

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University
Joe Stahlman Interview
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SM: Today is September 11th and we have Joe Stahlman with us. Tell me a little about yourself.

JS: I was raised and born in a little mining town in Armstrong County over about four miles I guess, west of Kittanning, I would say. I lived there until I got married and then moved to Slippery Rock—met a girl from Slippery Rock. [I was] born there, at home—in the house, with my grandmother as a midwife and then the doctor came after to check my mother over and me over at a later date. Anyhow, June 18th 1928. And I just had an ordinary country school education and went to high school. A lot of folks were farmers around that area, and a lot of them dropped out in sixth grade, some of them eighth grade. And a few of us went on to high school. My parents encouraged me to go on to high school. I guess my dad went to business college so he evidently did whatever was called secondary education. My mother, I think she quit eighth grade, ‘cause she had brothers and sisters to raise. So anyhow, she wanted me to go to high school, and I did, and I graduated from Kittanning High School in 1946. Met a girl from Slippery Rock area in ‘47, got married in February of ‘48, and moved up here. I’ve been here ever since.

SM: What’s your affiliation with Slippery Rock University?

JS: Just that I worked here. I started in June, after my twenty-first birthday, so it’d be after the 18th of June 1949. Let’s see, I gotta think a second.

SM: [Laughs] take your time.

JS: Yeah, I started here just as, I guess you’d call it tradesman helper or grounds crew or whatever. Before that I worked in a coal strip mine, and it wasn’t very steady work. It depended on the weather, and on them having the coal uncovered to work and whatever. Here I started—I had work every day, got up every morning.

SM: It was good to have a routine.

JS: Something in a, yeah, in a routine. And also I found that if I bought something on the installment plan, like we quite often did when we were newly married, we were able to make

payments on time and that kind of thing. I could depend every two weeks on having a full pay day and I could make payments on our loans. With the coal company, when I worked I made good money: \$1.25 an hour. I started here at sixty cents an hour. We worked forty-eight hours a week but we worked Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday from seven to five, and Thursday and Friday from seven to four. Then we worked those extra hours, or got three hours off on Saturday; so we worked Saturday morning and instead of working the three hours in the afternoon we had Saturday afternoon off and, of course Sunday. So that made a nice arrangement.

SM: What was your first impression of the campus when you got here?

JS: Well [pause] I'd never been on a college campus I don't think, unless it [was] just visiting or passing through or knowing, "Well there's a college" or whatever. So, it was kind of a different thing than I was used to. At that time the high school was located on campus also—Slippery Rock High School. And they had part of the high school—part of the classes in McKay, what's McKay [Education Building] today, and part of them in West Hall. The wood shop and it seems like the industrial arts—what I call industrial arts, or vocational—a lot of it was in West Hall. They also had agricultural courses for future farmers and so on. So, well, [it was] pretty interesting. Of course, the type of work I did helped the tradesmen, helped do mowing and groundwork and whatever.

One instance I recall: I was mowing the front campus. We had a large mower that they would walk behind. They had little trailing seats one could ride on, but the superintendent at that time didn't allow you to ride, you had to walk behind the thing. But anyhow, it cut three reels wide, quite a wide spot and they were reel-type mowers rather than the rotary blade that they have today. So I cut up along what I call the "long walk," the circle drive, comes up along the Alumni House. Now this is a whole different campus than it was. But I'd come up along there and around, and I went down around West Hall, just past Old Main, down along West Hall.

Boy, all of a sudden, that mower just locked up and stopped and stumbled. I wondered what happened with that so I got out and looked. Here's a block of wood caught in the reels and so I thought, "Well that's something." So I took it out and I laid it over—threw it over next to the wall of West Hall. [I] went on around, came back up around, made another round, and then: another block of wood. Well then I looked around and there's several pieces of wood out there. And I thought—they're just sawed off scraps of wood, little blocks—and I thought, "Well that's something isn't it? They must've dumped them out the window or something." I had no idea.

So I went around again, but when I got over by the walk, what I call the “long walk,” coming up, I looked across and there’s guys throwing the wooden blocks out the window. So, I knew nobody, I didn’t know any of the teachers or anything—high school, that’d be a high school teacher. So I went up and the superintendent—my boss, Howard Harper, was the superintendent of Buildings and Grounds at that time. And I went in and I said, you know, “I’m new, as you know, but I don’t know what to do about a situation.” But I told him what was going on. I said, “Who is the teacher?” He says Dr. Elder, Walter Elder, who was the shop teacher then. And I said, “Well they’re throwing the . . .” you know, told him what they were doing and I said I’ll go down and talk to him. He said, “He’s probably sawing the wooden blocks for them to throw out.” I thought, “What kind of a place am I in?” [SM laughs]

But anyhow, the buildings on campus at the time were . . . the Chapel was here, South Hall was here, and neither of those are here anymore. But I guess most of the buildings that were here at the time except, well, the old heating plant was where Weisenfluh [Dining Hall] parking lot is—the parking lot behind Weisenfluh is where the old original boiler house was.

