Bloomsburg High School

The Bloomsburg Area Senior High School as told to Patchwork by Eugene Steinruck

Interviewed by Randa Wolfe & Imam Elahi in the spring of 2002

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The current Bloomsburg Area High School is important because at the time it was built, it gave Bloomsburg an updated high school. The current high school was dedicated in 1964. It is an institution that gives a lot to our community by enriching many people with the fine aspects of education. The current high school has a lot of history that most students don't know and should be informed on.

Eugene Steinruck graduated from the former Bloomsburg Area Junior Senior High School in 1960, which was located on First and Center Street. He then came back years later to teach at the new high school in 1975. Steinruck has seen how much the current high school is different from the former one. He has also seen the changes the current high school has gone through.

PATCHWORK: Did you attend the Bloomsburg School District your entire school career?

STEINRUCK: Yes, I did.

PATCHWORK: Which elementary school did you go to?

STEINRUCK: Third Street Elementary School. I grew up on Eighth Street, and Eighth Street was to Third Street School up where the towers is right now, the high rise on Third Street that looks like a cement-block building. That used to be the Third Street School.

PATCHWORK: What are the differences between the old high school and the current one?

STEINRUCK: Well, first of all, the old high school was grades 7-12. There BHS 1st St.was a junior-senior high school and each grade pretty much had its own hallway. You did not mix grades, so to speak. Sometimes grades seven and eight were in the same location and so forth. There was an area for senior classes, an area for 11th grade, 10th grade, and so forth. The old high school schedule was completely different. We went to school; we started about 8:10 in the morning. We came into eventually, actually period one, and after period one we went to homeroom. This was a little bit later; this was a bit towards when I was about maybe 9th or 10th grade. It wasn't always that way. At one point, they went to homeroom first, I believe. But we went to period one, then homeroom, and then we had periods two, three, and four, each about fifteen minutes long. About 12:05 or 12:10, school closed, and there was no cafeteria until later, when they built the Memorial school. Then, there was a cafeteria there that people actually went to. But the same schedule persisted

at the high school, so the high school actually closed. We didn't have to be back until 1:20 in the afternoon. So, for about an hour and twelve minutes, you either carried your lunch or ate it at the school - there was a lunchroom – or you headed downtown, or in my case, the case of most people, we actually went home. I walked from the high school down to Eighth Street and had lunch, then went back, and I did that for nearly twelve years of school. No matter where I went to school, I always came home for lunch. In the afternoon, we were back at 1:20, where we had a ten-minute homeroom for attendance and announcements, and then we had periods five and six in the afternoon. That was it, six periods a day. So in terms of schedule, it's quite different. In terms of activity, the extra curricular activities were quite different. We only had three major sports: football, basketball, and baseball. They were for boys only, we did not have girls' sports at that point and girls and boys both participated in intramural sports: intramural basketball and those kinds of things. But that is a considerable difference, because we only had those three. We had an auto shop, which was kind of separate from the building. There were two buildings up there. There was an auto shop, and that was part of the curriculum. There was an auto shop, a shop that did woodworking, metalworking, there were more Industrial Arts programs because we didn't have a Vo-Tech at that point.

PATCHWORK: You said the girls didn't have an athletic team, did that make any difference with their phys ed class?

STEINRUCK: No, they still had physical education and they still did everything the boys did in terms of gymnastics. There were more things like gymnastics, we played basketball, and you played baseball, actually, we had boxing, we boxed at one time, we wrestled, and all those kind of things. Girls didn't do quite as much. They had other activities, and they did quite a bit in physical education.

PATCHWORK: Among the years you have taught in the current high school, how has it evolved?

STEINRUCK: Well, I started here in about 1975, and my first year, I taught in room 110. That was pretty much my classroom. And, at that time, I had an average of about 175 students a day. I had six classes. They average between twenty-five and forty students in a class. They were all ninth-graders. And, in the school, there were nearly about 725 to 750 students. So that would be 200 more students than we have now. The population was quite different. The seniors, for a number of years, had to have what would be called a "compressed schedule." Seniors had all of their classes from periods one through five. Then they were encouraged to leave. They did not go to assemblies, because the entire school could not fit in the auditorium. The auditorium only seats a limit of five hundred in total. When the entire school now, is in there, it's reasonably full, so you can

see if you just look at the empty seats. When we have about 500 students, you can leave the picture, if you have 200 more, obviously you don't have a place to put them. So assemblies were optional for seniors, and the reason was that if they really wanted to see something, they could. But generally, they were encouraged to leave school property, go home and do whatever. That then gave the afternoon a little bit of freedom for the other classmen to meet their scheduled requirements. That was my initial exposure to Bloomsburg when I came, that's when a teacher was concerned. Over the years, that has changed considerably, because the population has dropped by 200. As that was going down, they finally made a decision to keep seniors here, broaden the schedule possibilities, increase the number of electives. I think Channel One has had an influence on the overall schedule; essentially what it did at first, had a time where everybody was supposed to watch television. What it has evolved into is a time when everybody can have meetings while the television was on. That I feel is a chunk of time that has eaten into our schedule. The length of a class period has dropped. We originally having 46 or 47-minute class periods, I think it was 48 when we started, and it's now down to 42. It doesn't sound like much, taking six minutes off of a day, but that has changed things, I think considerably. It has kind of eroded away the time of instruction, and it's sometimes very difficult to get things done. So that evolution, as a teacher, I can see. We had to change our pattern of teaching, just for those few minutes.

I have found that extracurricular activities have changed. When I came in '75, there were not really as many athletic events, or teams one might say, as we have now. The basics were here: football, basketball, baseball, we had softball for girls. There was wrestling, I guess, when I came. We also had volleyball, but it was more intramural. But a lot things like that have persisted and many things, like girls' soccer and so forth. So the athletic program has changed. Just the number of extracurricular activities has changed, the types of extracurricular activities.

When I was in school, we had things like the Key Club, which was sponsored by Kiwanis. It was a service organization, something like National Honor Society is supposed to be now, sort of like PYEA. Groups like that, that perform services are called the Key Club, it was the student arm of the Kiwanis. It was a good service organization for students to participate in.

Dress has changed completely. What you are allowed to wear has changed considerably. When I was in school for instance, you were not allowed to wear, for instance, what we called "dungarees," blue jeans we call them today. We had to wear slacks and a shirt. As a matter of fact, during the play last year, people would say, "Are you going to dress like you did when you went to school back in the fifties?" and I said, "This is

it." We had to wear shirts and slacks, pretty much what I'm wearing now. The manner from the 70's was quite different from what it is now. It has evolved, in some cases into some things not suitable for school. It's a big change. It has been a big change for me as I watched it over the years. It's a fashion thing. The Gap says it's good, so everybody does it. So that has been a big change. Generally speaking, that's about it, I think. Pretty stable.

PATCHWORK: What is the biggest thing in clothing and hairstyles that you have noticed?

STEINRUCK: Hairstyles have actually gone from the real long, boys in particular, that's been a big change. Young ladies have been pretty stable, I think, over the years. The boys have gone from the really long hair to the standard of what you saw back in the fifties. Of course, mine has fallen out, but doesn't make a difference. But the fact is, it has really been a big change for me. Young ladies have stayed pretty much the same over the years. I think girls just naturally fuss with their hair a little bit more, and fix it a little bit more. And that, I think, has been a change, everything else has just been a style. Whatever style came in was there, we just had to kind of live with it.

PATCHWORK: What was the town like in 1964 when the school was built??

STEINRUCK: The school was built in 1964. The cornerstone says '62. I think they moved in in '63. So the '64 graduating year. It was 63-64. In the sixties, when the decision was made to build the building here, this area down here was not developed. The little league field was here. The one a little bit farther over from what we see in the park The little league field was kind of the beginning of the park area. But we really did not have an established park like you see now. There were areas down here that were more like jungle, and then there was the park. Right now, it used to be the Brown Farm. So this was actually farmland down through here. Over here where the maintenance shed is and on down in that area, it used to be the town dump. Where the food processing plant down here is, and then on down, it used to be a dump. And once a week, they would actually burn the dump. It smelled beautifully on those nights. It was just open. Everything was dumped there, garbage, everything.

The town was smaller. We did not nearly have as much development as we did on Eleventh and Twelfth Street than we have. But during those years, in the late fifties and early sixties, was when that whole area started to develop. When I was growing up, and even in high school, Ninth Street was pretty much the limit. Railroad Street wasn't open, we couldn't start here and drive straight up to Fifth Street. It was a dead end. You had to turn out Ninth Street and go out up to Market and then to Fifth Street. Bloomsburg Mills occupied the area, which is straight across from what is now Railroad Street. And the street wasn't open until the school was built here in the sixties. And that's when they

opened Railroad Street to go straight through. Generally speaking, this town has pretty much, what you called a town, Main Street, Market Street, Fifth Street and so forth. Everything there has remained pretty stable. Those are old houses, haven't changed much at all. But the town is expanding. And during that time it was expanding, it was expanding more out towards the Hemlock Township, which is out in the Buckhorn area. We'd be at the mall obviously. But there were extension areas up there as well as Lightstreet Road, and just down in this general area is becoming closer and closer to the river. And so, that was a big change. Also, this is interesting, maybe, we were influenced by changes in highway. The Berwick Highway is still called the New Berwick Highway, wasn't always there. You had to go up the Old Berwick Highway, all the way up to a viaduct, went over the railroad tracks and went over to Berwick on too many roads. When they opened that up, there was a lot more traffic, and there was nothing built on there. No fast food places, they didn't exist then. But there was very, very little on that highway. But nevertheless, when that was put in, that opened up a lot of traffic between Bloomsburg and Berwick, and it also helped industry as far as truck traffic on Route 11. Also, the Danville Highway- you used to have to go to Danville on the old road. It would have been in the late sixties when the Danville Highway was constructed. That ended up on Route 11 and increased traffic through town. That changed Bloomsburg. Before, you didn't really see quite as much traffic. That was a big change. I never thought about that before.

PATCHWORK: Back to comparison of the old high school and the new high school; do you see any differences in education system, rules, techniques used by the teaching staffs in the two schools?

STEINRUCK: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, if we would bring some of our teachers back that I had, they probably couldn't exist in our education system today. They would go crazy trying to deal with the very liberal rules that we have. First of all, teachers could spank you. And on occasion, we were swatted across the tail end with either a paddle or a hand, on occasion.

PATCHWORK: Even in high school?

STEINRUCK: Yeah, in high school. There were times when if you told mom and dad that you got this, then you got swatted once in school and swatted ten times at home. It was a process where parents were totally supportive of teachers. They were right, and they didn't ask questions. You didn't have an option of saying, "They did this to me," it was "What did you do to make them do it?" kind of thing. Teachers held a higher regard in terms of what they were doing in the classroom. You just really didn't have that option to question the teacher. Books were quite different, they didn't have a lot of pictures in them. They were much smaller. They were filled with a lot of content. Math books were filled with all math,

didn't have a lot of pictures. You did a lot of problems. Most of the time, in math class, you had a lot of board drills. You had to stand at the board, face the class, you had to memorize and repeat the times tables from one to 20, something you don't have to do now, while standing at the board and doing it. We were sent to the board with a lot of drills, Social studies was the same way, Geography, you had to drill where places were. A lot of different things were, today where it wasn't a method or a technique. The drills, kind of work, it's more interactive learning. We change many methods, sometimes for the better, sometimes not. But, yes the teaching is quite different.

PATCHWORK: Could you state some milestones in our current school's history?

STEIRUCK: I graduated from Bloomsburg University in '64. Actually, State College. I was in Bloomsburg, but not in the school at the time. Then I moved away to Gettysburg, so I kind of lost track of different things. But one milestone was the simple fact that there was a new school built. I never really thought about having a new school built. Obviously the facility was needed, and it was constructed, and that in itself is a milestone for the school. Probably if I can point to anything, it was just the fact that over the years, we have been established as a good school. I know that we have been compared to Central. I believe that the size of the school has lended itself to the fact that we have held our own in many, many respects within the area of other schools, some larger, some smaller have come to us for advice on occasion. And I think that the milestone is very simply that we have established ourselves as a good educational institution. I don't know any specific things, other than the fact that we survived the '72 flood. We didn't get totally wet, the basement did. I wasn't here then. Seventy-five, we survived that flood. And the water never came up to the building persay. So I guess those are significant things, too.

PATCHWORK: Do you know why the school us built by the river- or sewer plant?

STEINRUCK: Actually, yes I do. And it goes back historically to the- I did trace it at one time for a paper that I had written while I was at Bucknell. I was a new teacher, but actually a teacher that was hired but never active in the school. The professor required us to do something called an active data paper, a live data paper, about our school. Since I wasn't in my school yet, he allowed me to investigate Bloomsburg High School. So I went back to the newspaper and recorded a school board meeting and so forth. The school was built on a farm built by Ed Brown. I knew Mr. Brown. I knew his daughter, I graduated with her from high school, and I knew of the farm down here. I knew also that the land flooded. When the river floods, it brings river bottom soil, a good place to grow things. During the search for new land, the school board consisted of 27 members, not 9. One place was the airport where Conair is built now. That was a possibility. The Country Club, which is now where Redman's Stadium is at the university. That was available for purchase, that used to be the

Bloomsburg Country Club, a golf course. That was, by the school board, unacceptable due to its location. It was high on a hill and tough getting up and down transportation-wise. Both of these were voted against. There were some areas, I cannot remember where, they were outside of town, and at that time, it was considered not wise to build a building outside of town. But would it be in the Bloomsburg District? Most likely in the Buckhorn Area, but the mall's out there, which isn't too bad, I think. There a lot of different controversies like this for each area. This land was never really brought up until a little bit later. Mr. Weiter was president of the school board and this land was proposed. It was discussed, and then, at one meeting, he resigned. The next meeting, they proposed to buy the land because they couldn't buy the land since there was a conflict of interest while he was still president. After he resigned, the school bought it for about $1000 an acre. There are about 35 acres here, of land that would be purchased. They did that and there was one comment that was very interesting, I kind of chuckled at it myself. It was, "This land didn't flood." If it didn't flood, why was it built 15 feet or 20 feet so that we were above the river. This was how the land was acquired. That was just the sequence of things, left to anyone else's investigation as to whether it was completely of board at that particular time or whether they actually planned to buy this land. Mr. Brown did sell his land and school was placed here.

PATCHWORK: What was the atmosphere like on your first day of teaching the current high school?

STEINRUCK: I taught in Gettysburg High School for nine years. I would say this is very similar. Contrary to what students believe, every school is almost the same. You'll discover that if you went to one school to another, looking at it from the point of view of a teacher, with the exception of the little things we all do automatically, schools are pretty much the same. Students are pretty much the same, contrary to popular belief, they are. We're all people, we do the same things, we have the same expectations of the first day, we all have the same apprehensions, so I didn't find it a whole lot different from Gettysburg. But I did find the atmosphere to be totally friendly, in terms of the staff. I've had very good relationships with my colleagues. The students, I felt were cooperative, I remember that to a certain extent. When I started teaching my classes, I discovered that ninth graders aren't very cooperative. That became very frustrating for me, but I did discover that in subsequent years that there was kind of a shift as the population dropped. I think the crowdedness of the high school was upsetting to me. When the building was built for a small number and we only had a couple of people here, you could barely get through the hallway. It was so packed. I think that was frustrating. That was my first impression if I recall.

PATCHWORK: What were the surroundings like when the middle school was being built?

STEINRUCK: One of the things that I things I remember very easily is, of course, the parking lot, in fact doubles doors to the auditorium and swimming pool was the entrance to the high school. It was really a loading entrance, but an entrance you can come in. The parking lot is where the middle school is located. As a matter of fact, the basement of the middle school is the parking lot. So, it's one of the few buildings in our district to have a paved basement. All the others, I think, are dirt, but that one actually has pavement down there and the lines are still on the asphalt. So even though it was destroyed by tylon and so forth, that's how it was built. I remember walking across the parking lot to come to school, especially on bad weather days, because it was easier to come in there than come in the breezeway. Things were generally about the same. Surroundings were pretty much as it is now, as far as occupation. Hanover Foods used to be down here, as opposed to the company that owns it now. Generally speaking, it's pretty much the same.

PATCHWORK: What are some things you miss about the old high school?

STEINRUCK: Not so much the old high school. The building had a certain amount of character, although, it was kind of a little bit run down. But it has character. We went to school there for 6 years, 7-12th grade. So we knew it quite well. I think the attitude of the students when I was there, there was a different attitude about students than there is now, a different sense of togetherness. We were together, we grew up together, we would be called "townies." Most of us walked to school, I think there were five or six people that drove. First of all, there were no parking places, and secondly, many of us could not afford a car. There was one car in the family, they weren't gonna give it to one kid to drive to school.

PATCHWORK: Was there any drivers ed?

