

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Rayen School Project

The Rayen School as seen by a  
Jewish student in the late 1920's

O.H. 66

MRS. DOROTHY LACKEY

Interviewed

by

Mark Connelly

on

November 25, 1974

MRS. DOROTHY LACKEY

Mrs. Dorothy A. Lackey, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Friedman, was born on March 30, 1915.

Dorothy is a native of Youngstown and a graduate of The Rayen School. Upon her graduation she went to work for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration because the year was 1932 and the country was in the midst of the Depression. She remained there for a total of four years and then was employed with Truscan Steel Company. She stayed with Truscan until she married her husband Bill, which took place in 1940. To date, the Lackey's are the proud parents of two children; a girl Susan and a younger son Robert.

While attending the Rodef Shalom Temple, Dorothy is also quite busy in other organizations around the Youngstown area. She belongs to the National Council of Jewish Women, the Bandeis University Women, the Youngstown Chapter of Hadassah and is also a member of the Youngstown Federation of Women's Clubs. Mrs. Lackey also enjoys needlepoint and reading and tries to do some gardening when she finds the time.

BECKY PAGAC  
March 21, 1978

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INTERVIEWEE: MRS. DOROTHY LACKEY

INTERVIEWER: Mark Connelly

SUBJECT: The Rayen School as seen by a Jewish student  
in the late 1920's.

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CONNELLY: This is an interview with Mrs. Dorothy Lackey for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program dealing with the Rayen School. It is being done by Mark Connelly at Mrs. Lackey's residence at 2280 Selma Avenue. The date is November 25, 1974. It is approximately 10:15 a.m.

C: Mrs. Lackey, would you please talk a little about both your background and your family's background?

LACKEY: Well, my dad was educated at The Rayen School and Western Reserve University, and later was a graduate of Judge Gesner's Law School here in Youngstown. He was about a year or two old when he came to America. My mother came to Youngstown from the Pittsburgh area. She had a grammar school education. I thought our family was blue-blooded, but only because of my mother. She was always very impressed with my father's family. We were really brainwashed. "Brainwashed" wasn't the term for it then, but to her our family was the most important thing in the world.

Dad sold insurance and he practiced law. Our entertainment at breakfast was discussing the state capitals and Greek mythology. My dad was a very brilliant and literate man. He never was terribly successful financially, but he was a wonderful father. We really had a wonderful home life. We always knew who we were, and never had any identification crisis. We knew what was expected of us and we did it.

C: From what country did your father originally come?

L: Both my dad's and my mother's families came from what they called Austro-Hungary. At the time my dad's family came it was called Hungary, but they changed the name after the war.

C: Okay. Where did you go to grade school?

L: I went to Elm Street School, then to Rayen.

C: Why did your family choose The Rayen School for you?

L: Because we lived on the North Side. The Jewish people lived primarily on the North Side of Youngstown at that time. There was no synagogue on the South Side then.

C: Did you have any foreknowledge of The Rayen School at that time? Were you aware of its reputation?

L: Yes. Our cousins and an older sister had gone to Rayen before me. My sister and two or four cousins graduated from the old Rayen School.

C: And what had you heard about the school?

L: Well, it was the school. This was the place to go. We really felt that we were fortunate to go there. As a matter of fact, the year that I started, there was some talk that I might have to go to Hayes School. They had just built Hayes School, and I was panicky that I might have to go there for a year instead of going straight to Rayen. We really thought Rayen was the finest school.

C: Did you have any thoughts of going on to college?

L: Yes, but unfortunately, in 1929 the stock market crashed. Not that we ever had a lot of money, but I took the academic course, as we called it then. My junior year I took two commercial subjects because we realized that it wasn't going to be possible for me to go to college.

C: What year did you enter The Rayen School?

L: 1928.

C: Would you mind repeating your age?

L: I was 13 going on 14.

C: What was your impression the first time you entered the school?