And, let’s see, I felt pretty welcome because they sent me up to mow around the president’s residence; Dale Houk, Dr. Houk was the president at that time. And I had a little push-reel mower, no engine on it. They had a lot of flowerbeds, so the big mower could mow the front yard and around the big spaces but somebody had to trim around the flowerbeds and so on. That’s what I was doing. And I hadn’t been out there very long—went up pretty early in the morning and started mowing—and Dr. Houk came out and he said, “Hello, who are you?” And I told him my name and so on. [He said] “You just started here?” I said “Yeah,” I’d been there probably about a week at that time, I can’t truly remember. “Oh,” he said, “come on in and have a coffee.” And I said “Well, I have to. . . .” “Nope,” he said, “Come on in.” So I went in, sat down to breakfast, you know, with the president of the college; had coffee and I think part of a cinnamon roll or some kind of roll or Danish. And he asked me, [he] said, “Where did you work before; where did you come from?” And the something you’re wondering. And I talked to him a little bit; I told him where I was from and all that. And from then on, he knew my name was Joe, and he’d greet me by my name if I’d meet him out on campus, which was seldom. But I thought, “Now isn’t that nice?” You know, that’s kind of a friendly place.

The first job I had was in South Hall, the boys’ dorm had two big porches, one on the front and one on the side. They had huge porch swings, I don’t know, they must’ve been eight feet wide and there was a couple of slats missing out on the back of one of them. So I got my first job working at the carpenter’s shop cutting out those slats and putting them in and painting them up so they looked like they belonged in there. I worked at that quite a while.

Then finally I got on to be the plumber's helper. He needed a helper; the guy that always worked with him had retired. As a matter of fact, I guess that I kind of went around to the different tradesmen and helped whoever needed a hand. And I think I took his opening that was left when he left and retired.

Anyhow, getting back to working with the plumber. I left for a short period of time. I got kind of disgusted because I couldn't get a raise. I approached them and said, "I need more money. My family's getting bigger; [I'm] expecting my third child." And they said, "Well, you know, this is the best we can do." So I quit and went up to Cooper Bessemer [in Grove City] and worked up there for a little while, I think about six months. Then they had [an] administration change. Back in those days politics had quite a little bit to do with, at least, the upper administration. Not the faculty so much, but the president and deans and so on.

SM: The higher-ups.

JS: Yeah, that was it. So they had a complete change of administration, and a friend—well not a friend, I'd say an acquaintance of mine—got to be superintendent. He was quite a bit older than I was. [He was] superintendent of Buildings and Grounds and he came out one night and he said, "Would you be interested in coming back to the college?" I said, "Not the way it was." I said, "I just couldn't get along on that." And I said—or he said, "Well, I'll talk to you later." And so he came back another night, another evening, and said, "Well, we can do better for you, money-wise." I said, "Well, I was never displeased with the work, and so on. I liked the variety of things I was doing there and where I'm working now, I do the same old thing on the machine every night." I said, "That's pretty boring." So I said, "If you can go with the money part of it that'd be fine." And so I came back. Then I made up that time back, as far as retirement goes and so on.

Anyhow [pause] in the meantime the plumber had passed away. He was near retirement age when I left anyhow. And so I hired back on then as the plumber. But I had worked with all the tradespeople and that gave me a little bit of experience in all the trades. And I've always been, I guess what you would call—as far as building trades and related to buildings, and water lines, and steam lines, and electric lines, and things that are connected [pause] like a campus or building, group of buildings—I've always been kind of a "jack-of-all-trades" maybe not a master of any of them. But anyhow, I fit in pretty well to put me in line to be promoted up into other positions.

Let's see, first I was a plumber, then I got to be what they call building maintenance foreman and I was the foreman over the electricians, the plumbers, the heating plant, and what I call kind of

the technical end of the thing, or the skilled The only one I wasn't over was the carpenters at that time.

Well then, next thing I go up to be, they started a program; there was a huge change in the classifications. When I started out I was just a laborer, then I asked them one day, "What should I put down as my position, my classification?" They said, "Journeyman's apprentice." So, that's what I was. Well then I got to be plumber and that was an official classification then, and building maintenance foreman. Then they changed the thing from buildings and grounds superintendent to institutional maintenance superintendent. So then it had several—plant maintenance engineer, that was it: P.M.E. Then they went to the institutional maintenance superintendent. But they were all rated one, two, three and four I think was the highest of [any] of those. And now its Facilities—Development Facilities or whatever. Then it got to be Department of Physical Plant. And so the names changed but, as those classifications change so does the money, luckily. So that was always good. They re-did the whole thing. Groundskeepers and laborers and so one went right along with it.

SM: What kind of changes did the campus undergo while you were here? Any building renovations or . . . ?

JS: Oh yes. All [pause] this building. Starting with the new heating plant built in 1949. That was the first new building on campus. Shortly after that, they built Miller Auditorium in 1958 and also the addition to Maltby Library, which was the library at that time; now it's a computer center. They did an addition on that, then they built Patterson Hall and they started building the dormitories out across the hill, which they're tearing down now. Unbelievable, the buildings that were built in my lifetime—in my time here

SM: And they're already being torn down.

JS: Yeah, demolition. But, anyhow, they built the [Morrow] Field House in 1960 and then the [Spotts] World Culture Building and from then on what's here now. I knew they were talking about apartments even back when I retired. I retired June the 29th 1990. So, I was here forty-one years. There's a little tree planted down there next to the pond on the lower end of campus there in my honor. My daughter, Melba [Tomeo], had it planted there with a little plaque. So, believe it or not.

SM: Well, that's nice.

JS: It's kind of an honor, yeah. They gave that as a surprise to me when I retired.

SM: Well . . . what were some of the major events or activities that occurred on the campus, or even in the town of Slippery Rock, while you were here?