STEINRUCK: No, there was no driver ed. As a matter of fact, the parking lot- go up Center Street, and an older building on the right-hand side of the Columbia Trust Bank, that was the parking lot, behind the building, where students could park. There were two playgrounds, and that's where phys ed was held, and it was the left hand side as you go up center street. Those were the playgrounds. There just was a feeling of closeness. We were together more. We had a certain camarada that a lot of students might say, it wasn't a clique of two or three people, it was the whole class, because we were in town. We were in neighborhoods and we knew each other. One difference is student council elections. With the student council elections here, you have certain people that want to be president, vice-president, and in a short period of time, there might be a couple people that might give speeches in a short period of time. Student council elections for us, was an entire

day. And for an entire week, the walls were plastered solid with signs, posters. We were giving out bubblegum, we were giving out anything as a party. Actually, we ran on a ticket, just like we do in a national convention. Then on one day, Campaign Day, we had morning classes, and after we got dismissed for lunch at 12:10, we had a parade. And we would have a parade that would extended down Main Street. We all sat in convertibles and wave and throw candy at people. Then we would come back from the school and have a convention in the afternoon. And that was in the auditorium. We would have bands and demonstration. We'd have a regular show. Each group of candidates would have their own program, anything from singing, music, speeches, to make their candidate vote for them. We had a district attorney. We had hall monitors. Hall monitors could, if you were doing something bad, you could be given a ticket. If you were given a ticket, once a month, we had court. You could argue your case, and if the judge, president of the student council, found you guilty, he could sentence you to do things like wash the chalkboards for a week, or whatever. And people did that. It was part of student council. Students had a greater sense of participation, and I miss that.

PATCHWORK: Besides Gettysburg and Bloomsburg, have you taught anywhere else?

STEINRUCK: Well, I was a teaching assistant at Bucknell when I was getting my master's degree, and basically was a lab instructor for two years. But that was part of my assistantship program. But outside of Gettysburg, no.

PATCHWORK: How were your former teachers comparable to our current staff?

STEINRUCK: As I said before, the teachers that I had would be terribly frustrated at the experiences of today. I don't think they could deal legally with the situations. I think teachers today have a much different view, today, of the educational process. We are more legally bound than teachers applied to past. We have a much greater sense of liability. Just the simple fact of touching a student, most of us don't do that anymore. Just the idea that there are certain expectations in terms of curriculum. I don't think my teacher when I was in school or even some in college, ever had a lesson plan. They'd open a textbook, start at page one, and that's their lesson plan. Then you go to page two and page three. It was the same approach, but there are considerable differences. But, they were all dedicated teachers. There was no difference in them wanting to give you a good education, it was just method.

PATCHWORK: About which year did the methods actually change?

STEINRUCK: There was no one year, it was an evolving thing. When we started teaching in 1964, we had much more control over our classroom, or capabilities within our classroom,

in terms of saying, “Do this, don’t do that.” In the early 1970’s, late 1960’s, there was an approach made called “Student’s Bill of Rights ,” and this created quite a bit of change in their schools. It was, for a certain extent, detrimental to the educational program for a while. It swung very far to one side, and now it’s coming back and students see that they have an obligation to education, just like the teacher has an obligation to educate. There, for a while, students felt no obligation; they felt forced to work. I think there is a change, swinging back that way. I can’t point to anyone year, it happened over many years. It kind of went one way and came back another.

PATCHWORK: Is there anything else you can tell us about the history of the school?

STEINRUCK: I really don’t have anything else specific, in the fact that you haven’t asked, I think Bloomsburg has weathered many storms, in terms of things that were controversial, ups and downs, a lot of different situations. The athletic field for instance. Dr. Buchanan was here when that was built. There were a lot of questions asked: Why was it built? If it was built there, was it gonna flood? How big it was going to be? Would it accommodate a soccer field as well as a football field? Whether there should be lights. That was controversial time. When the middle school, my goodness, “should we have a swimming pool?” was a big controversy. It was gonna cost so much money, and now you see the value of the program, both in instruction of swimming, the swimming team, and in what we’re doing. Bloomsburg has had stormy days, but also positive influences on the community. It’s an open school, the community has used the school in a very positive way along with the university, there is a very cooperative nature there, I think we used the university to a good extent. That has not always been the case. We were not always in a cooperative state with Bloomsburg University or state colleges at that point. In recent years, we see that as a cooperation. So that’s an evolution of betterness of the programs for you folks. You have better opportunities that students in the past haven’t had. Basically that’s it. I think you’ve asked good questions and I think I have answered those and those are the ones that have made a difference very much.