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An Interview With
MR. JOSEPH T. REILLY

July 7, 1977

Interviewed by
Daisy Greene

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Washington County Library System
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Interviewee: Joseph Thomas Reilly
Interviewer: Daisy Greene

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Scope Note: The Washington County Library System, with assistance from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, conducted oral history interviews with local citizens. The project interviews took place between 1976 and 1978. The interviewees included long-term residents of the Greenville-Washington County area in their late 50's and older.

MRS. DAISY GREENE: The date is July 7, 1977. This is Daisy Greene, Interviewer for the Oral History Project of the Washington County Library System, having an interview with Mr. Joseph Thomas Reilly, of 348 South Main Street, Greenville, Mississippi.

Mr. Reilly, will you give me the date of your birth and the place of your birth?

REILLY: February 25, 1910, Greenville, Mississippi, in the same house in which I now live.

GREENE: That is unusual. Your mother's maiden name and your father's name?

REILLY: My mother's maiden name was Blanche Johnson, a resident of Chicot County, Arkansas. Her family came to Chicot County in the early 1830's when Arkansas was still a territory, and was residing in what is now Lake Village, Chicot County. The family lived there until after my grandfather's death in 1872, and then moved across the river to Greenville. My father was Joseph Reilly, an Irish immigrant from Cootehill, County Cavan, Ireland. He came to this country about 1902. He continued his education in New York City and plied his trade as a merchant tailor in Greenville, and was working in Greenville at the time he married my mother.

GREENE: You say he came from Ireland, and I

surmise he was a Catholic.

REILLY: Yes, he was. He was Roman Catholic.

GREENE: Then evidently you knew Father Korstenbroek?

REILLY: On, yes, I knew Father Korstenbroek. In fact, Father Korstenbroek baptized me, prepared me for my First Communion, gave me my First Communion, prepared me for Confirmation. Before that, he prepared my mother for Confirmation and married my mother and father

GREENE: Mr. Reilly, where did Father Korstenbroek come from?

REILLY: Father Paul John Korstenbroek was born in Amsterdam, Holland, November 10, 1849. He was ordained a Priest on August 15, 1870, in his native city of Haarlem, where he served for many years as one of the assistants in the Cathedral of that city. Having served as an assistant in the Cathedral, he was given the title of Canon, and thus became known as Canon Paul John Korstenbroek.

GREENE: Just a minute. Is Canon a title?

REILLY: It is a title, just as Monsignor or Father or Cardinal. When you worked in a Cathedral, or were assigned to a Cathedral in those days, you were given the title of Canon.

He came to America at the invitation of the Right Reverend Francis Jansens, Bishop of Natchez. He worked as a

Missionary in southern Mississippi, and later was assigned to St. Paul's Parish in Vicksburg. He came to Greenville in 1886, where he lived, teaching and building, serving and helping, until 1918, when his health failed. His love for Greenville and its people was ever-abiding, and a general sadness prevailed at his death. When Canon Korstenbroek - and it is spelled K-O-R-S-T-E-N-B-R-O-E-K. Now, many places and accounts in the history of Greenville refer to him as K-O-R-S-T-E-N-B-R-O-C-K, which is in error. In fact, the local Council of the Knights of Columbus in Greenville has misspelled his name in all of the Council records. I believe I am repeating here. When Canon Korstenbroek came to Greenville, this area included the east side of the Mississippi River from Friars Point, in Coahoma County, to Mayersville, in Issaquena County, as well as Lake Village, in Chicot County, Arkansas.

GREENE: How could he cover such a vast territory?