JS: Oh, a lot, a lot of changes. To pick one individual one would be difficult. I do remember during the Vietnam War when a lot of campuses were having anti-war protests. I think they had one little march here on campus. It didn't seem to get into the amount of demonstrations that they had on other campuses, or not to that extent. And, well, a lot of things have happened: movie theaters gone in Slippery Rock and of course, they tore the Chapel down, then they tore South Hall down, which was quite a thing. A lot of people were upset about tearing the Chapel down. It was a beautiful stone building. I suppose you've seen pictures of it.

SM: I don't know if I've seen the Chapel but I've seen some pictures of the older campus.

JS: I've got some slides that I took and when they started developing this lower campus I would go out on Harmony Road and from the same position there took slides of the buildings as they were coming up out of the ground. So, it's pretty interesting to watch. I should've taken them as they were going back down again. I didn't do that.

But yeah, the Chapel: they were still using that for high school graduation and also for the college graduation. Well, teachers college at that time. I saw those things change: from state teachers college to state college to university over that period of time. I saw seven presidents come and go. And, of course saw the student enrollment probably go somewhere—I think it was somewhere around six hundred to seven hundred, in that area, in '49. There were still people going to school here on the G.I. Bill from World War II.

There was a trailer court, a little trailer court, up just, it'd be just at this end of Patterson Hall and [pause] they had spaces there, electric provisions and sewage hookup and water hookup, and of course the trailers at that time weren't nearly as big or fancy as they are now. But several couples lived in there that I got to know. They were of course older than the ordinary student. Some of them had children—they had one child or something like that. And quite often they would come over to the shop and ask to use something that we had there like the saw or something. They didn't have tools but they were doing something around their trailer. When they built Patterson Hall they dug down and of course they called me up and said, "We've run into some pipes here." Well that's what it was, the underground conduit for that trailer court. And I remember that being there.

SM: Are there any memories that stick out in your mind while you were working here? Like, any particular event or happening?

JS: No, I remember going out when it changed to a university. Went out and took down all the Slippery Rock State College signs around the corners of the campus. And they put up one out front—quite a different one there now. But the one they put out and they unveiled it at midnight or something or other. It was a late, late night thing but I came in and [saw] them do that. Dr. Reinhart was president at that time.

They also bought up a lot of houses around that were individual or privately-owned houses to acquire more ground. I remember them buying the farm next door which had been a fellow named Gerlach's; I think there was two hundred acres or more in that farm. He didn't want to sell it and I think they used eminent domain to acquire that property and he was quite upset. And I talked to him, oh, several years after that. He bought another farm out near West Liberty. And he said, "You know, that was the best move I ever made." He said "I objected at the time," but he said it got him out of farming and he wasn't making any money out of it anyhow, really.

But he was a . . . bachelor fellow, never been married. He had sheep and—one of the other things I did, too, like I say, jack-of-all-trades: mark out the playing fields. It was beside where the Field House is now. I guess that field's still there. But, that was their main athletic field. I came in one Saturday to mark the thing before the game, Saturday morning, and there were sheep all over. He had sheep and [there were] sheep all over the place. I thought my . . . you know; and I realized then that that was—he was the only guy that had sheep around here. So I went down and I said, "You know you got a bunch of sheep up on the field up there, on the football field and I have to put marks on it: line it and everything before the game." The game's I think a 2 o'clock in the afternoon start or 1:30. So he came up with his pickup truck and a couple dogs. He got the dogs out and whatever he told 'em they rounded those sheep up and took 'em right down through the . . . there was woods [pause], a strip of wooded land there and went through there and took 'em down to his marsh, quick as a whistle. I wasn't able to remove some of the evidence that they had left on the field so I really don't know what happened there. That was kind of an interesting thing. But I got it worked out in time for the game.

Just a number of instances like that that I often told the fellows I worked with, "When I retire I'm going to write a book about this place." I never actually did, but there's a lot of memories like that that may be of interest.

SM: So, overall it was an enjoyable experience working here?

JS: Very, very enjoyable. [It's a] very good place to work, you know. I was the second president of the non-instructional union—not the faculty union, but the other, Local 819. And the first one

was the electrician, Dallas Gill—the first president. And then he retired and—I’d held other positions, in and up to that point.

So, that started in the 1950s . . . must have been ’56 or ’57. I think the credit union started in 1957, and then the union, staff union. That was another thing that has changed now: they call everybody staff, even the faculty . . . well, there was a division back then: they called them “non-instructional staff” and “faculty”, two separate things. Now they’ve kind of defined it all as staff.

Now they did, I don’t know, I guess they do have contracted meals now, still have [a] contracted caterer. Back then they had their own food service employees, and so on. My wife worked—my present wife worked at that. My first wife passed away and we were married, what, forty-nine years; passed away in 1997. About a year and a half later I married Garnet who I am married to now and we’ll be celebrating our tenth anniversary next month.

SM: Congratulations.

JS: Thank you. I can’t believe it’s been ten years. She had five children with her first husband and I had six, so together we have eleven children, which makes quite a group. Quite a group when we get together; it’s been a good thing. But yes, I enjoyed working here very much.

SM: That’s good.

JS: I was rather disappointed in bidding on some of the promotions here, of positions that came open. I thought—but then when I look back on it, I was looking at it from my direction and they didn’t see what they wanted I guess. So I never became the actual director of the physical plant. I was acting director I think three times while we did a search. I was good enough to do that for a year or so but not for the permanent position. But in the meantime while they were searching I got paid for the top position because I was doing it. So that was kind of interesting.

