

Dr. Herman Cooper
Personal Reflections
March 20, 1979

SMJ: It is March 20, 1979. I am in Albany, NY speaking with Dr. Herman Cooper. I realize there is a great deal written about you in many educational journals and in books concerning important educational people. I would like to hear a little bit about the background of your family and education.

HC: I come from a Delaware family that goes back for many generations. Originally, the family came from Wales and England. My father was the only member of his family who desired to have a college education. He made the sacrifice and went to Westlyn University. After his graduation, he began his teaching career in Wilburham, Mass. That is where four of his sons were born. He was a teacher of English at the academy there. In 1899 he was employed as a professor of English at Hamlin University in Saint Paul, Minnesota. All of the sons went through public school in St. Paul, Minn. for 8 years. At that time, he became the President of Upper Iowa University at Fayette, Iowa. I went to the academy there, as well as college; my brothers Harry and Ned also went to the college there. My oldest brother never prepared for teaching. Harry was the assistant superintendent of schools in the Minneapolis school system and Ned had the same position in a suburb of Minneapolis called Robinsdale.

SMJ: You went into music, didn't you?

HC: Well, in Upper Iowa, I majored in music as well as mathematics and science. For 7 years, I studied music under a professor there, both at the academy and in the college. I graduated in 1916, received my A.B. degree. In 1917 I was awarded a B.S. in Music. In the summer of 1917 I attended the University of Wisconsin, and from there volunteered for Second Officers Training Camp at Ft. Sheridan in Illinois. I was one of the few young men who was accepted at that training camp and was sent directly with nearly 500 other young officers to France. We were sent to learn directly from the French officers who gave us special lessons on using the 75mm gun. I was commissioned in the field artillery, but was later transferred to the Coast Guard Artillery Corps, because I was assigned to the Organization and Training Center Number 2 at Lamoge, France to give instruction in tractor artillery. I spent my military career in France at the 35th Brigade Headquarters. I returned from France in 1919 and was discharged in April. For the next year or two, I went and stayed in Western Montana with the Northern Pacific RR Co. At that time, no jobs were provided for veterans who had returned from WWI.

SMJ: They didn't have the stipulation that you could get your same job back at that time did they?

HC: When you resigned, you were out! The country was very patriotic about WWI, and my family was very anxious that at least two of their sons had gone to France. My mother was born in England, and she was very bitter toward the actions of Germany at that time. I returned to teachers college at Columbia University for my graduate work. I received my MS in 1921 and then accepted a position with Service Citizens of Delaware. That was a foundation

supported by Pierre S. DuPont to improve the public schools of Delaware. For nearly three years, I worked with my father during which time we published two books. Subject matter: The one teacher's school in Delaware and the attendance of Negroes in the schools in that state.

SMJ: I saw the reference to the two Coopers. One was your father?

HC: Yes, my father. I was brought there because he had unpleasant experiences with other people in the public school business. He knew very well that I would not take advantage of the situation. I returned to Columbia in 1924 and completed my credit requirements for the Doctorate. In 1925 I took the job at Geneseo. I don't need to go into the rest of this because you know already. That is all I need to say about the past.

SMJ: Someone mentioned that you had a great love for music. You didn't let that aspect become a part of your life though!

HC: There was no future of piano players back in those days.

SMJ: Is that where your love was, with piano?

HC: Yes. There really was no future in music, until we had the development of the radio and the television. We had nothing back in those days except for the telephone.

SMJ: Alright, the next question, and I know it has been answered too. I asked which positions have you held and which was the most challenging. You remarked...

HC: I held only one position in education prior to coming to NYS in 1925. I was four years as Director of Training, Head of the Education Department and in charge of the handicapped work at Sonyeah. That had to do with the physically handicapped. I became well acquainted with Dr. George McQwen of Fredonia who was director of training there while I was in Geneseo. When the Commission refused to make George principal of the Fredonia Normal School in 1929, he became determined that I become the next principal of the Fredonia Normal School. I was elected by the board in the spring of 1929 becoming active in the fall of 1929. I spent two years there.

SMJ: Now at that time you were equal with Dr. Rockwell, who was at...