L: Well, I was overwhelmed. The school was tremendous. You know, at Elm School we had a principal named Catherine Edmunds. You may hear talk about her during your interviews. She was just a darling. She knew every family, their problems, and their children's problems. I went from that close, close atmosphere up to this big factory [Rayen School] up here. I would imagine it's the same feeling that children get when they go to a big university. You know, you're lost. But I had a clique of friends and we found our way around.

C: Were these friends basically from Elm Street School?

L: Yes. And primarily Jewish.

C: Okay.

L: There wasn't the fraternization that there is now. I mean, my children had a lot of non-Jewish friends at Rayen. But my friends were primarily Jewish.

C: What things most impressed you the first time you entered the building?

L: I would imagine the size, excitement, and the ramps. I hadn't seen a ramp until then.

C: Were Jewish students aware of their Jewishness?

L: I think we were. Yes. Not that there was anti-Semitism among the students or even the faculty. I never felt any of that, never. But, we did sort of cling together. You know what it was? These were the children that made up our Sunday School class, the people that we went places with. It wasn't the atmosphere at the school that made us cling together. I can't say that it was. This was something that, I don't know, we just did. We went with a certain crowd, and that was it.

- C: So you would say that the student body as a whole was not a part of your clique?
- L: No. It wasn't one great big happy family or anything like that. There were many different cliques in it.
- C: Could you give an example of some cliques that you knew of at the time.
- L: Yes. There were cliques even among the Jewish students. There was a group of students from one temple that was conservative, and then there was one clique from a reform temple.
- C: Were there any recent immigrants from other ethnic groups at the school?
- L: Not that I know of. I never thought of our family as recent immigrants because my dad and mother had gone to school here.
- C: How would you categorize the basic socioeconomic class of the students at The Rayen School when you were there?
- L: I was aware that there were some very wealthy students at The Rayen School. We were middle class. We always had clothes and we were never hungry. I can't recall there being many things that I wanted but didn't have. By today's standards we didn't have a lot, but nobody lived on the standards that we are living on today. I don't think so, at any rate.
- C: Were there any students at The Rayen School that you would consider poor?
- L: If there were, I didn't know of them. I don't even know if there were many blacks. I can't remember.
- C: No blacks. That's a good observation.
- L: I'll tell what I do remember. My father was very upset when they built the school there because he felt that the wealthy children could walk there and the poor children had to pay bus fare. He thought that it was in a terrible location.
- C: How close did you live to the school?
- L: About a mile from the school.

C: How did you get there?

L: Well, in inclement weather we bussed, and in nice weather it was a nice walk. We walked straight up Fifth Avenue. It was lovely. Then we walked past Wick Park, and past Crandall Park. My father just felt that the children who lived in the West side area had a long hike to school, and he was right.

C: Did he ever voice his opinions through any of the school officials?

L: I doubt it. He did when it came to my grades, and felt that the teacher had graded me improperly.

C: Did you have many incidents?

L: A couple. He was right. I kept a letter for the longest time from an English teacher. My father felt I should have had a hundred per cent instead of ninety-five per cent. The English teacher wrote back a nice note explaining that she felt that he was wrong, but he had a right to his opinion, but the grade was still a ninety-five per cent.

C: Was he ever successful in having a grade changed?

L: Yes. Once, he was. This was in the days when the Bible was still in school. I went into an English class and the teacher surprised us with a test on the New Testament. I happened to receive the highest grade in the class. My dad was very well educated, and he would discuss things with us whether it was our religion or somebody else's. When he found out what she had done, and that she entered those grades in her grade book, he did go down to the Board of Education about that. She was ordered to take those grades out of her grade book.

C: Now this grade was from an English class. Was it what you might call a religiously oriented type of book, or was it literature?

L: No. She also happened to be our homeroom teacher. I can't really recall that definitely. I do know that the test was a shock to all of us. It was a written test, and she graded us on it. My father did go down to the Board of Education about it. There weren't any other problems because I was a "model" student.

C: What were your favorite subjects?