But it was interesting too to see the changes in . . . it kept my mind young to see the younger folks coming on, you know the students coming on campus. The fads and the dress and whatever; it was a good place to work for that reason also, to see those types of things.

Of course we didn’t have—we lost the high school. I was in the high school yearbook a couple times. We were over repairing the railing over by the, I want to call it the lab school, that’s over by McKay; and I didn’t realize that their camera was getting up that high. They had the students lined up in different classes on the bank there, and there we were bending over on the bank and it showed up in the yearbook. I just thought they would’ve clipped that off.

Oh but a lot of things, when I first started to work here, one of the things I did was carry the clock. And I watched—they didn't have campus police, they had two night watchmen and they worked twelve hour shifts: six to six—six in the evening 'til six in the morning. And you carried a clock with you. It had a chart in there [it could] run for a whole week, and as you went along you had to go to certain . . . there's little keys here and there in critical areas so you had to pass critical areas to get to the key and then you clicked it and that put an imprint on that chart, so they could tell whether you had gone the route or whatever that you were supposed to or be in [a] place. And the rule of thumb was you had to click that every fifteen minutes—somewhere—it could even be in the same place.

So I remember going around and at first [pause] well what happened, the one fellow slipped on the ice in the wintertime. The one night watchman hurt his back so he was off and I carried the clock for I don't know, two or three weeks while he was off. One of the things was they had, at the old heating plant there was only one fellow on a shift, so one of the things the watchman had to do as he passed around was go through that heating plant and make sure he was alright and everything was okay with him. Well since that was a nice warm place and it was wintertime I would come in and click the thing and I would wait fifteen minutes and I'd click it again and I would get warmed up a little bit and then start out on my rounds again.

One morning, well it was early in the morning, it must have been four o'clock or so, I came in and it was particularly cold and at that time too they generated their own electricity: they used the steam from the heating plant to run the engines that generated electric for use on campus. And I went in the engine room and sat down, at the little desk there and laid the clock down and laid my head down . . . next thing you know my eyes were going shut. So I don't know what time it was, almost six o'clock, almost time for me to quit and I should've made another round by that time and the fireman that was on that shift came in and he said, "You still here?!" and I said "Yes!" [Laughs]. I jumped up, you know, I said, "Oh my." I was supposed to unlock the kitchen for the bakers to get in early because they started baking early. And I went running up 'round; I made the quickest round then of the whole campus that I ever made.

But I went up to the kitchen first and oh, the lady jumped all over me. The one lady came and the baker was a heavy set woman: she couldn't have got in through the window. One opened the window, it wasn't locked, and she crawled through there; stepped in the mop bucket that had wheels—casters on it then, and it went and she fell down. I guess she just got bruised because she didn't break anything. Oh my, she was really on my case for that. "What happened, what happened?" and I said, "I just got in where it was warm and it . . ." I had already been up for ten hours by that time. That was one occasion.

I guess I always tell people I did almost every job on this campus except cook. I never cooked a meal in the dining hall. I washed dishes in the dining hall . . . being a plumber we had to take care of the dishwasher and after—one night they called me in and the big dishwasher had shut down in North Hall—the dining hall was in North Hall at that time. And the big dishwasher shut down so I worked, I got it going and they were so far behind at that time, I said “I’ll stick around and help you,” you know, as I was loading up the trays and putting them in and whatever. And then they had a glass washer that you had to put the glasses in, so I did some of that. It wasn’t unusual for me to do something like that while I was here.

Yeah that was an interesting part of it, it was interesting to—back when we had the . . . oh, when Russia and so on and people who worked for the government had to take a loyalty oath. . . .

SM: During the McCarthy era?

JS: Yeah. We took it as a group in the Chapel. We all gathered in and all went through the procedure, and did the loyalty oath, the ones that came after that then took one as a—before they started you know, before they started work. I don’t know when they quit doing that; I don’t remember the exact time but I remember doing that

SM: Well I think the McCarthy era, I think that ended in 1954, and that’s when he stepped down. So I think that’s probably when it ended.

JS: I remember it was a big thing at the time. But I remember the people who lived around campus that I got to know. The college at one time had their own “dump” they called it at that time: you dumped everything over . . . but they did collect the paper. They would go around—well I rode trucks and would go around to the dorms and the other buildings and pick up the waste paper or empty the big containers. They had sacks made out of burlap, they weren’t plastic at that time, and you’d change that: take the full one out and put a clean one in, take it down and put it in the truck. Then we’d bring it down to the dump and one fellow would go through and gather all the papers that were out of the thing and we baled it and then you’d take a load of baled paper to one of the scrap yards or salvage yards and I suppose they got some money out of it, I don’t know.

But that, that was a hand baler where you had to ratchet the thing down, put a wire tie around it, and But I can remember that and you’d dump stuff wooden—well the elementary school and the high school both were in McKay. They had a cafeteria there. Kids would throw away whole oranges or whatever, you know; they wouldn’t eat all of their lunch. So you had a lot of food stuffs. Well next thing you know we had rats, and that was another thing you had to put up

with. But they did have an exterminator come around and set bait for the rats and stuff. And I've even brought my little 22 caliber rifle in and shot them just for sport because there were plenty of them there. The dump was right, probably [pause] just about where [the] World Culture Building is now. There was also a pond there at one time.