HC: No, Fredonia was a three year institution. I was the head, but Harry Rockwell was the head of the only four year institution that prepared elementary school teachers. I made one mistake while at Fredonia. I invited the Commissioner of Education to be my commencement speaker during the second year that I was there. After spending a week at the house with the Coopers and getting acquainted with our accomplishment at Fredonia, Commissioner Graves was determined that I should come to Albany. Personally, I did not want to take the position, as Fredonia gave me all the opportunity I desired. Music was a specialization in elementary school teaching; but, the Commissioner went so far as to tell the Regents that he was going to appoint

me. The Chancellor called me in to Binghamton to confer with me. After a conference with Joseph A. McGinnis, who was the chairman of our board and Speaker of the Assembly, I was advised that I had just better take the position.

SMJ: You were a rather young man, too, at the time.

HC: I was only 33 years old when I came to Albany. No, I was 33 when I went to Fredonia and 35 when I went to Albany.

SMJ: Was that one of the reasons you felt you couldn't do the job?

HC: No, I had no fear of the job because I was told specifically that my job the first two years would be to assist the Commissioner on a part-time basis and be an associate in higher education under the Commissioner of Higher Education. After two years, the department made up its mind that they must improve the work in the Normal Schools and Teacher's Colleges. They felt it was necessary to re-write the certification program as it was a real mess at that time. To accomplish that process was the reason I was appointed to said position. Those were my responsibilities, to re-write the certification program. That was my first project. All authority for the issuance of certificates was placed in the office under my jurisdiction. Before that time, it was done in the office of the Assistant Commissioner for Elementary Education, Assistant Directors of Secondary Education to Assistant Commissioner for Vocational Education. It was a known fact that a superintendent or teacher could come to Albany at that time, and by going to the offices of several commissioners, could always come away with a certificate. I was told that we should clearly define our standards and make it very clear that only one office was going to be responsible for the certificates.

SMJ: So, you were given the position of reorganizing the many aspects of certification.

HC: I spent my first year re-writing the certification program and the Regents adopted it with the Commissioners approval after a rather long discussion. They saw an opportunity, under the new program, to maintain higher standards for certification, to improve the program for elementary teacher education, and to strengthen the programs in both secondary as well as vocational education. I was told, in no uncertain words by the Chancellor as well and the Commissioner, that my major job was to improve the quality of work and the quality of students in the ten Teachers Schools and teachers Colleges that were charged with the preparation of elementary school teachers. After the unification of the Certification Program, I had to spend every Monday in NYC working with the Board of Examiners and the Board of Education re-writing their rules and regulations controlling teacher education-re-examining their entire examination program, and making certain that the Commissioner's standards were completely understood and verified by the rules and regulations of the city. It was a very valuable experience for me, as I was the first member of the Commissioner's staff that was wholeheartedly accepted by the city, and I worked for the city every Monday until the time I

was shipped to the State University of New York in 1949. I admit, I learned much about the city. They learned much about the people in Albany, and we had a very excellent relationship between the two sources of teacher qualifications.

SMJ: Now did you live here all of the time, or did you live in New York City?

HC: I lived here. This was my home base. I came here in 1931 and stayed right here.

SMJ: You wish to continue?...

HC: Mrs. Jenkins of the NYS Congress of Parents and Teachers was also concerned about teacher quality in the elementary school. Shortly after my first two years in office as Assistant Commissioner for Teacher Education, she came and asked if I would be a member of the State Congress Committee for Teacher Education and Certification and act with her on attracting talented young people to apply for scholarships under their program which were to be used at that time solely in the Normal Schools and at Teacher's College in Buffalo. I accepted wholeheartedly, as this was an opportunity for the people of the state to realize scholarships were available for teacher education. Another good point was that the most talented would be accepted and appointed to a Normal School or a Teacher's College of their choice to spend three years or four years at Teacher's College at Buffalo to prepare for elementary school teaching. It was a great step forward in improving the quality of students attracted to these institutions. At the time I left the department, the State Congress of Teachers of Parents and Teachers had spent more than \$800,000 in scholarships for Teacher Education. However, in the later years, they had amended their original program and permitted those scholarships to be used for secondary teacher education.