REILLY: He was a Missionary Priest, and there were very few Priests in the area at the time. In fact, Greenville had a Church and Rectory, whereas, Lake Village had a Church, but no Rectory. Therefore, by agreement between the Bishop of the Diocese of Natchez, in Mississippi, and the Bishop of the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas, Priests were assigned to take care of both Parishes within this area. Greenville was

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serviced up until 1871 by the Little Rock Diocese, although Greenville was in the Natchez Diocese. He was relieved of the area on the west side of the Mississippi River in 1896, when the Bishop of Little Rock designated St. Mary's Church in Lake Village a separate Parish. (It was at this time that the name of the Church in Lake Village was changed to "Our Lady of the Lake" Parish.) He was elevated to the rank of Very Reverend in 1906. In 1888, Father Korstenbroek constructed a convent and school on the corner of Main and Hinds Streete, and invited the Sisters of Mercy of the Mother House of Vicksburg to staff this school. The first classes in that school started, I believe, in 1888, or soon thereafter. Classes were from the first grade to the twelfth.

GREENE: That was the Catholic School?

REILLY: That was the Catholic School. Prior to that time, there had been a school for Catholic children which was taught by lay teachers.

GREENE: Well, tell me, how do you know all this?

REILLY: Well, my grandmother and my parents had resided here for years, and at the time Father Korstenbroek came here, they were members of St. Joseph Parish. At least, my grandmother and mother were, and the rest of the Johnson family, and Father Korstenbroek was a very good friend and neighbor of our family. I have always been interested in

history, and for the past several years have done considerable research on the history of St. Joseph's Parish in Greenville, so I have had access to the Church records both here and in the Diocese of Natchez in compiling my summary.

GREENE: Was it you who lent the Democrat the picture of St. Joseph's Church in the flood?

REILLY: No, I did not have a picture of the Church during the flood, but I do have in my files a picture of the second Catholic Church in Greenville, which was built on Main Street between Shelby and Hinds, about where the Rectory now stands. The first Church in Greenville was on the corner - on the property bounded by Walnut Street and Central Avenue, and over the levee to Locust Street, on property that originally belonged to the Roach family.

GREENE: Do you mean the site which it first occupied is in the river now?

REILLY: The site which the first Church occupied is now partially in the levee and wharf. The Catholic Parish at that time had a Church, School and Rectory on that site. And the second Church was built on Main Street, between Hinds and Shelby Streets, and was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, November 28, 1875, and remained as such until November 23, 1908, when the third Church, or the present Church, at the corner of Main and Shelby Streets was dedicated on November 23, 1908.

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GREENE: It is a beautiful Gothic Church.

REILLY: A beautiful Gothic Church that was designed and planned by Father Korstenbroek, who was an architect-engineer by profession prior to his entering the Priesthood. He was a member of a noble Dutch family. He was familiar with the soil structure in Holland which was very similar to the loess condition in the Mississippi Delta. He designed the Church, I am told, after the Cathedral in his home town of Haarlem, Holland. When the contract was made, it contained a provision that the foundation must lie idle for one solid year before any bricks were placed thereon, so that any sediment in the soil would be detected before the weight of the Church was constructed, and, as of this date, there are no structural cracks in that building.

GREENE: That is St. Joseph's Church?

REILLY: That is St. Joseph's Church. And there is quite an account of the building of this Church in "Lanterns on The Levee", by William Alexander Percy. Mr. Gus Hecker, of Greenville, was the contractor, and there is quite an account of the wrangling in German between Father Korstenbroek and Mr. Hecker. The Church was built and paid for by Father Korstenbroek out of his family funds, or inheritance.

GREENE: From what you say, he evidently was from a wealthy family.

REILLY: Yes, that is correct, but under the rules of heredity in his country, the second son inherits nothing, and he was a second son. However, after his older brother

passed away, Father Korstenbroek went to Holland and renounced his title and collected his inheritance, and it was his inheritance that was used in the construction of St. Joseph's.

Let me get this sheet of paper.

GREENE: Did you say you wanted to add something to that?

REILLY: Yes. When he came back from Holland, he brought considerable furnishings from Holland, which he used in furnishing St. Joseph's Rectory. There was beautiful china, silver, and furniture, and his beloved piano, which he had crated in a metal case to withstand the shipment across the water without being disturbed. These furnishings, as well as many hundreds of volumes of books, were placed in the Rectory, and it became a showplace of Greenville. However, later, many of his successors in the Rectory have disposed of these furnishings and things that were there, without love or regard for the past.