SM: Really?

JS: Yeah, yeah. And way back, before I ever got here, they mined their own coal. There was a coal mine on campus [pause] to fire the boilers and so on, because they did make their own—as well as steam for heat—they made their own electric. And when I came the coal mine was no longer functional, but the tipple where they would bring the coal out and pick the bony out of it [inaudible] and sort it was still there, and the highway department for this area used that to put their ashes in. They'd haul the ashes from the heating plant and put it into the end of that tipple thing. And they could come with pick-ups—they didn't have the big dump trucks like they have now—they'd come with a pick-up truck and back under there, and all they had to do was open up the thing and throw it up back out to drop the ashes into the truck. And the only place there was ashes on the road was where you had to stop. The rest of the road you did the best you could on it.

Those fellows used to come up to the boiler house [heating plant] once in a while and they had a barrel with a fire in it and that's what kept them warm while they sat there waiting for snow to accumulate again [pause] and it was time to go out and spread ashes again. They would come up to the heating plant with a couple buckets and get coal and take it down to fire their little heater.

And one fellow came in one time—they were always playing tricks on one another—one fellow came in one night with two five gallon buckets, and said he wanted to, he was going to get coal but he had to go to the bathroom. So he went on to the bathroom there. While he was in there, we put wet ashes, we had a couple piles there that we hadn't wheeled out yet, and soaked them down with water as much as we could; put a layer of coal on top of it so it looked like it was full of coal. He came back out and he said, "Oh! Who filled up the coal bucket?" And I said, "One of the guys, one of your men was in here." So when the truck came around to pick him up again, well he put it in there and they went down and dumped that first bucket into their barrel of fire and just put the whole fire out. You know they were wondering what happened there. So that kind of horseplay went on. I guess it's like that with any place. We had a good relationship with them too.

But that coal mine is still there. It's sealed now so that the water can't come out and contaminate; but it is full of water. I believe the—it comes right under Harner Hall, what used to be the old mine entrance, but when they built Harner they drove cement piling down to hold the building up on either side of that. Now it wasn't very wide anyhow; it's just like a small country mine. I think they used mules to pull the cars out, or ponies maybe.

And like I say, this is before my time. When I came the barn was still here: the college had a barn that they kept the animals in. I don't think they ever had their own milk, but they did have an orchard on the hill by the president's residence, grapevines and so on, and I think they had what was used on campus.

It wasn't unusual way back years ago for institutions such as this to have a garden or use some of the produce they could raise, or some of the fruit. I don't want to get into some other thing, but a typical thing was the Odd Fellows home in Grove City: they did the same thing. They even canned their produce and used it later on, like home canning. I don't think they ever got to that point here.

They did have chickens at one time on campus, because I heard the old timers talk about the students going up and stealing chickens and cleaning them and roasting them and all that, just something to do. And we had characters like that on campus as well. I got to know some of them, usually the oddballs you know. I'm sure they got a good education and all of that, but they had other interests also.

A student fellow by the name of Ivan Jirak, who was a mountain climber, and he was older than the average student. He came up to the plumbing shop one time and wondered if I had any scrap copper tubing, and I said, "Yeah, I probably do have," I said, "What are you talking about, how long or whatever . . ." you know usually you can use the shorter pieces. Well he said . . . I forget what he mentioned, and I said, "What do you need it for?" And he said, "Well I mountain climb and when I go up a mountain—and some of the other fellows do the same, mountain climbers—they'll write a little synopsis of their climb, of where they stop and how far they made it one day or whatever, and they put it in a paper and seal the ends of the copper tube or something with waterproofing or whatever, and leave it there for the next fellow so he can open it up and see how his trip compared. So he climbed two mountains in South America, and I forget which country it was; one he named Mount Pittsburgh because it was his hometown. And it's still there. And he named the other one in honor of his mother. And so pieces of copper pipe from here are down in South America [laughs].

The one time he came out—he lived in South Hall, so it has been a while ago—he came out and he climbed right up the side of the stone face of the Chapel. You know it was just amazing, you couldn't hardly get your fingernails into that, you know, the joints where the stone was put together.

But that was, that was a very beautiful chapel building. It had wooden—the interior of course was wood—wooden wainscoting I think around the auditorium part of it, and there were termites that got into it. And I remember going down under the building, because the steam lines went through there and we had to go down there occasionally from the plumbing end of it. And I, you could see the tunnels where they looked like mortar joints going up the inside of the stone in the foundation, underneath the Chapel. And I'd go down and take a screwdriver or something and I'd take about that much out of the tunnel. Termites I guess are either allergic to light or whatever, they're very light colored, whether it kills them or whatever . . . anyhow they traveled the tunnel all the time to get up to the wood and I'd take it out, and the next day that tunnel would be all rebuilt and they put that in just, you know, within twelve hours they'd have that filled back in again.

But you could go around that wainscoting coating, and you could tell when you pushed on the varnish—paint—no that was varnish on the outside. You could push in and it would just push right in because the termites had eaten the wood from behind the varnish but it was still there [laughs] . . . curved beams, wooden beams put together: laminated one on the other so that they could bend around, and that was an interesting thing. Well anyhow, they did replace some of those with steel beams. But that was quite a task too, and then you still had the wooden floor joists on top of that, so they deemed it unsafe.

