

# YANKTON DAILY PRESS & DAKOTAN

October 17, 2014

## **Point Of View: A Heritage Worth Celebrating**

### **Robert F. Lyons, Yankton High School alumnus**

**S**ince the arrival of the Press & Dakotan's special issue: Heritage -- Education: Past, Present & Future (Sept. 29) there has been time for little else here in our home in Maine. The P&D's multiple sections so well presented are a superb, almost overwhelming review of education - public and private -in Yankton County. It has stimulated numerous telephone calls and emails among my brothers and family who are beneficiaries of that system.

My own educational heritage began in 1943 at Willowdale District No. 3, the one room school on my parent's farm, east of Yankton off Highway 50 (William and Mary Lyons) where all seven of us Lyons children were educated. In "The Mission Lives On," Kelly Hertz writes: "These school houses were essential hubs of education in rural locales meeting a mission of building for the future..." I should rather add, my education began in my home with my mother and father, she a former school teacher and he on the school board for decades.

When I read of the dazzling array of digital learning devices and the IT opportunities available in today's schools, I acknowledge that much has changed since I graduated from Yankton High School in 1955. And there have been dozens of nephews and nieces and great nephews and nieces who still partake of the legacy of fine education in the Yankton school system. But I hope all might recognize that it is the quality of the teaching and the teacher's relationship with the student that nurtures the learning along with the daily support of learning in the home. The most valuable lesson of schooling is that we can learn and that we can continue to seek out learning opportunities throughout our lives.

I have always taken sharp exception to Harvard President James Conant's report which argued that all high schools should have a graduating class of one hundred students, for only then could they provide a diverse curriculum with demanding courses for college. Small schools have too few choices to brag, according to this study of the American High School in 1959. Thus, Conant's idea was that the bigger the school, the better its sports, theater, arts and music presentations. My 1955 YHS graduating class had only 81 students. My family gives the lie to Conant's assertion. All seven of us did go on to college and several obtained advanced degrees. Although Conant's concern had some validity, most graduates of Yankton's school system were well equipped for life because of its dedicated teachers and because of their parents who invested so much in education. It was the size of their investment, not the size of the graduating class that counted most.

My mother, Mary Donohoe Lyons, (YHS 1914, Yankton College 1920) would be pleased that after 140 years, YHS enjoys the leadership of a woman principal, Dr. Jennifer Johnk who promises that the experience will provide "a firm foundation for a lifetime of success!"

Woksape editor Jacob Selgestad writes that "Perhaps the opportunity that most excites me is becoming editor of the school newspaper...." I too enjoyed "this once-in-a-lifetime experience" as editor of the Woksape in 1954-55. If Jacob keeps his ear to the ground, listens to the rhythms of the students and seeks out the unique offerings of the faculty and reports on them, he will be a very wise lad, well equipped for a rewarding future of life-long learning. It will be a legacy worth remembering of Yankton's educational heritage, as this special edition of the P&D celebrates. Thanks for the memories and the legacy of our heritage.

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