SMJ: Was it at that time that you established that position on each college called: Coordinator of Field Services?

HC: Yes. We established that job, and we also established a committee at each college that worked with the State and Congress of Parents and Teachers to interview the people who had applied for that institution. They would then make their recommendations back to the State Congress so that the Committee could select the first to be awarded under the scholarship program, and the associates, should anyone appointed or fail to accept the award.

SMJ: In case you didn't remember, it was George R. Sherry from the State College in Buffalo who was the first one established. Very good.

HC: Probably the Regents afforded a Teacher Education Committee under John L. O'Brien the Regents Chairman from the city of Buffalo. To broaden the program for teaching for elementary school teaching, a committee appointed by the Regents, consisting of three representatives from the normal schools and teachers colleges, three representatives of the private colleges, three faculty representatives, and three representatives from the teaching

profession and I acted as the recorder for the committee. The committee worked for two years under the chairmanship of Edmund E. Day, Chancellor of Cornell University. The program which they recommended greatly increased the requirements in the field of Social Studies, English, Science and Mathematics. However, it did retain the requirements for specialized courses for admission to teaching elementary education. In discussing this matter with the Regents, I was told, in no uncertain terms, that this committee's report was to be applied in all ten institutions. No exceptions were to be made, and the faculties were to follow it to the letter of the law. In other words, there were very few opportunities for student electives. The next important matter which concerned me was the creation of dormitories to take care of our needed enrollments.

SMJ: Yes, I understand that you were called the "Father of Dormitories"!

HC: This was especially true after the close of WWII. I have always had the impression, and I still do, that the best kind of higher education is always available on a campus where the students live in dorms and gain as much experience outside of their classrooms. The Dormitory Authority Bill was created by Charlie Brinn, a lawyer, and myself. At that time, the leadership of both the Assembly and the Senate were 100% behind the Normal School and Teacher's College. We had no problems getting this bill through. Originally, the dormitory authority was created for the 11 state supported Teacher Education Institutions. Since there was no money appropriated, the dormitory authority consisted of Hermann Cooper and his office, for the first three years of its existence. Following the war, money was made available by the state for temporary housing, and I was told, again in no uncertain terms, that if I could find a location among the 11 institutions where a dormitory could be built for less than \$1.00 a cubic foot, it would go along with the appropriations to build that residence hall. Luckily, the city of Buffalo had a very high unemployment rate at that time, so I chose Buffalo as our opportunity to demonstrate that a dorm could be built under the dorm authority for less than one dollar a cubic foot! Under the state's Construction Program it probably would have cost us 30-40% higher. When the bids came in, they were 95 cents a cubic foot. So funds were made available, and we were able to build quality residence halls with a minimum of student union space in Buffalo, on the campus.

SMJ: Was that the very first one then?

HC: Yes, that was the first dormitory erected. The year year, funds were made available so that we could build dormitories at all of the other schools. In 1936, a bill was introduced by the Assembly, and later the Senate sponsored by the legislators for the Normal School districts to convert the Normal Schools into Teacher's Colleges. This bill did not have the approval of the Regents and therefore was vetoed by Gov. Lehmann. However, it had the effect of forcing the Regents to determine whether or not they were going to improve the quality of these institutions by making them four year institutions. The Regents finally approved the concept, and from that time on, sponsored bills to convert Normal Schools into Teachers Colleges. During

that period, the special programs in the Normal Schools had already been approved by the Regents as four year institutions, but no mention was made of degrees for those programs. In the Spring of 1941 after Gov. Lehmann had vetoed two previous attempts to convert the Normal Schools into Teachers Colleges, I happened to be in Rochester the last day of the 30 day period. I phoned Judge Harlan Rippey who was on the Court of Appeals as well as on my Board of Visitors at Geneseo. I told him that the last day of the 30 day period was about to end and no bill had been signed. He said, "Come down, and we will find out what the difficulty is." On reaching his office he put a phone call in immediately to secure his nomination for the Governorship, upon Gov. Lehmann's retirement. Within a half an hour after the conversation with Judge Rippey and Lt. Gov. Pullati, we had the word from Albany that the bill had been signed.

SMJ: And you were right there.