They did raise some money [to] try to keep that building. They were going to tear the inside out, put steel—termite proof the insides of it. They wanted to make an art building out of it, a couple different things, but that never came to fruition; they couldn't get enough money.

And I heard by rumor that because it was a religious building or considered . . . and the state was supposed to be separated, that was one of the reasons they tore it down. I don't know whether that was true or not but Shippensburg, maybe they still have their chapel. They made it into an administration building, an office building, but that had very nice—our Chapel had very nice stained glass and some of them are over in the staff center in North Hall. You can see the stained glass over the windows. We took some of those apart and one of the student girls who worked at the maintenance office drew them and numbered them so they could put them back together

again the way they were because—well they're lead; lead is in between stained-glass and if you try to move them they sag and fall out.

But anyhow I think they're still, there may still be some of those crated up in wooden crates someplace on campus; there used to be. But they said, "Well those are stained-glass windows and they have religious things" There was not a religious emblem in any of the stained glass. Mainly it had to do with academics or whatever, and I can recall one that had an ink pot and a quill and an open book and, you know, something like that. [It] wasn't a bible: it was obviously a library book or a study book or something. I can't remember what was in the other but it looked very nice.

That was one of the places too, there were two keys in there I had to click every night as watchman. They finally quit having any kind of gatherings in there. Then they used it for a store room for a while: used furniture and everything else in the thing for a while. And then they finally decided they'd tear it down.

South Hall was a brick building with a wooden interior also, but it never seemed to get termites in it, but one thing they did have to do was add what we call "fire towers." They put a brick tower on the end of the original building so that you had a fireproof stairway to get out in case they had had a fire, but they never did.

They did the same thing with the apartment buildings they're building now, they have a fire . . . cement—masonry escape route, but the buildings are basically wooden inside. I often wonder about tearing down buildings that are fire rated—the other ones—and putting up wooden buildings that weren't; but then what do I know? [Laughs.]

But I see one of the things you've said here [refers to the interview questions]: "What things were good what things were bad?" Well [I] do have some of those, even though I didn't attend classes here or anything I still had a—I felt like an alumni of the place. When you start tearing things apart, you're tearing down part of my memories. And I'm sure anybody that went here—attend classes here can feel the same way. But they—I mentioned about them buying the properties around, and it grew from, I don't know what the original campus was when I first came, but I think it's 611 acres that they own now. Not all here; they also own Sugar Camp out Miller Road.

But yeah, it's been an interesting place to work. I never went beyond high school in formal education, but I did take college level classes that pertained to business management and management classes, and organizational communication and that type of thing that helped in my

work. And I did also add to my education including some correspondence courses, something like the online courses you get now but it was done by mail for different skills and so on that I felt I needed. Basically I learned by doing and that's been a help.

SM: Do you miss anything about being here or working here?

JS: I miss the fellows I worked with. I didn't [laughs] . . . I didn't miss the work. Well one thing we did have while I was here too, that was—I consider that one of the scariest things in my life. We had an occasion well, when Dr. Watrel was here. I don't know when it all started but I did a lot of the purchasing for the ordering: special things for the maintenance center or whatever, and piping and pipe fittings and electrical things and so on. And they had such an archaic purchasing procedure at that time: you couldn't buy anything over ten dollars without having a bid on the thing, maybe a phone bid or whatever. And that could really hold you up. You have, you know, somebody using—a teacher or something—using one area of the building and you have to try to get the thing—the heat back in it or electric back in it or whatever. And really it was a cumbersome thing: they should've changed that to some other type of system. But anyhow, we had a couple systems set up that we could circumvent that and actually get the thing and take care of it afterwards.

Well in a way that, I don't know of anybody abusing that to any great extent. I know that there were some people probably picked up something for themselves that didn't get marked, you know. You couldn't trace things as accurately as you should. But anyhow they had an investigation about that. And they built the Gail Rose Press Box without going through the Art Commission in Harrisburg: our local, our carpentry crew built that; of course that was not procedural.

So anyhow they had the investigation on the thing and I know I hadn't done anything on my own that I was not ordered to do or asked to do or told to do by my superiors. But still it wasn't right, and I knew it wasn't right, and I had my rights read to me I think three times by state investigators. And that was really scary because I still recall back when they changed things political-wise, and by that time I had gone into upper management in the maintenance center, and I didn't know whether it was kind of a witch hunt like they do once in a while or not. It really did bother me. It's something I still have a feeling about that lingers as very uncomfortable.

So that was a very disturbing experience. And wound up . . . well, Dr. Watrel left and they locked his office. Our locksmith had to go up and lock the office, and put a special lock on that

only the investigators had a key for. I thought that was kind of interesting and [pause] well, one of the interesting things about that: the locks, I suppose they still have the same system here, there's a key that you can put in and take the cylinder out of the lock and then put a different cylinder in and that will change it. As long as you have the key to take the cylinder out you can put a cylinder in that you have the key to fit. That's exactly what you did if you had to get into the president's office that they had "sealed" [laughs].

So we had to get in. They had a—I don't remember if it was a water leak or . . . some kind of a leak up there [that] came down through the ceiling. We said, "Well, we gotta get in." The locksmith says, "No problem," you know, and brought over a cylinder he had a key for and put it in there and opened it up. And we went in and did the repairs and then we changed it back to one that the investigators were the only ones that had the key to it.