GREENE: Do you know whether or not they were put some place in the back?

REILLY: They were not put some place in the Diocese. Many of them were just moved out or taken to the junk pile. I recall having seen the beautiful little rosewood piano at one time in a second-hand furniture store in Greenville, with a price tag of \$100.00 on it. That was around, I would say, 1930.

GREENE: Did any of the parishioners buy it?

REILLY: The contents, furnishings, were not put up for sale to the parishioners. They were, more or less, just traded in on new furniture and new things, and that was it. That is a very sore subject. Whatever happened to the many hundreds of volumes of books that lined the walls of the library is still an unanswered question.

GREENE: And, I imagine, a source of annoyance to old-timers?

REILLY: Considerably. Now, there have been chances in the interior of St. Joseph's Church over the years. Personally, I am not in favor of some of the changes that were made. The interior of the Church was originally in keeping with the Gothic architecture. The High Altar and the two side Altars were hand-carved in Germany and brought to Greenville for installation in that Church. Beneath the High Altar was a beautiful plaque of Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper, which we were told when the Church was being remodeled, would remain in the base of the present Altar, but, for some unknown reason, that memorial has "vamoosed" from the Church. The stained glass windows are is termed "hand-painted" stained glass, and most of the earlier windows were painted in Germany and sent over to this country. Over the High Altar, the Crucifizion window was given by Father Korstenbroek in memory of his mother and father. The other windows in the Church were

donated by members of the congregation, in memory of loved ones who have passed away. The original chandeliers were designed, as I was told, by Tiffany, and were each twelve or fourteen branch chandeliers. Around 1930, these were considered by members of the congregation as rather antiquated, and they were replaced with the present bronze hanging fixtures, of Gothic design, which are not worth as much as the original Tiffany fixtures. Many members of the congregation wanted to buy one or two of the original fixtures, but the Pastor at that time said, "No", and took them himself to the city dump and saw that they were destroyed.

GREENE: Why?

REILLY: Father Igo did it. Don't ask me.

GREENE: Destroyed! That's terrible. Each time my sister comes to Greenville from Washington, she asks about that scene of the "Last Supper". Is that what you were talking about?

REILLY: There is also another beautiful plaque in the Church which was given by Mr. William Alexander Percy in memory of his mother. It is on the wall on the Shelby Street side of the Church, in what is now the Confessional Chapel. The pipe organ in the Church is a very fine Kilgan organ, and should be used, but with the present-day trend of people not wanting to climb steps, and wanting to use an

elevator whenever they have to make an ascension in a building, the pipe organ is no longer used, and there is a mechanical organ downstairs, which is now being used for all the services.

GREENE: Will you spell the name of the organ?

REILLY: I am not sure, but I think it is K-I-L-G-A-N. That organ was selected by the late Mrs. Lucile Dunn Strong, who, for many years, was organist at the Church. She was taught by the Kilgan Company on the operation of that organ. The organ in St. Paul's Church in Vicksburg is also a Kilgan organ, but a much larger organ than the one in St. Joseph's.

GREENE: I remember Mrs. Lucile Strong played quite well. In fact, everybody in that generation knew her.

REILLY: Well, she taught us all music.

GREENE: You were a graduate of the Greenville High School class of 1927. Will you describe your --

REILLY: Just a minute. Let me finish about Father Korstenbroek. Father Korstenbroek passed away on December 21, 1925, in a Retirement Home down on the Mississippi Coast. His remains were returned to his beloved Greenville for burial. Father Louis Voyer, the Pastor, sang the Requiem Mass for his funeral service. Bishop Gerow, of Natchez, presided in the Sanctuary. The pallbearers were John A. Cannon, Hugh C. Watson, Paul Muffuletto, Joseph N. Ring, William Robertshaw, Edward Holland, E. F. Wineman, Joseph Reilly, Emmet Harty, Henry Kinsella, Joseph Wall, D. P. Shannahan, William A. Percy and C. L. Schlom.