HC: Yes, I was there. It was one of those fortunate things that happens in one's experiences. To be at the right place at the right time, to make sure that a program was approved. Our success in achieving this step was due largely to Senator Wicks who represented Normal School at New Paltz, Sen. Hanley from the Normal School at Geneseo, Sen. Fineberg from Platzburg and Dean Mallor Stevens who was responsible for the legislation creating the dormitory authority. Gov. Dewey came into office in 1942. He was not favorable to the shift of the Normal Schools to Teacher's Colleges as at that time, he was not favorable to the teachers of the state. He thought the teachers represented a very strong organization seeking larger state funds. However, this action made it possible for the broadening of the curriculums, so that teachers could continue to qualify for elementary school teaching on three years of study and complete their fourth year in summer session study. That program paralleled the four year program offered by the state at that time. One of the major benefits that came to teacher education by this change of title was the fact that now these institutions could recruit scholars from the fields of English, Social Studies, Sciences and Mathematics and other important cultural fields. Before that time, scholars in these respective academic special areas would take lower salaries in four year institutions as they saw no future for advancement in a three year institution. During the next few years, the standards for teacher education were increased to four years of pre-service study. Steps were taken to secure funds for the fourth year of study in residence. In the early 1940s the legislature did not approve funds for the fourth year of study which necessitated the regents abolishing all but nine positions in the school of practice and transferring those positions to the academic departments.

SMJ: In other words... if you went three years to Buffalo College at the end of the third year you were certified to teach? After just three years then?

HC: Yes, that is right. Now, before the standard became effective just prior to the time state university joined the State University of New York.

SMJ: What was your opinion of that? Did you feel it was the right thing for the university to join the State University? There is mixed feelings in Buffalo, of course you realize that!

HC: There should not be. It was interesting that Gov. Dewey, during the period of his two terms in office, had completely changed his attitude toward the State Teachers Colleges and towards teachers in general. He was responsible in part for taking State University out from under the Board of Regents. It was his point of view at that time, that no great state university could exist in this state if it was directly under the Board of Regents who was still supporting the private effort in preference to the public effort.

SMJ: I suppose he had a point.

HC: It was interesting that I was sent out by the Board of Regents in the Spring of 1948 to seek votes among the Board of Visitors of the then Teacher's Colleges. Interestingly enough I was unable to secure one vote.

SMJ: On whose side were you?

HC: State University, because the Regents were always opposed to the expense. The bill was passed with the backing of the legislature under the leadership of the former key people who were at that time 100 percent in favor of the public institutions. State University was created, and during its first year of existence, it was housed in the State Education Department, in one small office. Dr. Urich was the first President of the State University who remained only for a very short time. The legislature realized that State University, if it was to expand, must have better quarters. During the next four or five years, we were housed in the flag room of the capitol and...

SMJ: Now, you became a part of the university system... your position.

HC: Yes, I was in the flag room of the State University. Dr. Jarvey and I were transferred to State University in the budget of 1949. Funds were created at that time to expand the housing program of our colleges. Furthermore, Gov. Dewey was in a position to allot funds from the program that was set aside for a building throughout the war program. Many of the buildings that were planned during the War Program were set aside hoping that they could save money by redesigning and cutting down on the areas. This attempt delayed the building program for one year, but under State University, the program went forward for a second round of dormitories, and for at least one new building in each of the 11 colleges.

SMJ: Dr. Cooper, it is my impression that the war had a great deal to do with the changes. Teacher education had to change you know, and this is part of just the change isn't it? May I ask one more question about the Dormitory Authority? Am I clear on this? It is a fund which is separate from the taxes, in fact is it self-sustaining?

HC: The Dormitory Authority was granted power to issue bonds. Originally the State Comptroller took the first series of bonds at 3/4 of 1% for a 30 year period. These bonds were assured of payment of the interest on the bonds and the redemption of these bonds. It was assured by the room rentals. The rooms had to carry the bond program as well as to provide for the personnel in the dormitories.

SMJ: So that was included in the budget?

HC: No, that was never in the budget.

SMJ: No, the personnel and all of that was included in the Dormitory Authority budge.