I'm gonna look and see if that's still on [checks door.] Yep, same system. So if you have a key for that, to remove that cylinder . . . as a matter of fact you can reach in with a screwdriver if you have the key to take that out. But it does very nice for changing it, you know, when somebody is coming into an office that somebody else had keys for. It's a much more secure system than the old one.

I remember too—thinking about keys and locks and so on—when I first started here they said they had too many keys for West Hall, and things were getting moved and people were in there that didn't need to be in there, whatever. So they had the locksmith go down and change all the locks on the outside doors of West Hall. And so he said, "How many keys do you want me to make?" I think they made four or something like that. So he made the four and he had one key for himself but when he set the locks that way [pause] he called me in there one day and he said, "I made three more keys for West Hall," he said. "How about going down and seeing if they work?" He had to cut them out himself you know, and then before he handed them over to the faculty members or whoever needed the keys.

So I went down and tried them and they all worked. I said, "Yeah they're all fine." And he stamped—he marked the individual keys so he could know who we gave them to. He was the only one to do that. But anyhow the next day or a couple days after that he said, "I got a couple more keys here, how about going down." And people said they needed keys too and they weren't included on the original list. So I took them down, they worked, I brought them back, I said yes they work fine and I kept track of that. There were thirteen keys made after they changed that, so I don't know, I think that everybody that had keys before had keys when he got done with it. But I ran back and forth trying to make sure they worked, because if he didn't get them cleaned

exactly or whatever, or get the burrs off of them they wouldn't lock right. That was, that was interesting.

I remember the Hut burning—caught fire. What was the . . . well when I came, let's see, there was a building . . . what's here now, Rhoads Hall? I guess the parking lot of Rhoads Hall, there was a building there that was the grill that was like Rocky's or whatever they call the grill now. That was up there. There was a building in front of that that was the carpenter shop, and another building beside that had been the laundry at one time. At one time they had the—that was, I skipped that part already—that was the laundry, and we had the plumbing and electrical shop in that.

Behind those was the Art Building now, they called the Hut. And that was built for a, it had a dance floor, lounging chairs, and a nice fireplace down on the first floor; a nice fireplace, bowling alley underneath. I believe maybe there [were] three lanes there, and then there were also three pool tables.

And anyhow, that caught fire one night about three o'clock in the morning. Me being a plumber—they had West Sunbury Fire Department here in Slippery Rock and West Sunbury hooked onto a fire hydrant over on the side where the heating plant is. And they called me at home, I forget what time: early, wee hours in the morning and said, "We're running out of water," And we could turn the borough water into this cross connection between it and the college. So I come in and I didn't argue with anybody. I went up and opened the valve to let the water across from the borough, and then someone . . . I came down and asked the guy if that helped any and he said, "Yeah, a little bit." But it really hadn't helped that much as far as water availability and then somebody come down and says the tank's running over up—and the borough tank was a little higher than ours.

And here they weren't running out of water: the line was so small going to the hydrant that they were pulling on it but couldn't get everything they needed that's really constriction in the pipe. And [pause] so anyhow I went back up and closed the valve 'cause we still had—I looked up at—there was a scale on the outside of the tank and they had hardly taken it down even a quarter with all the firemen.

But they did get the fire out before the whole building burned, and then they rebuilt it. Nobody ever really did discover what set the place on fire, but I have a little sneaking suspicion—there was a waste can, a big trash can, right at the corner of the door, that very obviously was where the fire started. And I think somebody threw a cigarette in there that wasn't clear out or

something to that effect, and by the time it smoldered and burned and whatever and caught the rest of—and the Hut was a wood structure so it burned pretty quickly.

[There] used to be an apartment in there, in the end towards Patterson, and the swimming coach—aquatics coach, whatever—John Eiler lived in there and his wife when I first came. And I worked in the plumbing shop and the electrical shop so, when the World Series was on—some of the sneaky things we pulled—when the World Series was on—of course it was radio then—but we would save up all the electric lamps from the student rooms that needed repaired or new cords or new plugs on the end, new sockets or whatever. We saved them up and then we'd work on them in the shop to listen to the World Series.

Well then television came out, and the Eiler's had a television set. So then we would sneak over there and watch the World Series, especially when it was a . . . got to the critical game you know. We'd go over there and they always had snacks for us and everything. I think we were the only crew: the plumbers. Well me, a plumber; and I had a helper. And the electrician; he had a helper. So the four of us . . . watched the World Series on TV. That was kind of interesting.

But we did enough work; it wasn't really cheating the university—or the college—or anything. When I first worked here, if you worked overtime you didn't get paid extra, you could take that time off sometime if you wanted to. Well after a while you had more time—you'd have to take the whole year off you know, because they'd call you in . . . and we got paid salary; we weren't paid hourly anyhow. So you got the same amount every month, or every payday, no matter what. Being a plumber or an electrician, I think, were one of the worst things for call-outs, there's always something. North Hall, being the only ladies' dormitory, had several amusing things happen there [laughs], as you can imagine.

SM: Girls will be girls [laughs].

JS: Girls will be girls, that's for sure. And it wasn't—we weren't so fussy about, you know, a plumber doing electrical stuff or an electrician doing something plumbing. If you happen to be in there, go ahead and fix the thing. But they have a place to write up—they put the room number and what the difficulty was.

