

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 671

STEVE REGINA

Interviewed

by

Joseph Drobney

on

November 19, 1985

## STEVE REGINA

Steve Regina was born on July 18, 1919 in Youngstown, Ohio. Mr. Regina, who was raised only a few blocks from the site of the Westlake Housing Project, was educated in the Youngstown City School System. He left school after the 10th grade and joined the workforce in Youngstown. In the late 1930's, while working for the Heller-Murray construction firm, Steve Regina was directly involved in the construction of the Westlake Terrace Housing Project. Eventually, he was employed by and retired from the United States Steel Corporation. Steve Regina, a life-long resident of Youngstown, and his wife, Stephanie, now live on the city's West Side.

Joseph C. Drobney

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INTERVIEWEE: STEVE REGINA

INTERVIEWER: Joseph Drobney

SUBJECT: labor conditions, construction, Westlake  
Crossing

DATE: November 19, 1985

D: This is an interview with Steve Regina for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Joe Drobney, on November 19, 1985, at 124 North Belle Vista, in Youngstown, Ohio, at approximately 3:30 in the afternoon.

Just to begin, Mr. Regina, could you tell me something about your early years growing up, for example, when and where you were born, something about your parents, how many brothers and sisters you had, your early schooling?

R: I had four brothers counting myself and two sisters. That was the whole family plus my mother and dad.

D: When and where were you born?

R: I was born on 126 North Ardale.

D: In Youngstown?

R: In Youngstown on the north side.

D: What year was that?

R: 1919.

D: Do you remember your parents fairly well?

R: Oh, yes.

D: When you were a very young child, what type of work did

your father do?

R: He mostly did carpentry. He worked in a steel mill as a carpenter too, in different steel mills.

D: Can you remember a couple in particular like Brier Hill works, Youngstown Sheet & Tube?

R: Oh, yes, Brier Hill, Campbell Works, U. S. Steel. Then even when things were bad here and he got laid off, he went to West Virginia to work in a coal mine.

D: You originally then grew up on North Ardale which is, of course, down near the Westlake Crossing area.

R: Yes, a little west of it.

D: Where did you first go to school? Do you remember some of the schools you went to?

R: I went to a Catholic school from the first grade up through third grade. Then I went to public schools from the third grade on.

D: Which Catholic school was that?

R: St. Peter and Paul's on Covington.

D: What was the public school?

R: Jefferson and from there I went to Hayes Junior High.

D: Did you ever end up graduating from high school?

R: No, I quit in the tenth grade.

D: Did you go to Rayen High School for high school?

R: That was when I went to Rayen and then I quit.

D: As you were growing up there from what you can remember during the 1920's there on North Ardale, what type of neighborhood was it? Ethnically, was it mixed like Italians, Slovak, Poles? Was it all pretty much the same ethnic group?

R: Yes, it was all a little mixture of each.

D: How about as far as the types of work the people did? Were they all on North Ardale working people, factory people?

R: Yes, they were, all of them.

D: You didn't have any doctors, lawyers?

R: No.

D: As you were growing up during the 1920's when you were seven, eight, nine, and ten, you are still in elementary school. Did you or your brothers and sisters ever do any type of odd jobs and work to help out the family?

R: I went to work when I was fourteen years old. I worked for a contractor. I helped with refrigeration, electrical contractors. I mixed mortar or mud or whatever you want to call it for bricklayers. I did about everything you think you could do.

D: Let's zero in the first ten or eleven years then up until about 1930 when the Depression really set in Youngstown. During this period up to the time when you were ten or eleven, was your father mainly self-employed then or was he already starting to work for foundries like Sheet & Tube?

R: He was mostly always what you would call self-employed where he could always make a dollar. He worked in the steel mills too. Later on in years he didn't work in them.

D: He was a carpenter. When he was self-employed, did you help him?

R: A lot of times I went on jobs with him, not when I was really young like around nine or ten. I worked with him cutting lumber or whatever he needed.

D: Did your father go through formal procedures in bidding for a job?

R: Yes, then there was no unemployment office or anything. The only ones who had it were Sheet & Tube and U. S. Steel. If they needed you, they took you. A lot of times he went looking for a job. Maybe he saw a contractor doing a pretty good job like in the project there. Then again, in the project it was different. You had to be union.

D: During the 1920's and early 1930's before they had the big 1937 steel strike in Youngstown, before World War II came along in Youngstown, were your father and the carpenters in town under any type of union or any type of organization at all?

R: No. Only when the war came, he went to Wean United. He was like a clean-up man there. Then you had to be union there.

- D: In the 1920's and into the Depression in the 1930's whenever your father . . . In other words, there wasn't any organization in town for craftsmen who regulated what the wage would be. Did he get a different wage or a different amount for each job he did?
- R: I would say there were very, very few jobs where you had to be in the union where you had to work with union men. He mostly worked by himself like building a garage or putting an addition on himself or something like that.
- D: From what you remember your father was a carpenter and he was Slovene. Did any one ethnic group seem to dominate crafts or did you have Slovak electricians or Italian electricians? How did that work?
- R: Mostly the Italians were on the track gang. Hungarians wored as gas producers; they produced the gas for the open hearth furnaces. Mostly the Irish and Germans were on the floor like welders and that.
- D: In the private crafts when your father was going out on a carpenter's job, it didn't seem like all of the carpenters in Youngstown were Slovenes.
- R: No, it was mixed.
- D: You mentioned that you had gone originally to St. Peter and Paul's School up through the third grade. St. Peter and Paul's is down on that Westlake Crossing side of town anyway. From your early remembrances was that kind of a real center of the community, the church?
- R: Yes, mostly. They had a pretty big congregation there. My wife is Polish. She went to St. Casimir's Polish Church, and there were mostly Polish people in the near neighborhood.
- D: What about the school you went to up through the third grade? Did your folks have to pay a tuition for you to go to St. Peter and Paul's?
- R: In those days you gave what you could. Some gave a little more than others.
- D: You went to Jefferson public school?
- R: Yes, Jefferson.
- D: When you went to Jefferson School, what were the areas that Jefferson School covered? How far away were the

kids coming from? Was it just the general neighborhood like Covington?