GREENE: Was that Joseph Reilly you, or your father?

REILLY: That Joseph Reilly was my father. Now, what was that question about the high school class?

GREENE: Before I get into that class, let me ask you something about the Catholic School, St. Rose of Lima.

REILLY: I do not know much about the Catholic School, St. Rose of Lima, because I was educated in the public schools, but St. Rose of Lima was built, as I have told you, around 1888, and started having classes there up until, it seems to me, the thirties, when a new school was built out on Highway 82 and Golf Street.

GREENE: Was it a boarding school?

REILLY: Originally, the Nuns took girls, and boys, too, and they were housed in the building. Both boys and girls attended the school. But when St. Rose of Lima School was moved out on Highway 82 and Golf, the name was changed to St. Joseph's, to conform with the Parish, because the Parish then took over the management and operation of the school. Prior to that time, it was strictly under the Sisters of Mercy Mother House at Vicksburg.

GREENE: Now, back to the Class of 1927. I know that you couldn't have a regular Graduation Day because of the flood, so I would like to know about the graduation ceremonies, which must have been in the Fall.

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REILLY: We did not graduate until September 5, 1927. As we all said, it took the School Board five months to make up their minds what to do with the school or how to classify the students who were in school when the 1927 Flood came about. It is my understanding that we had just finished our second six weeks of the second semester, and had six more weeks of school to go. The School Board decided that all students who had passing grades at the end of the second six weeks exams or tests would be passed on to the next grade. Those who did not would have to repeat the grade the next year. There were 31 in our class who had passing grades as of the date of the flood, and who were entitled to receive diplomas as graduates of the Class of 1927. Our graduation exercises were held in the old Grand Theatre down on the corner of Poplar and Main, where most of the graduation exercises were held in those days. The headline on the first page of The Democrat-Times, September 6, 1927, stated:

"Graduation of the Senior Class of the High School."

"Unique Ceremony Attends Formal Closing."

"Splendid Class."

"Superintendent Bass and Principal Murphy Declare it the Best as a Whole that ever left Greenville High."

There was a very unique face-saving.

On September 6, 1927, the local paper had this account concerning the event:

"Exercising their prerogative of independence and uniqueness, the Class presented a novel program that was applauded for its unusualness as well as the excellent qualifications of its members. This was more keenly expressed in the stage setting which was the cause of general and favorable comment. Reflecting on the cause of the delay of the commencement program, the idea was conceived by the class members of building a stage setting around the program that would be emblematic, and hence a Mississippi River levee, sand-bagged, to bring forcibly to the audience the cause of our present plight, formed a background. The famous board walk which had a prominent part in Greenville's flood history, furnished seats for the members of the class. To the front, a boat brought to memory the many lives that were saved because of their part in the rescue work. A bale of cotton as the speaker's table reminds us of the thousands of bales that floated from the compress on to someone's porch or yard, and also of the cotton that we won't make this year of 1927 because of the flood."

GREENE: Mr. Reilly, did the sponsors have any part in designing that background?

REILLY: We had only one sponsor. In fact, each class had only one sponsor. Ours was Mrs. Robert Cannon. But the students designed and decided how they wanted the play to go.

GREENE: I see.

REILLY: Now, Richard Duncan, bless his soul, was our Class President. He presented Professor Forrest Murphy, Principal of the High School, who said that this was an unusual ending for an unusual year. He said that the class had been an outstanding one from the time they had first entered as Freshmen, and he had never seen a class that could do things like this one. When Mr. Bass was presented, everyone thought he was going to give his routine talk for commencement about the best class, and so on. But we were surprised. Mr. Bass declared that this class was the most capable, as a whole, that he had ever seen. "They did things", he said. And he told of some of their activities, their planning and arranging the commencement program, their independence and abilities. Looking over the audience, he remembered as former graduates the parents of several members of this class. He did not call names, and I would rather not guess.