And I remember one time they wrote up, I don't know what it was, some minor little thing. I can remember where the room was, toward Maltby kind of, on the corner by Old Main in one of the suites there. The girl wrote the thing up except I had so much other stuff to do that was more important and that was just kind of an inconvenience. I still don't remember what it was: something in the bathroom. Finally I went in one day after about three or four days, there's this

big, oh I don't know, nice poster made that said come and see the live seahorses, whatever. And it had signs all the way back through the wall and up—I mean back the hallway and up the stairway. Then clear up on the third floor. And they did: she had live seahorses, had just been born [laughs]. And I thought well, if they went through that much trouble . . . I went up and took care of that; didn't take very long, and I thought, "Well that was kind of an original idea."

One other time in there they [pause], oh I remember, it's kind of embarrassing [laughs]: for both of us I guess. I went up and they had pulled the plug out of the wall or unplugged whatever it was, and one of the blades of the plug had stuck in the outlet and they were afraid to take it out. So they, I went up and I rapped on the—or no, I was just getting ready to rap on the door. We always knock on the door and holler, "Man in the hall!" You know if they answered the door say it's a man to fix whatever it was. Now I was just getting ready to knock on the door and the woman comes along and says, "Did you come to fix our electric plug?" And I said, "Yeah." And she says, "Well go ahead in." And she just opened the door and her roommate was in there with no clothes on!

You know she never thought of it—of saying anything. [SM laughs] Yeah, she had it open before I could say anything at all. I didn't expect her to do that, I expected her to rattle the door or something and say something to her roommate. But, well in fact I didn't even know the roommate was in there, and she opened it up quickly closed it again, and she said, "We can't go in right now," and I said, "Yes that's obvious." She was just as red as a beet when I went in. But those things happen. And then yeah, a lot of different things happened like that.

SM: Well do you have any words of wisdom for any of the current or even future students of Slippery Rock or faculty members, staff members?

JS: Well I don't know, I guess I learned quite a little bit but it was just things that had to do with my work and what I did. I think having the students in a little town like Slippery Rock, I guess they still consider it a "rural setting" [laughs]. There's so many houses and apartments around here, I don't consider it rural anymore. But it is nice to have them, and I like the idea that we have so many international—I don't know what they have now but they always did have a lot of international students around.

I remember mowing grass one time out in front of South Hall and the first foreign student I knew of being here was Byung Hun Nam; he was a Korean. And I used to talk to him once in a while as I was working around—he stayed in South Hall there, and I was out mowing the grass and he was on the front porch there and I stopped riding, maybe went in to get a drink or something.

Anyhow we got to talking a little bit and he said, “What do you feed the grass [to]?” And I said, “Well we don’t feed—if its short clippings we just leave it lay and dry out and so on; if it happened to get too high before we get to mow it then you had to rake it off so you didn’t have that dead grass.” [He asked] “You don’t feed it to anything?” He just couldn’t believe that we would mow something down that you could use and not use it you know? I thought, “Well isn’t that interesting,” you know?

Yeah I can remember the first black student I’d seen on campus, was a girl that came. And whether there were any before that I never noticed, and that was interesting too because it was pretty much a Caucasian school.

And it was interesting the faculty would come and go; the oddballs, we had some that were a little different so to speak. Yeah, but I guess I won’t use any names or anything [laughs], but they were all very nice. Well a few of them were kind of touchy and cranky and so on, just like they are any place else, you have some that are friendly and very cordial. But I’ve seen a lot of them come and go.

Yeah, I guess one other thing I remember: they had a fellow that was acting president stay in the president’s residence, and I don’t know all the ins and outs; it was Dr. Edwards. He had a family, some children, and they had some sort of a thing—tried to get him out of the president’s house because he was [just the] acting president; but they didn’t have anybody selected to come in, I just don’t know. But anyhow they tried to force him out. So they had me go up and shut off the steam heat, so he wouldn’t have any heat or hot water. Then they had me shut off the water so then the bathrooms and toilets and so on wouldn’t work. And he called me one night—very nice fellow—he called me one time and I said, “Well I had my orders, Dr. Edwards,” I said, “but I’ll tell you what: the utilities for the president’s residence go through the library, or Maltby building and they’re fed from there.” And I said, “If you wanna take a walk around with me through that building. . . .” I gave him a time. I said, “I realize you have children, and I can just imagine not having a bathroom, you know, especially the commode and so on.”

And so he did. I went up and met him—I don’t think I ever told anybody that yet. But anyhow I went up and walked through and I said, “You know, see that valve up there? You know if you turn that valve very slowly that would put steam up to the register for heat, but,” I said, “If you open it fast though, you can do damage to it so it has to be done very slowly.” And then we went on around, I talked a little bit about the area we went through, about the utilities in it; and I said, “That valve in the corner there will turn the water on up to the residence.” So we walked around a little bit and I said goodbye to him.

He told me later on, he said, “I really appreciate that and I know you could’ve got yourself into trouble.” [Laughs] I said, “Well yes I wasn’t . . .” but I said, “I didn’t really tell you to turn it on now. I didn’t turn it on for you.” “Yes, isn’t that true?” But I don’t think anybody ever knew that he had—but he wasn’t there that long anyhow. He didn’t get the president’s job, he was just acting president.

Yeah I loved those things. Like I said, I enjoyed my time here and I still enjoy having it here—the university here. I don’t come on campus as often as I used to; I used to come into the library quite often. I did a lot of reading but I have so much of my own reading to do now [laughs]. I get a lot of periodicals and so on. I don’t know whether there is anything else you can think of . . .

SM: I don’t think so. It was a pleasant experience interviewing you, so I’d like to thank you.