

**University of Illinois Life 1928-1938**  
**Oral History Project**  
**Mary Monahan '27**  
**Arcola, IL**  
**March 28, 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 Mary Monahan, an alumna from the class of 1927. We are at Miss Monahan's home in Arcola, Illinois and the date is March 28, 2001.**

Mary Monahan: I was here in the old days, in the University of Illinois Journalism Department. I was very old because I was here from my sophomore year, for that I would have started '24 to '25. Yeah, '25, '26. So I was here those 3 years, because the first year I went to St. Mary in the Woods, when you, would call same ( ) that was Indiana.

**ES: Oh right.**

MM: It's near Terre Haute. But then I decided that I wanted to go down to the University of Illinois, so I just stayed there one year, because I lived in Arcola all my life.

**ES: Tell me about that, where you grew up in Arcola?**

MM: Yeah.

**ES: What did your parents do?**

MM: Well my dad was, you know, I guess you heard of broom corn.

**ES: Yeah.**

MM: He was they still wanted to sway, go out and buy broom corn from the farmers. And, that's the only reason, part of the reason, they eventually stopped raising in Illinois. It got like very bad weather for a couple years, it doesn't do well in rainy weather. I mean the crop will ruin corn. We don't make the brooms. We buy the broom corn and sell it to the manufacturer.

**ES: Oh I see, that's what your dad did? Bought the broom corn?**

MM: Yeah, they'd buy the broom corn. He was in business, and the one he worked for, before he had his own business with the Thomas Alliance Company where Arcola was.

Then my brother came home from Notre Dame in 1921 and that's when he decided, he'd be with dad in the business.

**ES: Did you have, how many brothers and sisters did you have?**

MM: Just one, Tom. He was named after my dad. And my brother kept on being in the business. I mean, one of them did. Tom, he was the oldest of the family. Really two of them did, but Pat started out to be, you know like in the computer business with the Citizen's Bank of Decatur, but then he came back to be with the company. And I guess, that's Pat Monahan, he's there later this week. We went out to Atlanta to see some grandchildren you know. They got new twins.

**ES: How important was education to your family, did your parents want you to go to college?**

MM: Yeah, they did. It was important to them, you know. My dad they lived in Peoria for a while and they moved back to Arcola, and so he went to, St. Francis High School for boys, and then he came back to Arcola after he graduated, but he just went to high school there.

**ES: And he wanted you to go to school?**

MM: Yeah and my mother did too.

**ES: How did you choose St. Mary's?**

MM: Well, since it's not too far away, and some of the people living in Arcola had gone to St. Mary's and we knew their families. . .that's the way. We felt like in some way, even though it looked rosy on the surface people thought there was a depression coming, but whether I can say that, because I'm not sure.

**ES: How did you decide to go to the U of I?**

MM: Well because I had already been thinking about Journalism, and I knew that was a good one. Like at Northwestern but Illinois was working up, and then of course that was a good one as well. I mean in those days they kept on, but that's why I decided on Illinois and it wouldn't be too far away from home.

**ES: Did you live on campus?**

MM: Yeah, in those days they had pretty nice places to live. Not apartments where you ( ). I'm sure they had those. I didn't want to tackle them. They had places where the people rented out the rooms, and that's where I was. I'm lucky though, because it was very nice. She was very nice, Mrs. Nickols. And in those days, like they do now, I guess they like to go to the football games and you know I don't know how well, you didn't

have to walk into there. Look in the *Daily Illini*, that's what I worked for as a student at Illinois. After I'd been there about a year, my Junior and Senior year.

**ES: You worked on the *Daily Illini*?**

MM: Yeah.

