

**University of Illinois Student Life 1928-1938**  
**Oral History Project**  
**June Yarnell Foster – Class of 39**  
**Champaign, IL**  
**March 30, 2001**

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**Ellen Swain: This is an oral history interview for the University of Illinois Archives. The interviewer is Ellen Swain, the narrator is June Yarnell Foster, an alumna from the class of 1939. We are at Mrs. Foster's home in Champaign, Illinois and the date is March 30, 2001.**

**Okay, I was wondering if you could start by stating your full name and birth date.**

June Yarnell: June Evans Yarnell, Y-A-R-N-E-L-L, birth date, November 12, 1917.

**ES: And where did you grow up?**

JY: I grew up about 60 miles south and east of here, that county is Moultrie and the city is Sullivan, Illinois.

**ES: What was your family life like, what did your parents do?**

JY: My parents lived on a farm they owned until I was four. Then they moved to a village, Kirksville, which is near there. My father and mother purchased a general merchandise store. They ran that until I was almost ready for high school. Mother and Dad were determined that I would go to high school, and that I would live at home. They lived 5 miles away, which meant moving. They sold the store, moved to the edge of Sullivan and purchased a small dairy farm. I attended 8<sup>th</sup> grade in Sullivan and then entered Sullivan High School

**ES: Did you have brothers and sisters?**

JY: I have one sister, younger, who is also a U of I alum.

**ES: What are your first memories of U of I, why did you want to go there as opposed to somewhere else?**

JY: I interviewed whatever university reps came to the high school, and was interested in some I began to realize there was not financial support for me to go to a private school. I learned about county scholarships, so I wrote for the home economics scholarship. I don't know what the pattern is now, but at that time, each county had a general scholarship and a home economics year scholarship for agriculture. I won the home economics scholarship at the University of Illinois.

**ES: How did that work, where did you, did you take a test somewhere?**

JY: Yes, the county superintendent of schools gave those tests, and determinee the winners.

**ES: Did many students from your class go on to college or go to U of I?**

JY: I remember two from my class: One girl, Mary Emalyn Clark [deceased] and Frank Schack, a basketball player who transferred early and now lives in Clay City, Illinois.

**ES: Did your parents want you to go to college?**

JY: Oh, I didn't have a choice. Fortunately, if I'd had a choice, it would have been to go to the University. My Mother and were determined that their two daughters, were college bound. Fortunately, we were both good candidates.

**ES: How did the Depression affect your family? Did they have a hard time sending you?**

JY: I'm sure they did. Many years later when I was going through papers I found a not that Dad had borrowed \$500 during my college years. I remembered the story of dad going from the store in Kirksville to the bank in Sullivan to deposit \$500. It was late afternoon and the bank was closed. He knocked on the door and they let him in. The bank did not open the next day – and example of the infamous bank closures. When I was leaving for the University, dad took me to the bank to sign a signaturee card for this account. If I needed money while I was away, I could write a check on his account. The largest check I ever wrote was for \$5.00.

**ES: What are your first memories of coming to school? Do you remember driving into town or what were your impressions?**

JY: We lived only sixty miles away and had often been to Champaign-Urbana. We found a rooming house for girls directly behind/east of Prehn's on Oregon. Two girls shared a bedroom and shared a completely equipped kitchen where we each cooked our own meals. By that time my parents in addition to the small dairy farm owned a small grocery store in Sullivan. There was always a good food supply and I could cook.

The second year mother and dad decided I shouldn't do my own cooking. I moved to another rooming house for girls a block south near Kam's o Lincoln, another popular coke stop. We ate our meals out. We each had a window box in a big glass enclose porch to keep fruit, milk or juices, etc.

My junior year they decided It should move to one of the organized independent houses where meals were served. I house Sager house in the 300 block on John Street in Champaign. All meals were prepared by a great cook and served in a dining room by student male waiters. Our house mother, "Mom" Sager, was an educated and gracious lady. For example, she served tea for "her girls" every Friday afternoon at 4:00 p.m.

**ES: And tell me how it differed from a sorority house.**

JY: Well there was no initiation fee, no allegiance to any other organization, no related houses on other campuses or states-- Sager House and all other independent houses on campus were independent entities. As I remember, the housemothers of the independent houses met regularly with the Dean of Women just as those in the Greek system. University's regulations applied to all girls regardless of where they lived. Extra curricular events organized by the university were open to houses in both systems. I know Sager House won a choral competition while my sister lived there during 1942-1946.