L: I would imagine English and history because everybody adored John Struthers Stewart. And he was so interesting. The English courses were interesting. The math courses were terrible, and I would still be at Rayen if my dad hadn't helped me with my homework every night. I remember one funny incident. We had a Mr. Kale for math. You'll hear a lot about Mr. Kale. He always wondered why I was so inconsistent. I always got a hundred on my homework and a zero on my tests.

C: You mentioned that Mr. Stewart's classes were so interesting. How did he conduct his classes?

L: Well, he was tall and he was thin, and he would sit on the first desk in the row. He never sat behind his desk. He really just talked to us. He was just a great teacher.

C: What were the students' relationships with him outside of the classroom?

L: I really don't know. He always knew us by name, and there was a smile and a warm feeling between us, but other than that, I wouldn't know.

C: How would you categorize the students' relationships with the teachers as a whole?

L: I think it was wonderful. I think the teachers today would love a situation like that, because we really adored them.

C: Was it what you would call a chummy relationship or was it a reserved relationship between the students and teachers?

L: Well, we didn't have the openness between students and teachers that the children have now. There was a feeling of almost parental respect held for teachers. I never argued with my parents, but my children do. They were the teachers and we were the students, and it was that sort of respectful, fond feeling between us.



- C: Would you say that most teachers knew you after you had been through their classes?
- L: Yes.
- C: What did you do for enjoyment during the high school years?
- L: I don't remember, really I don't. I took music lessons. I hated those. I think the movies played a large part then. I know that we went to a movie every Saturday afternoon. We had parties. I remember the Halloween parties. I never cared much for football, so I didn't go to too many games. Every Thanksgiving was ruined because we lost to South High School. In those days, the entertainment was at home. We didn't go to Cleveland to the theater or to Pittsburgh as we do today without thinking too much about it. There wasn't a symphony. There was a playhouse which we would go to occasionally.
- C: There were very little extracurricular activities at the school?
- L: There were, but I must have been very naive, because I see in our annual that I was a member of the French Club. I have no recollection of it. There were other societies, but I never was athletic, so I wasn't interested in them. I have evidence here that the students belonged to clubs. I just never participated too much.
- C: You say you were in the French Club. Can you speak French very well now?
- L: No.
- C: So you never kept up with it?
- L: No. Only to the extent that our daughter was a French and Spanish student, and I would use a couple words here and there in speaking with her.
- C: You mentioned that when you were going to the Elm Street School you had a very close relationship with the administration, including the principal. What was your opinion of the administration of The Rayen School?

- L: You know, you don't have the contact with high school faculty that you have with elementary faculty. We never had any problems, so really there was very little contact with the administration. I never went to the office for anything, and I didn't play truant so there was no necessity for any contact. I didn't know the administration. I don't think I ever said "good morning" to the principal. I think his name was Miller, I'm not even sure. Was it Miller? I knew Mr. Tear better. He was sort of a buffer between the principal and the students. But I had very little contact with him.
- C: Could you describe a typical day at The Rayen School. For example, what did you do from the time you got up in the morning until the time you came home from school?
- L: No, I don't really think I could describe a typical day. I know that my lessons were prepared. I went to school and I would behave myself. That's about it. The day would go without incident. I would go to my two morning classes and then I would have lunch. After lunch I would attend two afternoon classes.
- C: How much time did you spend at night studying?
- L: A lot. I would come home at 3:30 or 4:00 and start to study and I would study until dinner, then I would study after dinner. I never thought a thing of it. I wanted desperately to make the honor roll, but I didn't. There was one incident, I think, that was so typical of the times but was so different from today. I had a little English teacher, Miss Joshua. I don't recall how old she was, but I was thirteen. We were studying the Scarlet Letter, and I raised my hand in class and asked her what the "A" stood for. She said that she would see me after class to explain it to me. That's when she explained it to me--after class. She wouldn't explain it during class.
- C: Were there any discipline problems that you knew of at the school?
- L: No. Not as I hear they have today. I don't ever remember any real bad kid in school. I don't remember a disruptive child in any class. I have heard my children say they wish that "so-and-so" would

get out of class because he upsets everybody. I don't ever recall anything like that. It was very calm and in the classes which I attended there was no trouble. I don't ever remember anybody being sent out of the room. My friends and I were in the academic classes. Whether the trouble happened in some of the disruptive boy's drafting or woodcutting classes, I don't know.

C: During the time which you attended The Rayen School, was there such a thing as detention?

L: I don't think so. If there was I never received it. Now that I think of it, we were pretty regimented. But, we didn't know anything else.

C: What was the typical dress of the day?

L: Along with most of the children, we were pretty well dressed. I think I wore silk hose, and I remember one or two particularly pretty outfits that I had. There were no pants or jeans. Most girls wore sweaters, skirts, black and white oxfords, and blouses. Everybody was clean. I don't remember if there were any terribly poor kids. I just don't recall any. There were a lot of wealthy ones, but I don't remember any terribly poor ones.

C: Did you have any friends who did not attend Rayen School?

L: No. Most of my friends were from the North Side.

C: I meant friends that didn't attend any school at all.

L: You mean that didn't go to high school? No. We all went on to high school. There was no question. We just went on. I don't think as many of them worked after school the way some students do now. There were no part time jobs, and not as many restaurants where they could work part time.

C: What was your favorite year at Rayen?

L: I would imagine that it was my sophomore year. Johnny Russ was our science teacher. He was really just a kid when he started to teach. I had Mr. Stewart and Mr. Pickering and both of them were fine

teachers, I think that was my most pleasant year because by my third year I had already started taking typing and shorthand.

C: So you would say it was the teachers who made your year enjoyable?

L: Yes.

C: How clearly do you recall your graduation?

L: Pretty clearly, because it was the same day my sister was confirmed at the Anshe Emeth Temple, and we were rushing back and forth. It was a mad dash from one place to the other. I can't recall where my graduation was. I don't recall whether it was at Stambaugh Auditorium or not. Isn't that strange? It should stand out, but it doesn't.

C: What feelings did you have upon graduation as you looked back on your four years at The Rayen School? Did you have feelings of regret or expectation?

L: I don't think I felt too much expectation because things were pretty rough at that time. I knew I was going to have to go to work, and it wouldn't be too easy to get a job. I don't think, though, that in those days we had the feeling of depression people have about the times today. I went to work at the relief office after I graduated from Rayen, and saw some pretty sad things. But, as bad as things were then, there is such a hopeless feeling today that I didn't have back when I graduated. Maybe it was because I was young and had my whole life ahead of me.

C: How did the crash of 1929 affect you?

L: I wasn't too aware of it at the time. I didn't realize the seriousness of it. I was a kid. When I got a little bit older I realized how serious it was mostly from reading how terrible things were. But at the time I can't remember any particular emotion. Maybe this was because we didn't lose anything. We didn't have that kind of money. Dad had no investments. Our situation remained the same except that it was harder for dad, and mom worked occasionally selling dresses for friends who owned a dress shop. That was all.

- C: Did your sisters go to The Rayen School before you did?
- L: One sister did.
- C: Just one? She graduated how many years before you?
- L: Six. Five and a half to six.
- C: Did you use any of the books she used?
- L: No. I found an old Latin pony down in the basement once, but I don't know whose it was. We never used the same text books. Did we buy our text books then? I think we did, but we sold them again. We turned them in to the book store and they sold them.
- C: Do you remember the price you got back for them?
- L: No. I can't remember. Whatever it was, we thought it was too much when we bought them and too little when we sold them. It was the same story then as today.
- C: What kind of books did you read while you were in high school?
- L: We read voraciously. That was really one of our entertainments. I read everything. Of course, my dad was largely responsible for that too. I read classics, Greek mythology, and just everything. We went to the library almost every week.
- C: You referred to your father helping you. Would you say he pressured you in any way?
- L: No. Mom did, but not dad.
- C: In what ways did your mother pressure you?
- L: She wanted us to do the best we could, even better. I remember when I started what we called the Confirmation Class at Sunday School. She said she wanted me to be the valedictorian of the class. I didn't know what the valedictorian of the class was, but I made it. I tried desperately at Rayen to make the honor roll. Dad never pressured us like that; he just helped.