**ES: How did you get that job?**

MM: Well it was, I think pretty hard, I mean to get on the staff, but as I recall, and I write sports and maybe I told one of the people on the board or something, that I would like to cover some women's sports for them. And I think that's something like that, because I don't think I had anybody that was a grad that would give me their place. And then by the time I was a Junior, I knew I liked the *Illini*. That was really my big off campus activity. So we'd go back to classes to work, late in the afternoons, because then, in those days, I think it was in Uni High, you know that's one of the old buildings, I don't think I have the proper name for it, but they did, at that time, they had the basement. They had several rooms in the basement, and they printed their paper for a while down there. Just seemed that when you worked there you got to know the people that were working with you. You got to know the people in your classes better because they were working on it too.

**ES: Were there many women on the *Daily Illini*?**

MM: Well, I don't know the proportion, but they had a women's editor and her name was Jane Brown, and she was very good. And then, her assistant women's editor was Peggy Burton, that was a real good friend of mine. After I did the sports, they let me, sort of help handle the re-writes and things. Well anyway, I liked—

**ES: Did the women do certain stories and the men do others?**

MM: They were capable like Jane or Peggy, they were capable of doing, well from any type. They might give them good stories, but they might have a women's angle, still that's a start. That's what I was going to ask the Junior, the department, when did they, I mean first when I was there, you took English, plenty of English courses too, as well as Journalism. And I was going to ask them, when did they, so I would think, guessing, that maybe, it got stronger in the 1920s. On the campus. And everybody knew how good, was that the Woodale School of Journalism, I mean it, no it's up at Northwestern.

**ES: Right.**

MM: I think it was, but they of course were something to look up to.

**ES: Do you remember your professors in the Journalism school?**

MM: Yeah, I remember a few. I remember like Professor Murphy, but he was head of the department for a while, too. And you know, I'm jade, I don't know all their names. They're of course, those days, there weren't a lot of Journalism honoraries for women, Society, as well as the men. They had some, Sigma Delta Chi, you know, for the men. I don't know what the exact name for those was, ours was. . . and then, they changed it, that was after I graduated, they changed it to Women in Communications. This professional society and I enjoyed that. So later on I went to an alum chapter. I went to some of their meetings, that's when I was back home working, you know in the company. Those 4 years, when they let me, because a friend of mine got me in there, she just told them that she would have me come and work without getting paid, for 2 weeks just to show them that I could do newspaper because she would be there for 2 weeks and then she was leaving for fall job. One was a retired colonel, you know, I guess the Army. He and that Mr. McCormick was in Advertising, they took that chance.

**ES: This was after you graduated?**

MM: Yeah.

**ES: I see, I see.**

MM: I probably got in there to work that fall because I really tried hard all around Chicago. I tried, I wanted to work up there. It's been nice, but I could've kept on being active on the campus, after I graduated, but what I did do was go to the alumni unions. Everyone likes the ( ). Some of ( ), I enjoyed that too. That was when we would have, one weekend to go to the big alumni union too.

**ES: Tell me do you remember what the relationship between the faculty and students were? Did you know faculty very well outside the classroom?**

MM: No, I don't. I just knew, by hearing how they were getting along with them. You know the men reporters. I think you're right. I think there was several women in both the English, in Advanced English, but also in the Journalism. But I would probably say the percent would be. . . I don't know whether it would be a third, but the ones that I got to know were the people who worked in the *Daily Illini*. The men all went on to, well the girls went on, but they weren't, their house wasn't like Jane's. But the men went on like while they dual, he was Associated Press and he also was a ( ) correspondent. I don't know whether it's *Chicago Daily News* or— And then Stewart Howe, I mean he was in our class. I noticed that he has a project he's working on [Student Life and Culture Archives brochure]. I mean not the original Stewart, but I mean his company.

**ES: Stewart Howe?**

MM: Uh-huh.

**ES: Uh-huh, he was in your class?**

MM: Yeah.

**ES: You knew him?**

MM: Well I think he was either in my class or the year later or the year earlier, but we knew each other because he worked on the *Daily Illini*.