**ES: Sachem Sing? Maybe?**

JY: Possibly. Joyce, my sister, lives in the adjoining half of this duplex. I could ask her over to confirm before you leave.

**ES: How were you chosen to be in the, did you interview to be in the house?**

JY: The housemother (also owned the house and lived there with her husband Pop Sager, and their two children) interviewed my parents and me. I don't remember by what process I chose Sager House. I knew their excellent reputation on campus. My housemates and I tried to uphold it. If a group of us went to a neighborhood bar on Friday, we sang some other house's songs.

**ES: So you had a real identity, group identity? In competition with the other independent houses?**

JY: yes, we had an identity. I don't remember specific competitions other than Homecoming decorations and choral competitions. My sister remembers the trophy case and trophies which disappeared when Mom Sager sold the house and retired.

**ES: How much contact did you have with the Dean of Women? Did you know her name and—?**

JY: I'm sure that I knew her name. . . .Leonard?

**ES: Right, Maria Leonard.**

JY: Maria Leonard! Nobody had asked me that, and I hadn't thought of it in a long time. No I was never called in. I didn't have any problems.

**ES: Is that how you got to know her, if you were in trouble or—?**

JY: I'm sure she spoke to us. We respected her authority and guidance. I seem to remember some individual visits to her office when she gave compliments and encouragement for academic achievements.

**ES: Did she provide any type of orientation, when you got to school or—?**

JY: I assume so, but I don't remember specifics. I didn't have many difficulties although I came from small town and small high school and a very conservative area. As I think back, I remember one of my first classes was biology or zoology. In the first lab class the instructor said, "Choose your partner. You'll be working in partners at the tables." I didn't know anyone and just stood there. A beautiful black girl came and asked if I would be her partner. I probably said "sure." I had never had any contact with a Negro and hadn't seen many. The only minority in Sullivan I can identify would be Catholics.

The first class in the lab we were to dissect frogs. I had to leave the room and take several deep breaths. I suspect the "b" in that class was primarily due to my partner's work. I don't remember seeing her again until my Senior year. I was invited to join an academic honorary, Omicron Nu. When I went to the Initiation, she was president of the society.

**ES: Do you remember a lot of black students on campus?**

JY: No. I really don't. If I met them, they were simply other students.

**ES: You weren't aware of any problems that they had while they were in school?**

JY: No.

**ES: Could you say the same for Jewish students?**

JY: No, I can't. By my junior year I began to object to what I considered rude and obnoxious behavior. Some of the Jewish girls were very aggressive on campus sidewalks and other public places.

**ES: Was that a widespread feeling?**

JY: I don't know how to answer that because it isn't something that we discussed, in big meetings with friends we might say "Watch out here comes the kikes."

**ES: Right.**

JY: In our own little sphere, we recognized it.

**ES: Did you socialize much with Jewish students, or did they socialize—?**

JY: I guess we didn't socialize. I have no memories of girls in social situations, I recognized or labeled Jewish.

**ES: You mentioned Catholic students, were there Catholic-Protestant divisions on campus?**

JY: I have no idea. The mention of Catholics as a minority was in Sullivan. I was an active member of a Protestant church there. I did not affiliate with a campus group. I frequently attended nearby churches on Sunday.

**ES: And now you're speaking of Sullivan?**

JY: Yes.

**ES: Did you notice at the U of I now, economic differences between students? Was that prominent, were you aware?**

JY: Oh yes. One of the economic differences that was accepted was if you lived in an independent house you didn't have enough money to go into the Greek System.

**ES: It wasn't that you didn't want to, it was just that you didn't have enough money?**

JY: That was the general feeling I think.

**ES: Did being in a Greek house give you social prominence? Did you look up to people in the Greek houses or—?**

JY: I assume that in some circles being a Greek gave you social prominence. I didn't look up to the Greeks. Some probably did. Some Greeks I knew were nice with more financial resources than I did and some were snobs. I was invited to dinner a few sororities and asked to pledge. One I seriously considered. However, I was taught that if you can't pay for it, you can't have it. I wouldn't ask my parents for more and declined.

**ES: So you did have contact, you did socialize, it wasn't a division?**

JY: There was a division. There was no socializing between the Greeks and the Independents. Sororities "rushed" individuals in the independent houses – usually outstanding individuals. Some did pledge during the end of their junior year or beginning of their senior year.

**ES: You were able to?**

JY: Yes.

**ES: Tell me, you mentioned going to a bar, tell me what you did for fun, what kinds of things you did with your friends.**

JY: I loved to dance and I dated men who loved to dance – especially my husband. This big annual class dances – the Freshman Frolic, Sophomore Cotillion, Junior and senior something, when they brought the big bands to campus were special. There was dancing

each weekend on the roof of some hangout on Wright Street. On Sadie Hawkins and Valentine's days, a couple could dance under the stars for \$1.00 a couple. Maintaining my academic record, working part time, a few extra curricular activities such as helping with theatre productions, special Sager House projects and coke dates filled my time. I was never bored.

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**ES: The big evening events though were on the weekend?**

JY: Oh yes.

**ES: Is that right?**

JY: Yes.

**ES: You didn't go out during the weekdays, in the evenings?**

JY: Don't remember doing that very often, other than to go to work or to the student library. I had no fear about going alone at night.

**ES: Did the Depression have a noticeable affect on student life, on student social activities, and—?**

JY: I think maybe the Depression affected students in different ways, as it effected families in different ways. Most of my friends knew where we were, and we didn't have to talk about why were there.

**ES: Were you aware of what was going on nationally?**

JY: Only media coverage of current events.

**ES: Economically?**

JY: No, I was busy taking care of my own life. Survivor, with hope, approach.

**ES: How important were athletics for students? Did you go to—?**

JY: Well certainly we had to have a team to root for, and as usual, football and basketball were the primary sports. I dated an ROTC guy. He was determined to teach me to shoot. We'd go to the Armory, and I learned to shoot most of the basic things. There was a well rounded menu of arts, music, student productions to choose from.

**ES: How did students dress, did you dress up for class?**

JY: Oh there were fads and fashions as always. In general, it seems to me that students were neater. I don't ever remember seeing anyone in faded jeans or cut-offs with the fringe. Being well dressed, and well groomed, was the attire for most students I think. Pictures of houses and campus activities show the accepted fashions.

**ES: I'm switching gears here a little bit, but you mentioned that you worked in the library. How did you get that job?**

JY: I applied for a part time job at a University office. I typed the cards for the card file, it was very interesting work.

**ES: How many hours a week do you think you worked?**

JY: Seems to me it was 10 hours a week, but I'm not sure.

**ES: In addition to this you were on a scholarship?**

JY: Yes.

**ES: Did that pay your tuition?**

JY: Yes.

**ES: Oh, I see. So this was to help out with room and board?**

JY: No, it helped out with anything that I needed. Spending money, school supplies, etc. I watched my pennies. I think the biggest check I ever wrote on my father's bank account was \$5. And I don't remember why I needed that \$5, but I've looked back at those years and thought, what trust it was to do that for me. Now it's credit cards for some students.

**ES: Was it common for students to have jobs in addition to being in school?**

JY: Yes. Many of us were children affected by the Depression. That was a reality, we lived with it. I can't tell you where any of them worked, or what they did.

**ES: What other students did, uh-huh.**

JY: Right. It wasn't a divisive thing — It was just accepted.

**ES: Did you notice it getting better from your freshman year to your senior year?**

JY: Well I suppose it was getting better because my parents were upgrading where I lived, and how I had food.

**ES: I wanted to ask you too about your major, why you chose home economics?**

JY: Because it was a scholarship.

**ES: Oh! Was it an interest you had in high school though?**

JY: No, I hadn't had interest. I had had one foods class, as a senior elective, and I had had some sewing in a 4-H group for a couple of summers, at grade school level. I had all the college entrance requirements including 3 years of Latin.

**ES: So it was the way to get an education, huh?**

JY: I did have to do quite a bit of selling to my counselor at the U of I to take French – Journalism and Advertising. I managed to, put this all together and still meet the basics for a BS degree in home economics.

**ES: Did you go to school with a career in mind? Or what did you want to do with your degree?**

JY: Came to learn everything I could learn I didn't have a specific goal.

**ES: Did you establish relationships with your professors, did you know them on a personal basis?**

JY: Some of them.

**ES: Did you have any favorites?**

JY: I don't remember specific favorites. Lita Bane, head of the Department, is memorable. She was very supportive as an undergraduate and personally when I entered graduate school one semester after graduation I became a graduate assistant in Textiles and Clothing.

**ES: What types of classes did you take in home economics, what did they teach you?**

JY: Initially I wanted to be a dietitian, despite the fact that math and sciences were more difficult for me. Based on my high school transcript I was placed in a more advanced chemistry class. I completed 15 hours of chemistry, but then a dietitian had to take quantitative chemistry. I knew my math was not adequate. I switched interest to textiles and clothing, design, retailing, journalism and advertising. I think the content of a Home Economics degree from the college of Agriculture was not fully appreciated then. The recent restructuring into ACES seems a big improvement.

**ES: [Laughter] This is skipping around a little bit too. How much contact did students have with administrators in the school? Like the President of the**



**University, were you aware of who that person was, and was he visible and accessible to the students?**

JY: Of course I knew the names and faces and considered them accessible. I think I personally held my teachers, professors, and administrators with the University in some respect. I didn't try to socialize with them.

**ES: You weren't invited over to their homes or had contact with them outside of class?**

JY: I don't remember any individual invitations. They entertained students occasionally in groups and special occasions.

**ES: Were you aware, when you were in school, of students who were active in political movements, or protested what was going on over seas?**

JY: I have no idea what protesting was at that period of time. The only politics I knew was that there were elections for campus positions. If you delivered the votes in your house for the winner you would have an invitation to particular balls or events. There were political affiliations and organizations but, I was not involved. I didn't even know they existed in the beginning.

**ES: Were students aware of what was going on politically outside of campus?**

JY: Some – especially those studying political science, etc. Issues which impacted the lives of their families were discussed.

**ES: Did you go through commencement ceremony?**

JY: Oh yes, Mother and Dad were here. It was very important.

**ES: A big important day?**

JY: Yes.

**ES: What did you do directly after graduation?**

JY: That would have been the summer of '39. I stayed on campus and worked full time at the library. I was offered a position beginning the fall in Chicago with a magazine for Home Economics teachers. It was the job I thought I really wanted. I was delighted to have it offered. Then I decided that I didn't really want to go to Chicago. I wanted to marry the man I had known and dated frequently for several years. We were married I Sullivan in October of 1939.

**ES: So did you use your degree after you got married as far as—?**

JY: We decided to stay in Champaign and settled in our apartment. Three months later he was told he had tuberculosis and entered the Sanatorium on North Vine in Urbana. I entered Graduate School the second semester and was hired as a graduate assistant in textiles and clothing. In January 1942 at the end of the first semester, he was released. We moved to Des Moines where his mother lived. Our 3 sons were born there. I was actively involved with AAUW as an officer and with the Child Study groups. I frequently entertained my husband's sales force and accompanied him on a variety of business related activities. In August 1957 he had a fatal heart attack while we were on vacation. I had 3 sons aged 7, 8 and 15 years, a 20 year old Bachelor's degree and no work experience.

At the end of one year, I sold our home, moved the family back to Urbana and entered graduate school. I started where I had stopped 20 years before – textiles and clothing. In the meantime several synthetics had entered the market. I was again writing chemical formulas for new fibers and didn't like it. I enrolled a course in Child Development and Family Relations. I liked it. I had 20 years experience in the field. Fortunately Dr. Queenie Mills and Dr. Mollie Mowrer were very supportive. They suggest that I study and proficiency some require undergraduate course and begin their graduate program. I was working as a graduate student in the Extension Editorial Office writing press releases for the Home Economics staff and conducting interviews on WILL. I took their advice and was hired as an assistant at the Child Development Laboratory. I was there 2 years while I conducted my research, wrote the thesis and received the MS in June 1962.

**ES: What are your feelings about your education now, how have they influenced, how has your degree influenced you?**

JY: When I completed my MS I was hired by the Illinois department of children and Family Services as a Day Care Center License Representative in the 16 county Champaign Region. I started July 1, 1962. I was in the right place at the right time with an excellent education. The demand and need for Day Care and preschool Education was increasing. Head Start programs were anticipated in about 2 years. The next 18 years until my retirement on January 1, 1980 were filled with varied and professionally rewarding experiences. Obviously my studies at the U of I for the BS in 1939 and the MS in 1942 enable me to achieve both personal and professional goals and rewards.

**ES: Is there anything else you want to say?**

JY: I think I've talked enough.

**ES: Well thank you very much.**

END OF INTERVIEW.