HC: Under the State University the Dormitory Authority bill was amended several times. First, to take care of the agricultural schools and technical institutes which are fully supported; secondly, to make provision for housing if necessary at certain community colleges, and finally to make it possible for private colleges to secure funds from the Dormitory Authority for the erection of additional academic as well as dormitory buildings. In fact, I am under the impression that the Dormitory Authority today is able to provide funds if they are assured of a proper background of support by private interests to create libraries and other types of institutions for both communities and colleges.

SMJ: Then, it has worked out well, hasn't it?

HC: Yes, it has worked out very well.

SMJ: Now, that was prior to 1948. Now what was teacher education like after 1948? That was when the SUNY system was established?

HC: (A laugh) I have to tell you the truth. You may not like it!

SMJ: Perhaps, but that is why I am taping this, so I can get the truth.

HC: After the state began to provide the teachers with four years of preparation for a Bachelor's Degree, the department soon learned that there was no place for those graduates to secure preparation in private institutions for a fifth year of study. Under the circumstances, before I left the department, I was granted the authority to establish five year programs in all of the four year institutions, without any opposition from the regents.

SMJ: Now you continued to do the same work you had done all along, teacher certification and the improvement of teaching, or not?

HC: No, when I left the department, I gave my entire time to the improvement of teacher quality and teacher programs and institutional quality at the State University.

SMJ: Not certification then?

HC: Certification was a power of the Commissioner and should be left with the State Certification Department. It is true that, after I left the department, the Assistant Commissionership was abolished. Certification was then turned over to people in minor positions, and I might add that today certification is about where it was when I first started way back in 1935.

SMJ: Yes, that is what I was hoping you would say, because I have heard the same statement from other people.

HC: At that time, four year Liberal Arts graduates were granted life certificates to teach any subject, anywhere in the public school systems. I put a stop to that in 1936. Limiting certification to their major fields of effort. Secondly, I made certain that no certificates were granted to applicants with the exception of the state public institutions who did not have assurance of a teaching position. I followed this practice because one could not raise standards if you had a backlog of 5,000 or 10,000 people holding permanent certificates without jobs. Now that is exactly what we face today.

SMJ: Yes, and that is very sad isn't it? Is there anything else that you would like to discuss?

HC: Yes there is.

SMJ: Alright.

HC: Under State University I had the dream after we had taken over the University of Buffalo, that in Buffalo we could establish a proper set-up for graduate education between the two public institutions, the University of Buffalo and the State Teacher's College. It was my view and held by many of the Regents that we should take steps to limit all graduate work in teacher education to the State Teacher's College and to grant a Ph.D. of Education at that institution. There was considerable opposition to this point of view, both by the administration and by the faculty members of the academic departments. They seemed to hold the view that some day they might be granted the authority to offer doctor degrees in academic departments, which I am frank to say will never happen. I could have accomplished this goal (laugh) had I remained one more year. But, Paul Bulger left and he was for some unknown reason unwilling to go along with the program. I am certain that the president of the University of Buffalo would have agreed to abolish his education department, transferred it to the college and restrict his doctor's degrees to academic.

SMJ: Did Dr. Bulger give reasons for his not wanting that? Because that would add prestige to the college.

HC: Turn the recording machine off and I will tell you why. Tell you what his reasons were. (Part of conversation not taped.)

SMJ: What are your views?