**ES: I see.**

MM: Yeah, I mean you were in this ( ), I forget his first name, well I mean what they called him, his name was Randall. Anyway they all went onto have very good Journalism careers, and I know the girls did probably, but I didn't get to know everyone, Peggy and Jane I got to know, how some of the men were doing. Because they were AOPis and you know the men would be in the fraternity too. I didn't belong to a fraternity just to Journalism.

**ES: Why did you not join a sorority?**

MM: Well, when I first came there, I feel I don't know what they called it, Sigma Alpha Iota, that's the music one. They had them in those days. I don't think they would have them now, it was what they called the Catholic one. You know and my mother thought I might try that, so I think I got invited. I just didn't make the grades, when I was being—I knew some people who were sorority and fraternity, and I liked all of them. I thought it did a job to help them maybe.

**ES: Do you think it was important, I mean people who joined fraternities and sororities?**

MM: Well, I would say that. They probably thought that it was pretty important in those days, more so than later on.

**ES: What kinds of things did you do for fun?**

MM: Well, I liked sports that I like now. You had a University of Illinois Athletic book or something where you took it for the year, and so I went to the football games, but I don't think I got to so many basketball games, but I probably got to some, and then I liked baseball in the summer. I liked to listen over the radio, you know like WGN, Cubs and White Sox. I don't think there was much time for recreation when you're working on the *Illini*.

**ES: Oh I see.**

MM: There might not be quite as many wanting to take it up at first, and then they had the University Press, where they printed books and things that I didn't get in on. Some of the people worked on the *Illio*.

**ES: They did that too?**

MM: They did. I'm sorry, I don't think you're going to hear much of that. You might be a little more careful about how much you ate out, things like—

**ES: You started to feel that there might be some financial. . . ?**

MM: I don't know, maybe the farms, started to be not so ( ) for a while. I could ask somebody who knows more about it, but I definitely was in on it.

**ES: Did your family have to sacrifice to send you to college?**

MM: Well since we had already started having the Depression in Arcola, because we had bank trouble, I think they probably did. They wouldn't really let you know much about it.

**ES: And you said you kind of had to watch your money when you were in school?**

MM: Well, we did. But not to the extent that it got to later. But, I don't know a lot of the students had folks that really wanted them to get a good education. I was going to say, did you ever hear of the name Busey, as of those days, because they were very important. I mean they had people going to school there, but they were important in Champaign-Urbana. That was one of the big, and another one is the one who used to be the big cleaners. But I knew them, they were in transportation, like the bus station, I can't say their first name, their family, and one or two of their people were in our class.

**ES: I see.**

MM: Compared to those days, it's much different now isn't it?

**ES: Yes [laughter].**

MM: Because I always enjoyed going back, what do they call it, Women in Communication. And they had studies with mostly English people writing books. Then I belonged to AUW Champaign-Urbana. And I mean that's their Charleston branch, I belonged to that for years. But I guess if you really had a business in Champaign right after you got through college. But since we got to Champaign *News Gazette* and the Urbana *Courier* was, well it was running to for certain amounts of time. I liked that too.

**ES: Now the *Daily Illini* kind of served as a community paper then didn't it?**

MM: Yeah it really did. I think they didn't have a morning thing to compete with then. Otherwise I think the *News Gazette* had a morning edition and then an afternoon edition. But I think now it's big. When I was in school. We had a few of the colored people that went to our classes, I think then. I don't know that it was really, maybe it's a little more congenial then for couple years.

**ES: More congenial back then?**

MM: Well, I meant what they did. They wouldn't have had the number going. It takes a while to develop so that you have a certain, some going to the institution then, I mean to get minority groups.

**ES: You don't remember any incidents of—?**

MM: Riot. Well the few that I had in my classes, I liked. And then when I got up to Chicago, after the newspaper closed, I was able to work on the Chicago Relief. It was under Cook County and that's when you saw so many really in a lot of trouble financially. Because it was hitting hard and then when they'd come in for interviews, they had good professions and I thought there were some, but I don't suppose compared to the whole University I don't know whether, what they'd say. My dad, when we had that broom corn business, he had to go to Chicago to see customer's lots, and then we'd go to a show, in town, or we'd go to the you know the vaudeville palace. And I got to see them in shows. And I really didn't have the bitter, I was interested that they got along. I don't know looking back I'd have whether somebody said they did. . .yeah go ahead.

