FEMALE ANNOUNCER: Welcome to Mansfield University voices, an Oral History of the university. The following interview is with Myron Webster, a 1913 graduate of Mansfield State Normal School. In this interview, conducted by history professor, Dr. Robert Unger in 1987, Mr. Webster, age 94, discusses what he liked and disliked about the Normal School.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: This is an interview with Dr. Myron Webster, taped at his home, 120 St. James Street, Mansfield, Pennsylvania. Dr. Webster, you said that you went to the Normal School in 1910 and in looking at the records today back to when you did start there's something rather curious. I was wondering, did you start in the summer of 1910? Or was it the fall term?

MYRON WEBSTER: It was in the fall.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: In the fall?

MYRON WEBSTER: As I remember, yeah, I think it was. I don't know that there were any summer school programs at that time.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Okay. Because it was at that time that the four-year normal term was instituted by the state, but you were under the three-year term.

MYRON WEBSTER: That’s right.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: And I was rather interested in what had happened there. Perhaps at this time you don’t recall, but I’m just rather curious if that’s when they started the four-year program but you were there on the three-year program because you are listed as having graduated in 1913. As to Dr. Smith, Dr. Andrew Thomas Smith, who was principal, as you think back about him, what's the one thing that comes to mind that stands out?

MYRON WEBSTER: As I probably mentioned, he was scholarly and a perfectionist, I would say, in his handling of problems. He wanted to be as accurate as he could. Where he investigated problems, I think back on him, almost reminded me of attorneys, in a sense, seeking truth. He was a [indecipherable] man in that respect and as I thought of him, even then. I stood in awe of him because of his position and his personality and it wasn’t until toward the end of my period here as a student, he was taking care of his horses, and I mentioned that to you I think, he seemed to be just like other men in many ways. Doing things, menial in a sense but certainly not below him, because he was doing the same thing. Does that picture him, as I saw him?

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Yes, and I guess, from what you said before, as a disciplinarian he seemed a little strict, but fair.

MYRON WEBSTER: I would certainly say that.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Because at that period of time the rules were very strict at the Normal School.

MYRON WEBSTER: Yes

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Do you recall any of the rules in particular, anything that stands out as a rule that kind of bothered you perhaps as a student?

MYRON WEBSTER: No, I told you, if I remember rightly, that somebody told him that I was being criticized by Professor Ryle [?], one of my teachers. I told you about that. And so I was called to his office. I mentioned to you that when I was asked why I did whatever it was I blurted out right quickly, “I don’t
like him” and that was the truth. Now he was, again, he was critical but fair. He didn’t lose his temper and give me a violent scolding that any angry man would at all.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Especially since you had criticized, in a sense, one of his teachers.

MYRON WEBSTER: No.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Another thing I was wondering too, in terms of Dr. Smith, A lot took place, a lot of growth had taken place at school, up to and including the renovation of Alumni Hall, which was a major project. Again, looking back from a student perspective, perhaps only, what was the thing perhaps that you disliked most about the institution?

MYRON WEBSTER: About the--

DR. ROBERT UNGER: The Normal School, becoming the Normal School.

MYRON WEBSTER: Pretty much I accepted it because it was a higher level then I was accustomed to in a one-room rural school.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Yes, it was.

MYRON WEBSTER: But when we went to, we called it a chapel, when we went to the hall for that meeting we were going on a schedule and Dr. Smith was in charge of it. We were to get there on time, and we were seated there. I know where my seat was in that public meeting. We were supposed to be there. Now Dr. Smith wasn’t a man to get up and berate us in his words, he wasn’t given to that. He would more likely say, in effect, be in your place, this meeting begins and it is called to order at such a time. And then if there were violations of it, well if we were not there, that was checked. But most of us, I think, would rather go there than go to a classroom where we would be called on.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: In my mind’s eye I can see the picture of him, the standard picture of him and that’s the image I have as I ask questions. And what you’re saying, it almost fits the image.

MYRON WEBSTER: Yes.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: In other words, what you saw is what you got.

MYRON WEBSTER: I have respected him and the memory of him all the years. I wasn’t subjected to very much discipline, I guess I told you.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: As you say, you came from a home where you knew what the situation was and you were expected to do it, and Normal School was no different.

MYRON WEBSTER: That’s right, in that respect. It was a rich time of my life because it was so new and, well I was growing up and welcoming changes in my life. And the faculty, again we had all kinds of people, naturally. Because that’s what faculty then was and is now, all kinds of people.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Oh, yes.

MYRON WEBSTER: It has to be just that. But, no I had to wear what clothes I had. For example, I had one, I guess we called it, Sunday suit, and it was old and faded and they couldn’t buy me a new suit to go, bring over there. So mother got some dye and darkened that suit and pressed it for me and that’s what I had. And my Sunday clothing, if you like, was very meager and it was in fitting with our financial status I suppose and had to be. Had to be, yet I enjoyed it.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: As you recall, as best as possible, who were the faculty members that impressed
you the most?

