe Smith was dean. Mr. Pickard was the business manager. Mr. Buchanan was the director of admissions. Mrs. Smith was registrar. Dean Dykema was chairman of the division of languages and literature, and then he later became dean of the College of Arts and Sciences when Dean Smith gave that up and stayed just as dean of the university.

Since most of my work was off in physical education and I tend to be a person who doesn't branch out too much, I didn't know too many of the other faculty on campus, other than to say hello to them.

TL: What was President Jones like?

BL: Dynamic. I think he was a person who was totally committed to the growth and development of the university. I think that his particular strength was in the area of meeting people in the community, and carrying the message of the needs of the university to them, where I think Dean Smith concerned himself with the academic program, and Mr. Pickard with the practical matters of classrooms and chairs and desks, and whatever equipment was needed for each of the instructional areas. I think they were a good team. I think that Mrs. Smith was probably the one that got after all three of them when they needed to be shaped up! (Laughter)

TL: What were the students like when you first came here?

BL: The students of today wouldn't like it very well, but students, as a group, are more similiar than they realize. My own opinion is it's fun to work with them because they go through pretty much the same stages. In they come as freshmen; it's a big world; they're not sure which direction to go. Sophomores think we've been here a year; we know everybody. And then, I think it's between sophomore and junior year that many of them begin to become adults and become concerned about when they finish school and what they are going to do. What are the things that they should do in the remaining time to become as well qualified as they can?

As I say, in general, I feel that each group goes through pretty much the same phases. The surface embellishments may change. The fellows may grow beards or they may decide to all go around clean shaven. We have Cherokee haircuts or the butch haircuts or the long shoulder length, but that isn't the part that I'm referring to. They all tend to come in and go through much the same stages.

TL: Do you think the university is more academically oriented than when you first came here?

BL: Students, when they've been off someplace else and come back, say, "Well, they have this at such and such a school, why don't we have it here?" I've had occasion to answer them with, "If you want an education, the opportunity is here, as much or more so than it is in a lot of other institutions." Conversely, it is true on most other campuses. If you don't want the education and you just want to fool around, the opportunity is here for that too.

I think that as the university has grown, there has been less opportunity for the students to have as much interaction with the professors individually; therefore, perhaps there hasn't been the opportunity for individual involvement in the academic scholarly activities to the extent that there was when the university was smaller.

Our classes are large. You don't have the personal contact with the individual student that we did have earlier. Classes were small. We would get maybe six, ten, fifteen students per class. A large class would have been a class with say twenty in it.

TL: What were some of the students and faculty activities in the early days here at the university?

BL: Greek sing has been going as long as I can remember. They had an annual May Day. The football and basketball games were pretty well backed by both students and faculty. This was, in a sense, one of the social occasions where everybody saw everybody else. There was a sense of group cohesiveness, again, that comes with a small setting that you lose when you get so much larger as we have now.

TL: Do you think that's the main difference in the university, the size?

BL: Yes.

TL: Do you think going state has much to do with that?

BL: Aside from the state red tape, I don't really feel that going state has made that much difference. Yes, we have some more buildings, but I don't think it has made that much difference in the type of students who come here. I don't think it has made that much difference in the type of objectives that they have. Our students, most of them, are job-oriented. They go to school to get the knowledge or the training that they need in order to improve their employment prospects. I don't really see that the

addition of the name "state" has really made that much difference in the university as a whole. I'm sure that it has made quite a difference from the things that people have to do with administration.

TL: What was the campus like when you first came here?

BL: You could walk from one end to the other in five minutes! (Laughter) The campus at that time was pretty much from Wick to Bryson, Lincoln to Spring. Subtract First Christian Church and Butler Art from that geography. The William Rayen School of Engineering was down at the old Rayen School building. The next branch out was the utilization of the YWCA. It had been used for the physical education classes prior to that. The classes were taught by people on the Y staff. The men's classes were taught by the people on the YM staff. When I came, the transition that was made at that point was the program was brought on the campus with staff here on campus who went over to the Y to teach those classes that were housed there. But otherwise, the other classes were right here on campus.

TL: What was the general view of the people in the Youngstown area toward the university?

BL: It was positive. This was the hometown college. Everybody got out and worked for it. When they had the library fund drive, people from all facets of the community were involved in it. I think there was a sense of pride, a sense of interest in the university and in its program and in its growth. On the whole, it was backed by all segments of the community, not only Youngstown, but also the general valley areas: Niles, Girard, New Castle, and Sharon.

TL: How was the university promoted to the general public?

BL: Miss Flint was the director of public relations at the time, and I think she used the radio and television and newspaper articles, roto sections. Lloyd Jones was the photographer. Teachers from the university, workshops, and special clinics promoted the university.

TL: Were there any codes of dress or discipline in the early days, say in the days when it was still a college?

BL: Student Council battled the battle on and off. I think, comparatively, the students tended to dress a little less casually than they do now. Student dress codes tend to go in cycles. The blue jeans are back in now, but they also were around during World War II.

When the fellows came back from the service, naturally, the young ladies decided that there should be a little more attractive attire. The standard garb during the latter part of the 1940's and early 1950's in college was the Army surplus uniforms that they brought home with them from military service. We've been through the long skirts, medium length skirts, short skirts, hot pants, back to blue jeans. (Laughter)

TL: What effect did the end of World War II have on the university?

BL: I really came in after that. I was still in college at the end of that one. But this campus, as I understand it, had its military unit on campus. I think it was a Navy B-5 Unit, and they were billeted in the back end of the building where the planetarium is now. When they were phased out, the Athletic Department, Mr. Webster, Mr. Beatty, and Mr. Rosselli, inherited the back for the athletic group. The physical education program expanded. It became more expensive to rent facilities off campus. In the meantime, the new library was being built, Tod Hall and the library wing, and it was decided to move the athletic department to facilities in the basement of Tod Hall, which left the building that they had been in open. At that point the physical education department was asked if they would be interested, since the area where the B-5 group had been billeted had at one time been Dune's Boys Club Gymnasium. So we moved down to campus after extensive interior remodeling of that building to the first gym on campus, the whole great 32 feet wide and 59 feet long and 16 feet foot ceiling!

TL: What have been your major contributions to the university? Looking back, is there anything you would like to have changed over the years?

BL: Those things which I felt needed to be changed, and I was capable of changing, I attempted to change. As you know, any time a group of people are working together, the directions of change are not the problems of any one person. It swings back and forth and you battle back and forth. When change comes about it may not be the change that any one of them wanted in particular, but it's the change that the forces that were in effect at the time end up causing.

I think that this university is particularly responsive to the demands of the people in this community, which is not good or bad by itself. When you take the objectives of the university over the years and the fact that it was here to serve the needs of the people in

this geographic area, I think on the whole they've expanded and contracted in relation to the needs and the demands of the people here.

The job situation, the areas of employment where employment is more open, you'll find more emphasis geared to what's available. And if there's a contraction in the type of positions available then there'll be a de-emphasis in the programs that lead into that. I think in that sense, this university probably is more responsive than several others that I'm aware of, primarily because we serve people from the immediate vicinity, whereas, for instance Ohio State, or Ohio University--which I know a little bit more about--they draw their students from much further away and because the school itself is far enough away; they don't see the changes as they occur. It might be two to five years before they're aware of a change and then will adjust their programs; whereas this university within a year to two years is able to switch gears and raise the emphasis or lower it in a particular area of employment.

TL: Have you enjoyed teaching here at the university?

BL: I've found it to be a very interesting experience.

TL: Is there anything you'd like to say in general about the university that I haven't covered?

BL: No.

TL: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW