

Lancaster County Historical Society
Oral History Project

Interviewee: Mary Scott Haverstick

Interviewer:

Date Recorded:

Transcriber: Kaitlyn Cody

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This interview is with Mary Scott Haverstick who was born and raised in Paradise, Pennsylvania. She would like to tell us about going to school and this period was in the early 1920's.

Interviewer: Mary, just what was it like when you went to school in the early 1920's?

Mary: Well actually the thing I wanted to talk about was the part of my education that I feel is very valuable, which was walking to school.

When I look back over the years, I spent in a country school, the time spent leaving my house and walking probably two miles through a small country town to the schoolhouse in the morning and returning home in the evening was as much value to me in my later life and particularly left me with many happy memories.

One of the things I became conscious of much later was that I had learned on those walks a great deal about the seasons. I think first of the foggy mornings of early September when the world was quite shrouded and very careful crossing roads and walking up not being too sure of what was a block ahead of you in the sidewalk with not too many people out. I used to walk past one stretch of sidewalk, about that time of year where a local gardener had a luscious crop of small red berries that grew on a bush that protruded through the fence and I always stopped to eat a few of those.

I also became very conscious of the color of the sky so that to this day I look at a sky and think that is the kind of shade of blue that says it's spring or that's the kind of shade of blue says it's fall and there is quite a difference if you spend enough time outdoors to become conscious of it. I also hardly ever wore a wristwatch in my life because somehow that time spent outside seemed to make me conscious on many levels that I'm not too sure exactly what they are. Maybe the shadows I don't know what. But I did develop a fairly keen sense of what time of day it was by my surroundings. I also remember walking in the snow which seemed quite deeper than I don't know about that I used to hear people older than I say when I was small that the snow used to be deeper. I feel that way. And the icicles that I saw and particularly the heavy, heavy clothing that we wore in the winter to be warm in those days meant to be loaded down with many heavy clothing which I didn't care too much for and couldn't wait to get to school to shed. In fact, I can remember, my first stop at school was to go in the outdoor toilet and take off the outer layer of the stockings that I was forced to wear.

I also learned to know a lot of people on my way back and forth because it was long and because in a small town we were all more or less like a family you knew everybody. And felt free to knock at doors and ask for drinks of water and visit people. One lady along the way about halfway between my house and school was a proud owner of a player piano and I used to knock on her door about once a week and ask, on the way home this was, if I could stop in and play her piano. And she was very gracious about that, although I must say there were times she announced she had a sick headache and shut the door rather firmly.

Another man along the way owned a pitcher. It looked like silver and I suppose it was silver. And we would knock at his door and when he would answered asking if he would mind playing the pitcher for us. And he would bring it to the door and wind it and it would play, "How Dry I Am" which we thought was wonderful.

A friend of my mother's had a cuckoo clock which fascinated me and I stopped in there a good deal and asked if I could wait for the cuckoo to come out and sometimes I would wait for it to come out once and sometimes twice and then go on my way and maybe stop to see the lady who subscribed to more magazines than anybody in our small town at that time and a lot of us little girls collected what we called the Campbell Soup Dolls which were the little curly headed girls in the corner of their ad and she would allow us to cut them out and take them home with us.

Another favorite stop was at a house where they had a large, uh, sofa right in the corner of the kitchen beside the coal stove. They also subscribed to Sears Roebuck Magazine and the girl who lived there and I would spend some time on the sofa with the new issue of Sears Roebuck playing "what do you want on this page" and we'd take turns as we went through the magazine each one picking the item on that page that we would like to own.

That home had also in the kitchen the um sampler, uh not a sampler I don't know how they made those, but the thing that said "Home Sweet Home" in red and green with a wooden frame and also a picture I've never forgotten called "Rock of Ages" which was what I presume was a sinner touching a cross in the middle of a storm tossed sea. I also remember that house because later when the grandmother died there, the viewing was held in a way that may have been common then but was the one time I ever saw it, where the casket was inside the windows in the parlor and all of us who lived in the neighborhood walked across the porch to view the body instead of going to an undertaking parlor. This house was right beside a woman who had appointed herself to watch me carefully because she noticed I walked through all the mud puddles and feared that I would get colds or something and used to come out and threaten me every time I walked through the mud puddles in front of her house, that she was going to tell my mother about that immediately.

Another favorite stop was the grocery store, which was an enormous three story brick building with the traditional big counter full of penny candy and the cracker barrels and pickle barrels and lots of old men who passed a lot of time sitting around there, and they

sold galoshes and all kinds of things that I can't imagine now would have any place in a grocery store. Outside that store was a fire escape which sometimes we would go all the way up to the third story and in the spring the, I believe it was the local Mennonite church, the ladies from there quilted on the third floor and who made beautiful quilts and we would sit on the landing of the fire escape and watch them. As we left the store there were no horses tied to the railing outside we'd take a couple somersaults on the railings that were meant for horses and go on our way to home. However between the store and my home there was also the creek down the meadow and in the spring I'd walk down and look at it and sometimes take one test ride out on the swing that hung there which was a branch hanging from a rope out over the creek and back again to the rock where I started out and looked forward to swimming in the summer.

And in the winter, I would go down through the meadow and try out the creek to see if it were ready for ice skating because the ice skating was really great. We built bonfires along the creek at night and skated from Paradise to Leaman Place many evenings so it was important to find out if the skating was ready.