MYRON WEBSTER: The, I can’t think of the name when I want to. A math teacher--

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Lets see, I’ll try to think of some of them.

MYRON WEBSTER: A professor, and I had him in arithmetic.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: It wasn’t Ruppert?

MYRON WEBSTER: No.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: I just went through a bunch of those names today, but, again I didn’t know what they taught.

MYRON WEBSTER: He taught, the one that I am thinking of, I can see how he looked, of course, but I can’t think of his name. I probably won’t think of it tomorrow either but I can remember him. He taught, and by the way did you ever run across a course known as Mental Arithmetic?

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Mental Arithmetic?

MYRON WEBSTER: Wel that was one of them. He taught that and he taught straightaway arithmetic. And he was strong on me to go up to the board and put on the board the solution to one of the problems. He’d stop me, or anybody, and he’d say, make a statement, “Why?” And I collected from that man, that same technique because it appealed to me. And when I got in law school it appealed to me there. What’s the reason for that?

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Perfect.

MYRON WEBSTER: What’s the reason for that? And that has permeated my teaching all through the years. Just a student, a student that I had many, many years ago. I met him just the other day and he said, “Do you remember,” and so forth. He mentioned that to me, “You made us tell the reason.” I said, “Well I was made to tell the reason too, back when I was a student.” And it was in order, all right.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: I’m going to throw out just a couple of names to you and then just give me a response. George Cass, I’ve seen a lot of different comments and in the Carontowan made by students and character comes through as what?

MYRON WEBSTER: Well he was, Professor Cass was a nervous type of man in his classification, his classes. History was his field. Not the best history teacher that I ever had simply because he was not likely to hold me on to my subject. I think that would be about the best I could say. And he would wander from the subject that was supposedly under construction.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Okay.

MYRON WEBSTER: I didn’t think of him at that time as doing that but that I’m sure, I know he would do that, off-sided, and I would too.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: H.J. Van Norman, he had kind of an aristocratic bearing from the picture.

MYRON WEBSTER: Yes. Now he taught English grammar and English, not grammar, the higher, there isn’t anything higher than English grammar in my opinion, but that was probably my best subject and the analysis involved in it. His ability to explain why this particular word involved, or phrase, is a subjective kind of thing, or whether it’s an affinity for whatever, his explanation of it was not outstanding, as I remember him. But again, I’m in my favorite subject, in fact, I was brought back here to teach it, to the seniors, I told you.
DR. ROBERT UNGER: Yes. 1920 Carontowan says Grammar and Arithmetic were your two subjects.

MYRON WEBSTER: Those two were the Review English Grammar and Arithmetic. For the seniors, for senior year. They were required to take those two, because they were the two things that were stressed greatly at that time.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Those are very valuable.

MYRON WEBSTER: Should be, yes.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: I can see from what you said, that the background and questioning in arithmetic, and then your interest in grammar and in how a word is developed, and so forth, were important to your building to succeed in law school.

MYRON WEBSTER: Well, oh yes. Oh yes, that's true.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: So law school was a logical extension of that background.

MYRON WEBSTER: But at that time, I wasn't thinking of law school. They supplied me all right.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Another person, I don't know, is it George Strait?

MYRON WEBSTER: Daddy Strait.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Daddy Strait, right.

MYRON WEBSTER: I don't think of him so much in the classroom, as I do of his nickname, Daddy, was meant that he was in charge of the dormitories.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Oh. That's where that came from. Okay.

MYRON WEBSTER: That's right.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: I never knew that.

MYRON WEBSTER: Well, we didn't think of it at that time, but because he was acting as a father, we dubbed him Daddy, and the reason is right there.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: And it stuck?

MYRON WEBSTER: Oh yes, it did. He was a great big fella. You'll see his picture, and so forth. But he was, I was about to say, but I'm not satisfied with the word, more of a mother maybe than a father-sense.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: More compassionate?

MYRON WEBSTER: No. Mannered.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Mannered.

MYRON WEBSTER: Personality. He wasn't a sissy, he wasn't effeminate, no, but as I think back, I didn't think of him as a masterful, a strong masterful kind of man. I don't think he was. But he was a good man, and he set a good example, if any, with us. But we used to laugh at him, sometimes, like every teacher's laughed at, sometimes. But I've been into classes with him, but there's nothing there that stands out, concerning his methods or anything at that time.
DR. ROBERT UNGER: And that's fine. But this is, again, perception. And some of that comes from the fact that you were his colleague, as well as a student. And that of course kind of shades things too. Of course, a person I cannot help but ask about is Will George Butler.