Lady Betty Candler was the Salutatorian and winner of the Joe Weinberg award in mathematics. This year that award was a four-year scholarship to Sophia Newcomb College of Tulane University, in New Orleans. I believe the Joe Weinberg family still gives an award each year at Commencement exercises. "The World is Waiting for the Sunrise" was sung by a quartet composed of Misses Alice Hunt Magruder and

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Lillian Smith, and Messrs. Maynard Wilzin and Richard Duncan. Mrs. Eva Wiggins accompanied them on the piano. Mrs. Robert Cannon, the sponsor, was presented a beautiful silver flower-holder for the great service she had rendered the class during their four years in high school. Miss Margaret May Ashley, representing the French Class, which was most active and outstanding in high school, donated funds derived from their French plays to the Pica Fund. The Valedictory, by Miss Maria Hunt Negus, was a most interesting one. I do not have a copy of that. The Courtesy Medal was awarded to me, Joe Reilly, as the most considerate and kindly member of the Class. The benediction was given by Lee Lipscomb, bless his soul, who was the son of the then Presiding Elder of the First Methodist Church. His benediction was brief, and as follows: "God be with you till we meet again."

GREENE: You mentioned the Pica. It must be a very old paper. I didn't know it was that old.

REILLY: The Pica was a very old paper, and, as I recall, reading Mr. Brodie Crump's column in the Greenville Democrat-Times, it was founded in the years when Mrs. Alva Robinson Boone and Edward Alexander were in High School. The late Monsignor Joseph Leppert, of Memphis, Tennessee, who was a Greenville boy, was the first Editor of The Pica.

GREENE: Perhaps, sometime, you will tell me more about Mr. E. E. Bass.

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REILLY: Well, I probably will, but I don't know too much. There are others in the community who knew Mr. Bass much better than I. In fact, Dr. W. B. "Bert" Thompson used that as a dissertation for his doctorate.

GREENE: Now, this Class of 1927 celebrated its 50th Anniversary.

REILLY: We tried to get it in the Forties, and we just couldn't get the people together. The ladies were a little reluctant because everybody would know how old they were. Then we tried to have a 45th and couldn't get anybody interested. Now since we got Medicare and Social Security, people are not so concerned about their ages any more. We took the bull by the horns and decided we were going to have a 50th Reunion even for those of us who live in town. We decided just that thing and got a list of members of the Class. There were 31 of us, and six have passed away during the years, and the ones who were here in town we called together and formed a planning committee, and, of course, I would take the brunt of it. I had to spearhead it. We tried to select a date that would be favorable to everyone. Someone asked us why we celebrated on April 15th. Well, we all had to file income taxes. They couldn't get us all together before April 15th. We were too busy compiling figures, so we decided that by celebrating on April 15th, we would join the local CPA's and everybody else celebrating that

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they had filed their income taxes. We didn't want too much, but we wanted to have everything nice, and we felt that it was the only time we'd ever get together again maybe, and we wanted to do it right.

Mr. and Mrs. Maynard Wilzin graciously offered to have us at their home for a social cocktail hour prior to a dinner. We checked around the various places for dinner and what we could have, and we finally selected the Downtowner. Several of our members are quite prominent cooks, and lean somewhat to the gourmet class, so we decided that we would have just the social hour and an elegant dinner, and that would be our celebration. Prior to that time, we sent out communications to all of the out-of-town members whom we could locate. Up until about a week before the deadline, we still had three missing links, but we located one of those, but he was unable to come because of a recent death in his family. We never did find two of them. But we had a good time. We decided that it would be our celebration as a Class, and if anyone wanted to invite a member of the Faculty as his guest and would pick up the tab for the expenses, he was entitled to do so.

GREENE: Did any of them do so?

REILLY: Mr. and Mrs. Wilzin invited Mrs. Carolyn Metcalfe Badow to be their guest, and Mrs. Badow really had

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the time of her life.

GREENE: Are any of your former teachers living?

