

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 651

ROBERT HAMMOND

Interviewed

by

Elisa Calabrese

on

October 16, 1985

ROBERT MARTIN HAMMOND

Attorney Robert Martin Hammond, son of Gerald and Hazel Hammond, was born June 3, 1916 in Youngstown, Ohio. Robert Hammond graduated from high school in Culver, Indiana at the preparatory school of Culver Military Academy. In 1938 Mr. Hammond received a B. A. Degree from the University of Michigan. In 1941 he was awarded a Juris. Doctor from the University of Cincinnati. From April 1941 to September 1945 Robert Hammond served in the Air Force as Lieutenant Colonel in the Inspector General's Department.

July 1, 1946 marked Robert Hammond's marriage to Mary Carlton. They have four children. After world War II in 1946 Robert Hammond became a partner in the law firm of Hammond, Hammond, and Christian, Attorneys at Law.

Mr. Hammond is a member of First Christian Church of Youngstown. Organizations in which he is affiliated include: Ohio State and American Bar Associations, Youngstown Rotary Club, and the Youngstown Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Robert Hammond is an attorney for the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority.

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT HAMMOND

INTERVIEWER: Elisa Calabrese

SUBJECT: lawsuits, low income housing, Depression,
YMHA

DATE: October 16, 1985

C: This is an interview with Attorney Robert Hammond for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Westlake Terrace project, by Elisa Calabrese, on October 16, 1985, at the Metropolitan Housing Authority, in Youngstown, at approximately 10:00 a.m.

H: I am an attorney who practices law in the state of Ohio and all other courts. I started practice in Youngstown in 1946 after I came out of World War II. I joined my father Gerald F. Hammond, the original counselor for the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority. He started when the Authority started which would have been about 1933. He served as an unpaid counsel for the Housing Board. I knew some of the Housing Board. Charlie Leedie served, I believe, as chairman of that board; I knew him. I knew Frank Mowery, Ray Hagstrum, and other men who were then prominent in the social and civic life of Youngstown.

The Youngstown Housing Authority was one of the first to construct public housing in Ohio. The dean of Housing Authority directors in Ohio was a man by the name of Ernest J. Bohn from Cleveland. Public housing at its best and at its worst is in a way a memorial to Ernie Bohn and to Paul Strait, the first director of the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority.

Our law office, Hammond, Hammond, and Christian, has represented the Housing Authority since the beginning. We continue to represent them.

I was born in Youngstown in 1916 and except for five

years in World War II and my schooling, I have lived here all of my life.

C: What does your job involve being an attorney for the Housing Authority?

H: First of all, we review all bids that are submitted on public contracts. That means for any item costing over \$5,000, it is required by law that the Housing Authority advertise for bids and solicit secure public bidding. The Housing Authority prepares specifications, for example, for windows for a particular project and plans. This is done with the advice and assistance of outside architects and engineers. The Authority will prepare plans and ask for bids. A contractor who is interested in supplying new windows will come up to the Authority and get a copy of the plans.

After the Housing Authority receives those bids--we will say they will receive three or four bids on a particular project--those bids are then submitted to us as attorneys. We review those bids, that is probably one of our most important functions, to determine whether the lowest and best bid qualifies, and whether we can recommend the bid for acceptance by the Authority. The bid, of course, must conform to the advertisement and specifications. If the Authority asks bids for apples, we can't okay a bid to buy oranges. We have to see to it that the contractor in every contract bid complies with all the bid specifications.

The Housing Board will then grant the contracts and award the bid. If a first bid does not qualify, we would advise the Authority. If the bids are not qualified or if there are no qualified bidders, the Authority may readvertise for more bids.

It is our job to protect the Housing Board of Commissioners and make sure that all the T's are crossed and the I's are dotted in the bid. I must keep the board from a position where there could be considered to be in a conflict of interest in any way. Like a pilot guiding the boat through the shores, I have to see the bouys and the markers and help steer so that the Housing Board doesn't get involved in any matter in which there is a conflict.

I have to be careful as legal counsel that if one of our members is in the building and supply business, for example, that he is not in a position where his company will have any advantage through the fact that he is a member of the commissioners. That is my job. Another one of our commissioners now is a business agent for the carpenter's union. I have to see to it that he has no special advantage.

Another Housing board member is a bank vice-president. My job, as I see it, is to steer the Housing commissioners so that in the first place there is no malfeasance or misfeasance and secondly in addition that there is no appearance of any misfeasance or malfeasance by my Board of Commissioners.

My job is also to advise the Housing Authority in regard to personnel matters, grievance procedures by tenants. Tenants may complain of discrimination in housing and sometimes file lawsuits against the Authority claiming that they have not been permitted to go into a different housing unit which they preferred. Sometimes it isn't a question of discrimination but a question of common sense. We have to represent the Authority in those matters.

Westlake Terrace was built in an area that was known with a very bad term of "Monkey's Nest". This was an area of decrepit, shabby, run-down housing that was built before the zoning laws. It was a disaster area. Well, the Housing Authority bought that land and cleared slum land to build public housing.

Throughout housing since 1932 the real estate interest of the city has had many second thoughts about public housing. In the beginning some members who came to serve on the Housing Board came from real estate, from banking, and from mortgage interests. Some were very much opposed to the idea of public housing because they felt it would compete with the private market. The fact is that the law provides that there must be at least a twenty percent gap between what private housing is available for these low income people and public housing; public housing does fill that need. Suppose a two bedroom house in Youngstown would rent for \$275 a month, there are many people who could not possibly pay that \$275 a month. Under the Brook Amendment, public housing tenants cannot be required to pay more than twenty-five percent of their monthly income for housing. These are the guidelines.

Nathan Strauss was the first national public housing administrator, appointed by Franklin D. Roosevelt; this was 1932 or 1933. Strauss came to Youngstown to have the ground-breaking ceremony. They were going to tear down the first rat-infested building where Westlake Public Housing was going to be built. We tore down slum housing and replaced it with good housing. A consortium of Youngstown builders headed by Tom Murray of Heller-Murray Construction Company got the contract to build Westlake. This was in the depths of the Depression. Unemployment was very high and here was this chance for this public housing to be built. The builders built wonderful buildings, by the way. Solid

brick, not brick veneer, but solid brick with copper gutters, copper down spouts and slate roofs. You can hardly find that kind of construction now.

- C: You were talking about Westlake. You mentioned before that you were acquainted with Scheibel, the architect. Do you have any stories or any type of interesting facts that you could tell us about Westlake pertaining with them?
- H: I knew Morris Scheibel well personally. He was an architect in Youngstown, a very prominent architect. He often represented the Housing Authority as the supervising architect. He was without fear or favor when he found an error in construction. When he found a contractor was not following the plans he made him replace it. He was absolutely implacably honest and unbribable. If he told a contractor to tear construction down for noncompliance they had to do it. He was a very, very competent man. He was not as highly regarded, I think, as he should have been for his integrity.
- C: Thank you so much for sharing your experiences.

END OF INTERVIEW