- C: What did it take to make the honor roll at Rayen?
- L: Three "E's" every month. That meant three excellents.
- C: What was the grading system?
- L: "E", "G", "D", and "F", I think.
- C: You received your grades every month?
- L: I think. We received our grades either every month or every six weeks. I can't recall.
- C: To your recollection, how did your friends do in school?
- L: Well, one of my closest friends was smarter than I was. I'm not sure, but I think she made the honor roll. Three of us were sort of inseparable. My other friend's grades weren't quite as good as mine. But, my two friends were smart kids. They really were.
- C: How many subjects did you take?
- L: Four. I think I had five one year. The year that I took shorthand and typing I think that I carried five.
- C: How much pressure did you receive from the teachers?
- L: None. I think they knew I was doing the best I could.
- C: Did you know of cases where teachers pressured the students at all?
- L: No.
- C: When you graduated, you went to work in the relief office. How did you find the adjustment of leaving the secure environment of The Rayen School?
- L: Rather traumatic, especially when I was typing the case of a teacher that I had had in public school. It was a shock to me. I was only seventeen years old. It was a terrible shock because I loved this teacher and here she was applying for relief. I thought it was a terrible, terrible thing, and it was.

C: How long did you work for the relief office?

L: I worked from 1932 to 1936 when Franklin Delano Roosevelt became President, and started all these public work programs. After leaving the relief office, I went to the Truscon Steel Company.

C: Can you recall how much you were paid at the relief office?

L: No. When I left Truscon I was making a hundred dollars a month, which was as much as some of the engineers were getting.

C: What years were these?

L: From 1936 until I married in 1940.

C: As you look back on your years at school from your position right now, what one thing stands out the most in your memory?

L: Well, I would say the faculty, without any reservations.

C: Did any one faculty member stand out in particular?

L: I wouldn't say any one did. I might say three men stood out; Kenneth Pickering, John Stewart, and John Russ. Johnny was fun and good looking. The other two were just excellent teachers.

C: Now this was based on your knowledge of them in the classroom only?

L: Yes.

C: How would you compare the women teachers to the men teachers in the school?

L: Well, it's funny that you should ask. The women weren't nearly as interesting. I don't know why, but they weren't. Maybe it's because they didn't have the strong personalities that the men did. They seemed older. Maybe the fact that the older men were married and the women were all single had something to do with it. I don't know. One of them had a sweet way about her, but most of them were pretty business-like. They felt that you were there to study and you did it.

C: Which women teachers stand out the most in your mind?

L: My geometry teacher for one. She was a good teacher. She was "no-nonsense" and no fun, but she was a good teacher. Miss Walkerly, who taught one of my commercial subjects was an excellent teacher. I can say that in all the time I was at The Rayen School, I really actively disliked only one or two women teachers. One was the typing teacher. I could never warm up to her. The other was Miss Peterson.

C: Was Miss Peterson at Rayen School throughout your high school years?

L: She was dean of girls. I don't think she was teaching any more.

C: How much contact did you have with Miss Peterson?

L: None. I had no problems about which I had to see her. I think she was a classmate of my father's, and I remember that he wasn't real fond of her either. Maybe I absorbed my feelings toward her from my father. In the first place, I think she was already too old for the job when I was in school. I don't know why I say this. I had no contact with her, but I just didn't like her. Maybe it was her bearing. You warm up to some people when you look at them, and some people you don't.

C: If you had the power to do over, what one thing would you change about The Rayen School when you were there?

L: I really don't know. I never thought about it. I know the school was not permitted to hire Jewish teachers at that time, and that probably bugged me. It was written in their charter that they were not permitted to hire Jewish teachers. I believe it has only been in the last fifteen or twenty years that they hired any Jewish faculty. I would imagine that should have bothered me.

C: So you say that it was in the charter that the school was not permitted to hire Jewish teachers?

L: It was in the Rayen charter that they were given.

C: The one that goes back to 1866?