REILLY: Yes, many of them. Mrs. Norma Council O'Bannon and Mrs. Lelia Bridges Payne taught us through the 7th and 8th grades at Central School, which is now Ella Darling. In high school, Mrs. Geraldine Russo Dean, now of Leland; Mrs. Cora Lee Catchings, now of Merigold; Mrs. Robert Cannon, now of Memphis; Mrs. Carolyn Metcalf Badow, of Greenville; Mrs. Eva Wiggins, now of Nashville, Tennessee; Mrs. Tom Middleton, now of Jackson, Mississippi; Miss Edith Morrow Brown - or I should say "Doctor" Brown. I do not know her present address. Miss Mary Keady, of Greenville, and Miss Mary Moss, now of Courtland, Miss., and I seem to remember three more in number whose names I cannot recall at this time.

GREENE: You said it took the school board five months to decide whether they should give the students their diplomas even though they misses six weeks of school. Do you think they made a wise decision?

REILLY: I think, under the circumstances, that was about the best solution. It is true that some students can cram through the last six weeks and bring up averages, but, as Mr. Bass had stated in a letter to Mr. Herman Solomon, written during the flood, there were really only two in our class who were on the borderline and the possibility that they could not have brought up their grades.

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Now, do you want me to continue with the Reunion?

GREENE: Oh, yes.

REILLY: Well, about five-thirty that afternoon we met with Laura and Maynard and had a wonderful time. They are the perfect host and hostess in their home. Everyone brought scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, pictures, class pictures, and we had a ball! We had a ball just looking at the pictures and seeing how we looked in those days. The joke was really on me, because someone came up - I believe Edith Haynes had the picture, taken on the front steps of the old Starling School, which is now the administration building for the city school system, and I did not recognize myself in that picture.

GREENE: Why?

REILLY: They all had to point out that I was the little boy in the white britches and the blonde hair, sitting on the front row.

GREENE: Oh, no!

REILLY: In that picture, there were many of our class: Laura and Maynard and Earl and Edith and Lillian and Mary Virginia. Others had pictures of their classes when they were going to Central School or Court School. At that time, Central, Court and Starling taught from the kindergarten through the sixth grade, and then all of the students went to Central School for the 7th and 8th grades, which actually

served as a Junior High School, so many in our class we did not meet until we attended the 7th and 8th grades at Central School. We enjoyed it, and since the party that night we have talked back and forth about how this one looked and how that one looked, and what happened in the early days. After leaving the Wilzin home, we went to the Downtowner, and the table was beautiful. We didn't have an elegant dinner. We had an eleGANT dinner!

GREENE: What was it?

REILLY: We went into the River Room, which is the first room just off the lobby at the Downtowner, and they had arranged one big table in the center of the room. There must have been about six of those regular tables shoved together, and it was covered all in white, and the guests seated around so that we could sit across from everybody and didn't have to have our backs against anyone. For the cracks in the tables, the lady had taken gold and pink ribbon and lined it across the table to carry out the class colors. In the center of the table was a great big birthday cake, a flat cake, and all decorated with appropriate wording, which had been given by one of our members, Mrs. Ray Sarason Weiner. At each corner of the cake were tall silver candlesticks, with the glass insert, and in each glass insert were two dozen roses of various colors which we had picked from the different yards in Greenville,

and in the center a tall green taper. The ladies had loaned their silver goblets, and there was a silver goblet at each place. The first course was a pineapple cup, and at each place was this fresh pineapple in a plate. As we were seated, the waitress removed the top portion of the pineapple, and there in the pineapples were fresh strawberries, fresh peaches - all fresh fruits - marinated in sauterne. The table was a thing to behold, and was certainly beautiful. We tried to get pictures with some Polaroid cameras, but we didn't have too much luck.

GREENE: You had no professional photographer, Mr. Reilly?