Uh, somewhere between the school and home if it took that long to get home, eventually most children would have to go to the bathroom. And in those days most of the houses in the town had no plumbing inside but you were free to, if you knocked at the door and asked the lady of the house if you could use their bathroom, they would allow you to use their bathroom. And the bathrooms were as fascinating as the houses because they seemed to be kept in the same style that the lady of the house kept her own home. Some were very neat and tidy with lace curtains and carefully [swathed] and some were a little more careless than that. My favorite was the barber shop's outdoor toilet. The barber, as the calendars became obsolete, put them on the wall of the toilet and Lucky Tiger which was a hairdressing used in that time put out calendars with women I suppose later they would have been called pinup girls with long flowing hair in rather revealing costumes. So that was a very favorite place to stop. All in all, I feel sad for my children not to live in a world where they're so welcome to be free to walk along the road and to know their neighbors so intimately.

Interviewer: Now Mary this was very interesting on your walking to school. How far was it from your home to school?

Mary: I think I said in the beginning about 2 miles. I'm not sure of that but approximately 2 miles.

Interviewer: And how big a school room?

Mary: Well it was the country school with two rooms. Two classes were together in one room and then the next two classes were together in the next room, and then the separate building with the two more.

Interviewer: So, as I understand from your conversation, you seldom had what they call today snow days, where you didn't go to school because it snowed?

Mary: I don't remember that. We could have had but I don't remember any. Everyone was within walking distance I don't know about the teachers.

Interviewer: How do you relate your walking to school in all kinds of weather in the rain, snow, and bad weather with today's schools where your bused to a school if you live, if you live over a half a mile or a mile from the school. Do you feel that they're, you would rather have been bused, I would assume from what you said you had an experience from walking to school?

Mary: Well we certainly did but traffic conditions were quite different and, of course, our school was within that distance of our home so that changes things so that it would be rather impractical with the current world to assume that that would be a good thing for children. We were fortunate in, in the fact that the school was closer to our homes and also the traffic was not something to be alarmed about.

Interviewer: Do you recall what time you left your home in the morning to go to school?

Mary: School started at 8:30, I don't know what time I left the house but school started at 8:30 and as I recall was finished at 3:30 in the afternoon and I would assume I must have left the house at 7:30 and got home around 4:30, especially poking around the way I did.

Interviewer: So it was a pretty complete day?

Mary: I think it was particularly complete because we also got some exercise. We got exercise, went to school, got exercise on the way home, but as I say it's unrealistic to expect that now.

Interviewer: Let's talk a little bit instead of walking to school, about what the school itself was like when you got inside of it.

Mary: Well it had a stove up front and a platform that we stood on to recite. And little wooden desks, and I think a number of schoolteachers have described for this program rather fully the interior of the schools and the physical layouts of them.

Interviewer: You were in elementary school...

Mary: I was in elementary school and I could add something else about the kind of people that I met.

In this simple country town, there was also an interesting group moved in who were another part of our education and brought maybe some voices from a larger world or a more confusing world to us. I remember being stopped on the way home several times by a large yellow van and this van had moved into an area right below us and had a number of men living in it who were members of the socialist party and I can still remember how careful they were to expose the children in that community to thinking

maybe outside the system in which we lived by stopping little groups of us on the sidewalk and bringing from the van an apple and the one man would hold up the apple and say, "wouldn't you all like to have the apple?" and we would say, "yes" and he would say, "but if I gave the apple to just one of you wouldn't I be unfair?" and we would say, "yes" and he would get out a knife and cut the apple into as many portions as there were children and give us each a segment and say, "now wasn't that fair?" and we would say, "yes" and he would say, "Remember children, this is socialism" that was in a small town in Lancaster County in probably 1928 or '9. So that we did have voices other than just the regular small community.

Interviewer: You talk about 1928 or '29 versus today. The traffic must have been just a few cars, people in those days didn't have many cars, were there a lot of horses?

Mary: I don't remember when I was going to school a lot of horses, although this was in an Amish community too. The surrounding community was Amish so we had teams and wagons and a few cars, but really not too much going on although we did cross Route 30. But I don't remember Route 30 being any particularly busy thing to cross at that time.

Interviewer: At that time, if I recollect Route 30 was a two lane highway.

Mary: With a trolley track in the middle. The trolley came from Lancaster down to I think Leaman Place although it might have gone further.

Interviewer: In your classes in elementary school during this period, was there any particular ethnic group, a German, Scotch, Irish, uh other, that comprised the student?

Mary: I think Lancaster County's small towns at that time were probably predominantly German extraction uh, we did have a few Amish children, uh some children were from Mennonite families, I'd say there was a pretty wide spread. Some people were in businesses that were more or less national businesses. And some people lived in small towns and some people lived on farms. But I think basically we were all country people with country people's values.

Interviewer: There was no feeling, in other words, that there was a different social strata between your family and other families in your community?

Mary: Well I think those of us who were gay knew we were gay and those who were plain knew they were plain, but it certainly caused no conflict between the children, nor among the adults.

Interviewer: Tell us a little bit about the teacher you had at this elementary school?

Mary: Well, I had three different teachers in elementary school and um, I remember them as being devoted and very proficient teachers and especially in English. I felt our background was really very good in grammar and also in literature and of course we were forced in those days to do a good deal of memorizing and sometimes we memorized

things that maybe the meaning wasn't exactly clear to us at the time but later in life some of the verses particularly that we were made to memorize had real meaning for me in occasions in my life when that particular experience happened to me. I could go back and remember the verse that someone had written that encompassed the feelings that I was feeling.

Interviewer: Now, you have become a writer, poet, uh you've become interested in the arts, your education from the elementary school through the Paradise High School would not by today's standards have been the springboard to literary accomplishments...

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