- L: That's the one. Haven't you heard that before?
- C: No. I've never heard that before. But you say the treatment of the Jewish students . . .
- L: I never realized that I was different or apart because I was Jewish. I never felt any anti-Semitism on the part of any teacher or student.
- C: There was never any segregation?
- L: No, but they weren't allowed to hire a Jewish teacher.
- C: This was The Rayen School which was not allowed to hire a Jewish teacher, not just the Board of Education?
- L: No, this was The Rayen School. This restriction was in the charter of The Rayen School. They have since removed it, I think. I don't know. When my children went to Rayen there were some Jewish faculty members. As a matter of fact, there was a young girl here the other night who was a graduate of Rayen, and at the time her sister was hired as a substitute teacher there. She was there long after I was, and she said Mr. Tear felt very badly about the restriction and discussed it with her at the time. He felt it was wrong that they couldn't hire a Jewish teacher.
- C: Do you recall what centered around the change in the charter that allowed The Rayen School to hire Jewish teachers?
- L: No, I wasn't there. By the time my children got to Rayen it had already been changed. I don't recall if there was anything in the newspaper about the change in the charter.
- C: Have you kept up with what has happened? Would you say that you are actively involved with the school?
- L: Not actively, but the ex-librarian lives across the street. We have discussed things at the school with her. By the time my son graduated, he was kind of glad to be getting out of there. He graduated in 1967.

- C: Could you make a distinction now between the Rayen you went to and the Rayen that your son went to.
- L: The Rayen that my daughter went to, I would say is the Rayen that I went to.
- C: What year did she graduate from Rayen?
- L: She graduated in 1962. I think she enjoyed it. I think Bob did up to the end. He wasn't the student that Susie was. I think he was glad he was getting out of there. The kids were getting kind of unruly. There wasn't any school spirit. He worked on the newspaper, and they couldn't sell the newspapers. There was no feeling for the school. When I went to Rayen, we had pride in it.
- C: What was your attitude towards South High School?
- L: We hated South, all because of football. It wasn't for social or economic reasons. It was because of sports.
- C: What about the other schools, for example, East High School?
- L: I don't think there was the rivalry with East High that there was with South.
- C: Would you say there was a feeling of superiority among the Rayen students?
- L: Definitely.
- C: Do you feel it was justified?
- L: Yes I do. I think we had a fine education and a different atmosphere. I'm speaking from ignorance, really, because I never spent a day at South High, but I just feel that we had a superior school. I don't say it's the same school today.
- C: Do you feel any remorse about what has happened to The Rayen School?
- L: I do, but it's a remorse for a lot of things today. A lot of institutions have deteriorated. There is a lack of feeling for everything. People don't have

pride in a lot of things that they used to have. I still get a thrill when I see the flag waving. A lot of people think the flag is just a symbol, but I don't look at it that way. The older you get, the more conservative you get.

C: Would you consider yourself a conservative through your high school years?

L: I've always been a conservative, but a liberal conservative. Politically, I'm liberal. Concerning morals and ethics, I'm very conservative. I should have lived with Queen Victoria.

C: Did your daughter or your son ever experience any anti-Semitic attitudes at school?

L: No, I guess we're lucky. I think Hitler did a lot to make us very self conscious, and make it easier for people to show how they felt. I don't remember of once having had either of the children say that something unpleasant had happened at school with any of their classmates or their teachers. They had a lot of non-Jewish friends.

C: When you were back in school, would you say the teachers were especially nice to you?

L: They were nice, but I was "nice"-- well behaved. That was all.

C: Is there anything else you feel you have to say?

L: I think we were happy when I went to The Rayen School. There were a couple of unpleasant minutes, when we didn't quite know what we were supposed to do. For the most part I was happy, but that could have been a reflection from my home life. We were happy at home; we were happy at school.

C: Have you said everything you want to say?

L: I have. It's difficult to remember back 42 years. I'm not old enough to remember the past better than I do the present. I do know that we had tremendous pride. For the most part, my years at The Rayen School were very happy years.

C: Thank you very much, Mrs. Lackey.