REILLY: I must say that before we entered, we wanted to get some pictures, and Mrs. Maria Hunt Walker had brought a Polaroid camera, a brand new one, which she had never used. She couldn't get it open, and Dr. George Archer and Jack Lowry and Maria Hunt struggled getting that thing open, and Mrs. Alice Hunt Cummings, of Vicksburg, stood there with her hands on her hips, and commented, "Three 'A' students, and not a single one of them knows how to operate a Polaroid camera!" At any rate, we did get some pictures. The dinner was wonderfully served. We had top sirloin steaks. They were cooked as we asked for each person, and they were really good. We had a salad of fresh grapefruit portions, with a sauce that

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Maria Hunt had made herself and had taken to the Downtowner to use; and Maria Hunt is quite a gourmet cook. We had Broccoli - no, French-cut snap beans - and a baked potato. Then we had vanilla ice cream doused with green creme de menthe and topper with a red cherry, along with our cake; and Rae was selected to cut the cake which she had so graciously given us, but she was so engrossed in conversation that she couldn't talk and cut the cake at the same time, so by the time she got the cake cut most of us had ice cream that had turned to soup, but it was all in good spirit, and we enjoyed it.

GREENE: She made the cake?

REILLY: No, she had one of the local bakeries make and decorate the cake, and then we selected her to serve it. George Archer - Doctor George - who is always watching his waistline - after we had finished eating, said, "My goodness, you mean we're going to have ice cream and cake to top it off?" During the course of the meal there was jabber-jabber-jabber, and one of the items which was discussed was in the days when we decided that we would start a custom of giving, as a junior class, a dinner for the graduating seniors. In those days, there were no cafeterias in the schools, no dishes, no silverware, no nothing. So the boys in the class had to go out and borrow card tables and chairs and bring them in, and we brought from home tablecloths and silverware and glassware and dishes, and the girls in the class all decided to do the cooking. I

do not recall what the menu was at that first Junior-Senior Party we gave, but I do recall, and it was quite a bit of comment at the dinner that night, that Alice Hunt Cummins and Ray Sarasen Weiner had served on a Committee to make the patties in which the green peas were served, and Alice Hunt said that out of about seven patties only one could be used. The calamity list was tremendous.

GREENE: I see. What happened?

REILLY: We went on and had the party, and I'm sure that was one of the things that Mr. Bass and Mr. Murphy were thinking about when they talked about the "unique things" we did, and how we accomplished them, because from then on the subsequent Junior Classes gave a supper for the Seniors. We had, all our lives, worked and earned money, and we carried our own bank account. The city system always wants to have control of the class money, but they didn't get control of ours. We collected newspapers and magazines every Saturday and took them down and sold them to Friedman's Junk place. We didn't do as they do now. They ask for newspapers and magazines for the schools, and expect you to bring them to the school. We were only too glad to go out and get them. We collected and took them down there and sold them. Every year we had big rummage sales on Washington Avenue, down on the Scott lot, which was mid-way between Broadway and Theobald on the south side of the street. Nowadays, they call them

"carport sales", but we didn't have any cars in those days, so they were "rummage sales", and they always made money.

GREENE: What did you use the money for?

REILLY: Then every Fall we would go out and pick cotton, and we would get money there, and we would always bank it. Now, at the time we were Seniors, plans were under-way for the construction of a Junior High School adjacent to Greenville High School, and there was to be an auditorium built large enough to serve both schools. The auditorium in Greenville High School in that day was small. So we thought it would be nice if we gave a donation to the School Board toward purchasing a velvet curtain for the new auditorium. We had money in the bank, and we had plans for getting more money by giving our Senior play, which was called "Adam and Eva". We had selected the play before the flood, and as the summer went on we decided that we would go ahead with that play, but we had trouble getting anyone to direct it. Mrs. Cannon, our sponsor, was not versed in theatricals, so she called upon her good friend, Louise Eskrigge, and my sister, Katherine Reilly, as both Louise and Katherine had been interested in theatricals at MSCW and elsewhere after graduation. Those two coached us in the heat of the summer and we gave our Senior play in the auditorium of the old Greenville High School. We gave a two-night run, and we had a sell-out crowd

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both nights. In fact, the Fire Department allowed us to sell standing-room-only, and we allowed people to stand around the sides. We got so much money from that class play that the next day we borrowed the wheelbarrow from the Janitor and we put all the money in the wheelbarrow, and the whole class got together and wheeled it down Washington Avenue to the bank and deposited it in the bank.