HC: Since my retirement, I have some very strong views as to what State University should do in the field of teacher education. Since there is little or no leadership in the department, the future of teacher education in this state depends upon it (State University). In my judgment in the past few years, the leadership of the former State Teacher's College should petition the right to change programs in teacher education from four pre-service years to five pre-service years. There is no need for many of these teachers today; there is no better time than the present to set up the right kind of five year program for the preparation of teachers. What do I mean by the right kind of a program? I mean this: They should complete two years of general education in an institution like all other students, then there should be three years of teacher education programs controlled by the educational professional faculty and the academic faculties as well that offers the kind of courses that better prepare teachers for teaching in the public schools. Now, what do I mean? I mean teachers of English should not take any programs in a liberal arts college for English, they should take advance programs in English that make them better teachers of English in the public secondary schools. During the last few years I was still in active service, I was trying to get some research body to set up appropriate funds to make studies that would determine the kind of English courses that would better prepare English teachers to teach in the public secondary schools. No one was interested. I also was interested in getting faculty members to re-examine professional programs because we know so much more today about human growth and development, about psychology, about teaching of several subjects, about how to use a campus school to properly implement students who are preparing to go out and teach in the public schools. All of those studies should not be available, but no one seems to be interested. A challenge is facing the State University of New York to set up these programs, to set up research studies, and implement what they hope to accomplish and to make certain at the end of the five years they have the kind of teacher that will be fully qualified to teach in the public schools and be issued a permanent certificate. And I mean by fully qualified: not 18 hours of secondary school teaching, 18 hours of education is a PUBLIC DISGRACE, it is a farce! There is at least 30 or perhaps 36 hours in the right kind of professional courses today that all secondary school teachers should be required to take. That is also true of elementary education. And those courses should be related to the kind of work that is available in the campus schools, so there is a close coordination between the campus school staff and the education staff in the final three years of the program.

SMJ: Now after that five years would they have a B.A.?

HC: No, a Masters Degree. A five year program should be to a Masters Degree in Science with a specialization in parenthesis. Showing that it is teaching of English, elementary subjects, etc.

SMJ: Dr. Cooper, do you not think it is because of the Liberal Arts thrust that has hurt the teacher education program?

HC: The Liberal Arts thrust has hurt all of the colleges. The academic faculties are determined that they control and that fight which we never had in previous years is now controlling what takes place in the various units of State University.

SMJ: Yes, it really does. Buffalo is very bad.

HC: We have gone the same way of all other higher institutions. Now you can cut the machine off because I will tell you exactly what I think happened. (More conversation not taped.)

SMJ: Dr. Cooper could you comment on the State Teacher's Faculty Association? I believe you originated that.

HC: The State Teacher's College Faculty Association was started during the late 1930s. At that time, I had to restrict enrollments in the 9 Normal Schools to 500 students each; to 1,000 students in Buffalo and 1,200 in Albany because there were no teaching opportunities available for employment except in the rural or small village schools. Under that program, it was possible for about 70% of our elementary school teachers to find employment. If we had allowed our enrollments to increase to much higher levels, there would be a great many unemployed like there is now. I help conferences in various parts of the state and faculty members in those days paid their own expenses to attend a conference. They proved very valuable in that we were able to get faculties to recognize that they had a very important role to play in the improvement of the quality of instruction in the State Teacher's College. During that same period I was Chairman of the Teachers Education Committee of the State Teacher's Association. I had the full support of the association on all of the goals and policies I was trying to follow through the department and later State University. Before the State Teacher's Colleges were under the State University the Budget Department gave me \$40,000.00 a year for the conduct of these colleges. Under this program, I was able to have the conferences for one week, bring in the best scholars from other distinguished institutions. It is my belief that a State University such as we had should use the talent in its various colleges for the benefit of upgrading the faculties in the other institutions. One of my real regrets is that after my retirement no one seemed to be interested in following through on programs for weekly faculty conferences and other types of State University programs that would improve the general quality of instruction.

SMJ: Now you had those at Lake Placid, weren't they?

HC: No, Lake Placid went their own way.

SMJ: Yes, I understand... but they didn't mind though did they?

HC: When I started to pay their expenses I held the institutions in the dormitories, at the various colleges.

SMJ: Dr. Urban or one of those professors and Dr. Petersen mentioned that it was very, very fine because you rubbed elbows with other professionals in your own field; and it broadened your own experiences. They both spoke highly of them.

HC: It is part of some former statements I may have made. I still believe that State University could greatly strengthen the quality of its programs if it would go back and bring the leadership of these faculties together in hopes of strengthening the programs in the local institutions.

SMJ: I understand Dr. Cooper from professors who have spoken of you that you are not a man to approach unless you knew just what you were talking about. They enjoyed your presentations, but you had better know your business when speaking with Dr. Cooper. Everyone said you had a great devotion, you knew your business and that you were a man of integrity. YOU would be looked up to and they would respect your opinion.

Last of tape 1. Dr. Cooper did not wish to continue.