MYRON WEBSTER: There's what?

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Will George Butler.

MYRON WEBSTER: Oh. Will George was one of the most fond, of publicity, of any of us. He was one of, I had a few lessons on the violin. That's my chief hobby. I was playing that just before you came out here. And I've agreed to play, a couple places now, when I get ready. But I've agreed to play, and one of them is about a month from now, and it's over near Liberty, and they're having a community meeting over there, in the churches, and this woman, she's a student of mine, she mentioned where I'd played, and she was there, that if I couldn't play at this meeting over in Liberty.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Is this a bush meeting? They have a church service out, like a bush meeting out in--

MYRON WEBSTER: No, it's in a church.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: It's in a church. It might be similar.

MYRON WEBSTER: It could be. It could be held outside there. But I said, “If I come I'll talk with the woman that accompanies me,” I told you about. She said, “We don't have a piano. We have an old reed organ, you have to pump it.” I said, “I don't know whether she'll want to do that, or whether she can.” I was over that way, yesterday, in Roseville, she lives. And I had a notion to stop and tell her about it, and ask her if she wanted to. I thought maybe I'd mention that to you, I don't know. I thought I'd go and get the pitch of that organ, and see if it was standard pitch, because that's important to me. I don't like to go and lower the pitch of my violin, because I have to get that adjusted for awhile, otherwise I'm not playing.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: I'm not a musician, at all. But my wife is, and I understand what you're saying. If that isn't set properly, you can't play it.

MYRON WEBSTER: No. Well, anyway. We'll now, Will George, he loved, he really was a miserable violin player. He would just torture that violin. And everybody knew it, who knew anything about it. But, he wanted to be noticed for that, or a speech he would make, and if the newspapers didn't pick it up, he'd write to them, and just give it to them, for not doing it. He's the only man that I ever knew that made that a practice. When he'd talk, he would, and he had a lot of qualities that I liked. He was always very good to me. Maybe that's why I liked him. I would sometimes almost shudder. I didn't say anything about it. At the awful, I don't want to say tone, but the awful screeching tone that he'd get on the violin. He'd just bear down and murder it. But that was, all the violin players, and a lot of other people, knew it didn't sound right. But the outstanding character, Will George, was just that. He loved publicity, personal publicity, more than any other person I ever knew.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: And I can attest to what you say, because a number of years ago Ward Austin had purchased the remainder of the estate, of his estate. And he gave part of it to the school. So I have stacks of these brochures with Will George’s picture on them, that he circulated everywhere. And copies of the programs, where he was on the programs. Or a poem he read or so forth. And so as an actual violinist, he wasn't that great, but as a composer, he got a lot of recognition as a composer.

MYRON WEBSTER: That, to me, I couldn’t, I could tell you whether I liked the composition. But I couldn’t pass judgment on that, but if he directed an orchestra, or if he played some portion of that violin in public, then I could be critical of his rendering of it anyway. But I think as a composer he probably would rank.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Does he--
MYRON WEBSTER: The Navy band, the Navy orchestra or whatever, was here and the conductor was very good you know. And I suppose in tribute to Mansfield and Butler, that band played one of Butler’s publications.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Long Live America? That was one that was played a lot, was Long Live America.

MYRON WEBSTER: No, that’s not the name I was thinking of. But anyway, Butler wanted to take the podium and lead it. And they wouldn’t let him do it.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Oh boy!

MYRON WEBSTER: He was a strange man.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: I’ve heard comments about him and one was that he was also a fairly good amateur photographer.

MYRON WEBSTER: I didn’t know that. I didn’t know that he did that.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Something else, of course I have a copy of one of his oil paintings. He did some oil painting.

MYRON WEBSTER: Yeah. I think I’ve seen something of that nature that he had done. He had talent, of course, but he wanted people to know it and acknowledge it publicly.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: I also have been told that, of course, he never married.

MYRON WEBSTER: No.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: But he was also somewhat, at least in his younger days, somewhat of a ladies man.

MYRON WEBSTER: Yes, there was one of the faculty members up here, Hoag.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Hoag, yes, H-O-A-G.

MYRON WEBSTER: Hoag.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: Georgia Locke Hoag.

MYRON WEBSTER: And he wanted to take her out and so forth and she mentioned that to me one time, I think, I’m not sure. Anyway, I knew about it. She was not happy about it. I suppose he, I don’t know why he didn’t remarry, because there are women somewhere that want to get married.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: He also had a reputation for not being too careful about having his bills paid.

MYRON WEBSTER: He was worse than that.

DR. ROBERT UNGER: I was being nice.

MYRON WEBSTER: Yes.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER: That’s all for part one of the interview with Myron Webster. To hear more, please download Myron Webster part two.