**ES: I wondered, how do you think Jewish students got along on campus?**

MM: I remember I had friends there too. Mr. Robertson was chairman of the History department. But I mean, I don't know whether he came from one of the countries of Europe, but I had two of those people who I admired so much. One of them would have been, became Jed's friend. I mean I don't know whether it was in his area but we had a very good History department, instructor, and I'm trying to say his name, but I can't. When they got to go through the 60s, I would think that group of that era would have been pretty disturbed. I don't know whether it was disturbed around Champaign-Urbana as it was in Chicago. Chicago was, it was pretty disturbed, wasn't it? I wasn't there, by then. I was working in Arcola.

**ES: What do you remember about the rules for the students on campus?**

MM: Yeah, that I should be able to tell you better. I know since I just moved on a, you know one of the Greek houses on campus. They had rules, you know, on curfew. Yeah, I mean you had to get in, be in, those things. I think her house was, it was for girls when I moved. And later, I think she took all boys for a while. But, I always, I just think it was coming along with, I need to ask some of the professors, how bad we really were for hostility [*laughter*].

**ES: [*Laughter*] Do you remember the Dean of Women?**

MM: Yeah, I was just going to say, I was there when, was it Mrs. Leonard?

**ES: Uh-huh.**

MM: I admired her. I thought she did a pretty good job.

**ES: Did students like her, do you think?**

MM: Well, I think they thought she was sort of strict. Then she had an assistant that might have been a few years later, but her name was Irene Pearson, and her folks, some of Irene's people, were related, some of the boys particularly, went, you know were at Illinois and not out of school yet. Irene was very good. And I thought she was a good assistant Dean of Women, and I don't know whether, is that Mrs. Leonard, Maria?

**ES: Maria.**

MM: Maria.

**ES: Uh-huh.**

MM: I don't know whether she retired a few years after I was there.

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**ES: Okay you were talking about Maria Leonard.**

MM: Well the basic rules for men, or students both men and women, were sort of enforced, or at least, they knew about it better by these deans. I noticed in the *News Gazette* on one of the ( ), that it said, yeah, Dean Clark that he was probably the first Dean of Men in college, is that right?

**ES: That's right, he was.**

MM: That's amazing! I do remember him a little. He was colorful and [*laughter*], yeah and I think, Maria, I think she was pretty good in a way. But I don't know how they classed the people.

**ES: You never got in trouble so you didn't have to—?**

MM: Well I'm sure—

**ES: Go with them [*laughter*].**

MM: I'm sure I got, you know, I don't know which one, but I remember I had to go to see Maria once, you know, once or twice, and I was scared. Because she had you come just to her office. I guess I was right on the campus. Well, I don't know whether I was missing too many classes in a row or something.

**ES: So you had to go talk to her?**



MM: At least I remember talking to her [*laughter*]. I liked her in a way, Maria. I imagine he was the most colorful and probably the most well known of the faculty, wasn't he, Tom?

**ES: Among the students, you think he was the most—?**

MM: Yeah, well there might be some of them that got sort of perturbed [*laughter*], but they think he's too strict. Well I think he was just well known.

**ES: Did they regulate morality on campus? Was there a strict moral code, dating?**

MM: Well I know that curfew was, they enforced that. I'm sure they wrote them all, because I was just going to say, I don't, when it came along, or when it, another generation when they did have housing for both men and women. I mean I don't know when that was, when it was a joint project.

**ES: Right, but when you were there, you lived in a rooming house? Did you know the other students in your house?**

MM: Yeah that what was nice too, they had two of them transfer to Illinois then, two or three, who used to be in Arcola, and I knew them then. They were just a year or two older than I was, but they were like upper classmen, and they graduated in '26.