GREENE: Oh, no. Do you have any idea how much it was?

REILLY: I do not know how much money we had, but we found out we had so much money. We went back to the School Board and asked them what it would cost to put a velvet curtain in the auditorium in the Bass School - the new one, the new auditorium. They got an estimate and gave it to us. We wrote out a check and paid for the curtain for that auditorium. Our Janitor had suffered financially and otherwise during the flood. We made a sizeable cash donation to our Janitor. The maid at the school, likewise, had suffered during the flood. We gave her a donation. We bought a silver bowl for our sponsor, and we thought we had used up all our money.

GREENE: Well, I read in the paper this Spring that you still had some money left. Is that true?

REILLY: That is true. That was a secret, and was something we did not know until two days before our reunion.

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It did not come to light until two days prior to this party - this reunion party - and I decided it had been a secret and had been forgotten that long, and I wasn't going to say anything about it in advance of the party. So, after we finished eating at the Downtowner - I had taken a gavel with me, since I was serving as Master of Ceremonies - I gaveled the table and I told the class members that we were going to have to go into an executive session, as we had some unfinished business that had to be attended to at that meeting. And, of course, everybody started jabber, jabber, jabber, as to what unfinished business we, our class, after fifty years, could have. I announced, just as I have said, about the various contributions we made with our funds, and we found just two days before this meeting that we still had \$23.00 in the Class Treasury. And I felt that we could not wait fifty years longer for another reunion, so we had to dispose of that business at this session.

I asked what the feeling of the group was for the disposition of that money. The feeling was that it should be donated to a charitable organization. One of the members moved that we consider giving the \$23.00 to the Boys Club of Washington County, as that organization had been started after the budgets had been set for the city and the county, and was having a pretty good struggle getting funds to operate, and from all indications, the group was doing a nice job. There was an

immediate second to that motion. It was put to vote, and by unanimous vote of the members present, we decided to contribute our \$23.00 to the Boys Club of Washington County, Mississippi. After that, I adjourned the meeting, and we assembled for our class picture, taken by Mr. Ed Larson, a local photographer. And that was our 50th Anniversary, our Fiftieth Reunion.

GREENE: It is just possible the Oral History Project would like to have a copy of that picture.

REILLY: Well, Mr. Larson was hired as the photographer to take it, and members can purchase the picture from him.

GREENE: Have you purchased one?

REILLY: Yes, Mr. Larson told me the other day that I never have gone by to pick it up, so after I leave here, I am going by to pick it up.

GREENE: You know they make copies of them and give the original back later.

REILLY: I'm sure Miss Bert Miller has a copy.

GREENE: Oh, that's true. She is a member of our Oral History Project.

REILLY: She is a member of our class.

GREENE: Do you remember, and would you mind divulging the names of the maid and the janitor that your Class helped?

REILLY: I'm sorry. I tried to think of it, and

I tried and tried, but don't remember. It seems to me the Janitor's first name was Sam. I can't remember his last name. He lived up toward Metcalfe, somewhere in that area, which was badly damaged by the flood.

GREENE: This was a most unusual class. I agree with Mr. Bass and Mr. Murphy.

REILLY: You are right, - most unusual!

GREENE: Do you plan to have another reunion?

REILLY: Well, we're not going to wait 50 years for it.

GREENE: I imagine not.

REILLY: We've had some ideas to get together and have a picnic, probably this Fall, or maybe next Spring, outdoors somewhere, but nothing elaborate. We had our party.

GREENE: The party's over.

REILLY: The party's over.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Alice C. Nagel)

A FINAL DRAFT
August 24, 1977.

acn

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