**ES: So they lived in your house?**

MM: Yeah it was, that was one thing, Mrs. Nickols, she didn't make a it too difficult for you. Maybe she might not have been as strict with some. I don't know how they handled the real troubles. I thought that the Dean of Men and the Dean of Women and their assistants had quite a lot to do with keeping order on the campus.

**ES: How important was religion to students on campus?**

MM: They already having those foundations, I'm sure you know. And they were on campus and they certainly tried to lend us some, like you know the University and the foundation was beautiful building down there on, right off the campus. Anybody could go there and study. You didn't have to be a Methodist, and that was true of the others. Like the Catholic was the Newman Foundation. I know the Presbyterian's had one, and United Church of Christ, or the that's part of the Christian Church, well, Dr. Stephan Fischer was their pastor for years, and he was really wonderful. He talked so well, and it was his granddaughter that was in my class, Sally Fischer, and she was good to him. She sort of took on the things that would have you know, rush, after she graduated, she stayed on to help Dr. Fischer. I mean, religion would have some part, but I don't know, to me it all made an impression, because we had father John O'Brien. I mean he was at Newman foundation for a while. And then he wrote some books. And he gave very good sermons,

just like today I think they have another one at St. Johns. That's a new one. My friend goes to their masses a lot, and she says they're very good.

**ES: Did you attend Newman when you were there?**

MM: Well I did some, but I went to church and that would have been Newman Chapel I think. I mean I went there partly, and otherwise, I might have just gone to one of the parish churches, that's St. Mary's, but I did at least on Sunday I was there.

INTERRUPTION

**ES: Did you have a job when you were at school, to help pay for school?**

MM: No. I wanted to get as much experience on the *Daily Illini*, that took in quite a few.

INTERRUPTION

MM: No, they were starting to improve the health service for the students on the Illinois campus, and then they had McKinley, what's it called, McKinley Hospital?

**ES: Uh-huh.**

MM: Well I don't know when that started, it might have gone beforehand. But I think, oh yeah, and then we'd have vaccinations. If it was going to be, thought it might be an epidemic or something. They'd offer a chance to get your shot. Maybe the flu, one of those have epidemics while you were there.

**ES: Did they quarantine students when they had—?**

MM: Well, they could do it in the house you lived in or the fraternity or sorority, yeah. See I don't think polio had reached it's highest ranks. Yeah, I know it's very contagious, but I guess it came along later than when I was there. But I think there's a time when it was really bad. Really bad for, well it was just contagious. Then they had men's health department, women's, but I don't know if that was before my time. I should have let a friend of mine look some things up for you.

**ES: Oh no [laughter]. How, how aware of you, how were you aware of national events going on?**

MM: Oh I was interested in that, because, it was try to use the radio, and then TV was there. Yeah, I was aware of that, I think a lot of them were in that day were. You know?

**ES: Were students involved in politics?**

MM: Well, I think maybe the Republicans might have. I might have noticed it more. I think that they were, like Young Republican clubs, and Young Democratic Clubs. I think

that when they went to college, students did become more aware of politics if they were at all interested, and they might be interested in some of the candidates. I mean, I remember when President Roosevelt, when he ran and kept on running, and then I remember President Hoover too, because, yeah, he and Dolly would've been reelected if it hadn't have been for the Depression, well the Depression and things. And then I think the, then there was more activity then, when they had an election. I mean among the students, or the young businessmen or young businesswomen.

**ES: Did they have student protests or anything when you were there?**

MM: That's what I really have to look up. I think there must have been some, because that was, it was after the war wasn't it, after the first war? And then the other one broke out, it was like 1940, well, with the Pearl Harbor in 1941, I guess there's always protests, but I don't know whether in those days it was more force going on. I think it was during President Roosevelt's terms. I wanted to help anyway that I could in that. It was just, and would know you remember you saw a picture. He never wanted them to show that he was not able to walk. He always had it so, how was it done, Francis? He had the, you know cameras.

**ES: Not show his legs, uh-huh.**

MM: Yeah that's when Pearl had a big outburst, when President Roosevelt.

**ES: Tell me did you go through Commencement ceremony?**

MM: Yeah, yeah in those days you did.

**ES: What was that like, do you remember that day?**

MM: Yeah, I thought it was a Sunday. But I don't know whether they had it on Sundays then. Yeah, but it was a big crowd. On the campus, you know the Broadwalk, they had a Broadwalk, where a lot the activities were on the campus. They just called it the Broad. Now they have a lot going on in the Illini Union Building.

**ES: Did your parents go to Commencement?**

MM: Yeah, yeah they did. I guess in those days you had more room. I mean there weren't that many people in the [class], you know. There maybe not as many people that went to school.

**ES: And you said after you graduated, your friend got you a job.**

MM: Yeah, well yeah, I went to Chicago first, because my friend, she went to Northwestern and summer school, in Quincy, and another one of her friends was a graduate student. I was able to stay at their places. One of them was a Pi Phi, and the other one, I don't know it, but it was really hard. That's another reason why I think that it

was showing that things were slowing down a bit. Of course Journalism though, probably didn't have a whole lot for women yet. When I got out my friend just trained me on the job so.

**ES: Now where did you work?**

MM: They called it *Jefferson Park Weekly*. That's down on Milwaukee and, I don't remember whether that's Milwaukee and Higgins or, it's in that area though.

**ES: And how long did you work there?**

MM: I worked there the four years that it was open, I mean, that it continued to be open. So it closed in '31.

**ES: In '31 because of the Depression?**

MM: Yeah. The advertising man had to take it over because Colonel Robert, the editor, died, so they kept on trying hard to break even, but it got worse.

**ES: And then you moved back down to Arcola?**

MM: Yeah. Well, there were different things in between because my mother had said that I should get typing and shorthand in high school, but they just thought I didn't have enough time to do it, the faculty out at school here because, well anyway, I had to get all these college related courses. Then ( ) in Joliet, that was Business College, and she had me come up for about a year. You had to take it for about eight or nine months, so then I did learn shorthand and typing. Then later on helped in like, you could get a job in a publishing house maybe you know if you happen to have enough training and all that. But I did eventually get a job in publishing, but the reason I got it is that I could type, and they were getting out a new cookbook.

**ES: I see, and that was here in town?**

MM: Yeah there was one thing that I was going to tell you about that I wrote on the Red Cross a lot at home, and then we had like a summer recreation program, and we didn't have a swimming pool yet, but Tuscola had a pool, they built a pool before we did. Also, Mattoon had one, and so we had a project that the mothers would get enough cars together and just bring the children over to one of these. We had Red Cross swimming classes that were there, and that kept on, it was even in Tuscola later on, to help Arcola. That's why we kept on because we wanted eventually to have guards that would be able to takeover—the reason I laugh at that still because, I had to have a quarter, because I think that's all they probably charged them, the students. We always brought some extra quarters, in case they forgot. Anyway, that was some. Then my mother went working in the Women's Club for a long time, and then after I went home a while. I joined it too.

**ES: So you worked in the—?**

MM: Yeah, and that's why I kept up the volunteering, just writing the women's front news.

**ES: I see, that's how you kept the Journalism business going.**

MM: Well yeah in later years because I was over in Peoria for a few years because I had relatives over there, and that's where I just worked as a proof reader on the courier, used to be transcript, it was their night paper. Now Journalism has the whole thing I guess.

**ES: So you really used your degree.**

MM: Well I did and, you know in a way I also found out how hard it is to sleep if you are on a night shift, like I was in Peoria. I was telling Francis that her daughter was on a night shift, but she seems to handle it doesn't she.

Francis: Yeah, she does real well Mary. ( ).

END OF INTERVIEW.