R: Before they built Caldwell School on West Rayen Avenue they were coming from way down in Monkey's Nest all the way up to Jefferson. They were walking from there all the way up to Hayes and Rayen. There was no such thing as a boundry. I knew a lot of them who came from Campbell to St. Peter and Paul's. They took a bus every-day and took a bus back. They had to pay. It wasn't like it is today.

D: You mentioned the Monkey's Nest. I have heard a lot of different things about the neighborhood and the people down there. What do you remember about that area they call the Monkey's Nest in the 1920's and 1930's?

R: I walked that way six days a week and sometimes even seven. There was never any trouble. They have a bad name because I figured at one time there might have been monkeys down there, but it was never that bad. The papers exaggerate it. I walked through there day and night and nobody ever, ever bothered me.

D: Was it mainly homes down there?

R: A lot of homes, yes.

D: How about the people who lived there? Was it ethnically mixed?

R: Yes, ethnically mixed.

D: Would you say it was working class?

R: All working class, yes, middle class.

D: Did people own their own homes down there in the Monkey's Nest?

R: Yes.

D: From what you can remember at least before World War II was that the Monkey's Nest was mainly working people who had their own homes.

R: Right.

D: As we get into about 1929, 1930 by now you are about ten or eleven and just about ready to go to Hayes Junior High.

R: Yes.

- D: Can you kind of compare a little bit from what you remember about downtown Youngstown in the late 1920's and into the 1930's compared to downtown Youngstown today as far as businesses, people on the streets, activities, stuff like that?
- R: In those days you could go anywhere. There were people always downtown. They were downtown until midnight or something like that window shopping on weekends mostly. The mothers would take the children and look in the windows. Ever since that plaza was put in that killed everything.
- D: For example, in the late 1920's and early 1930's what were some of the big stores? Can you name a big list of some of the big ones that you can remember?
- R: G. M. McKelvey, Woolworth.
- D: How about the theaters? I heard Youngstown was kind of like a city of theaters back there. There were five or six or seven big theaters. Do you remember the Park, the Palace?
- R: Yes, there was the Park. The Palace was a beautiful theater. There was the Warner Brothers. I went to the Strand.
- D: I have heard about that. Where exactly was that?
- R: You would call it the southeast corner of the square.
- D: The southeast corner was the Strand Theater?
- R: Yes, it was right next to Tod House there on that corner.
- D: Did they have live performances in any of those theaters?
- R: Palace did. I don't know if the Park did at that time or not. I know Palace was one of them. Warner might have.
- D: Do you remember . . . I guess at one time there were quite a lot of ballrooms or a few big ballrooms in Youngstown. There was one up on Elm.
- R: Elms Ballroom and Idora Ballroom. I don't know about Avon Oaks. I don't know how long that has been there, but it has been there quite a while.
- D: Did you used to go to the theaters quite a lot?
- R: Yes, that was when they were a nickel or a dime.



- D: Was there any one in particular you went to, or did you hit them all?
- R: We always liked doing that on a Saturday morning. You donated a can of fruit or something like that. You gave it to the usher and then you walked in free. The Warner Brothers had that a lot of times. Paramount had it. We went there. I didn't go that much. We went to Regent Theater.
- D: Where was that at?
- R: Way down on the east end down near Basin Street.
- D: Once the Depression set in some of the theaters like you said the Warner donated a can of food . . .
- R: When they had a drive for the poor people. It wasn't every day. Theaters then were cheap.
- D: At this time you said you paid a nickel or a dime for the movie. What did you get, a double feature and a cartoon?
- R: Yes.
- D: So that was the big day on Saturday?
- R: Yes, Saturday was the big day.
- D: How did you get downtown? Did you walk, take the streetcar?
- R: Oh, you walked. I would walk from the north side all the way to Sherwood Avenue. I passed circulars then from house to house. I would walk all day and then walk home. It was very seldom when I rode.
- D: I did hear at one time during the 1920's and 1930's that Youngstown did have a pretty extensive subway system and that you could ride way out to Struthers.
- R: Oh, yes, you could go to Sharon Line. You could get the streetcar downtown. You could take that all the way to Detroit, Michigan. You could switch.
- D: Really?
- R: Oh, yes, they hauled freight down Federal Street on the streetcars in the back of them. There was a car with freight on it coming into town.
- D: Right on the streetcar?

- R: Right on the car behind the streetcar. It wasn't real heavy stuff, but they hauled it.
- D: At this time as you were growing up in the late 1920's and early 1930's how about trains coming into Youngstown? Didn't they have like two or three different rail lines coming through town?
- R: Yes, you had the Erie, Pennsylvania, New York Central, Baltimore & Ohio.
- D: How many of those carried passengers into Youngstown?
- R: Pennsylvania, B & O (Baltimore & Ohio), Erie, and New York Central. I guess you had to switch off in Cleveland if you wanted to go to New York or something on the New York Central.
- D: Down the street from you right on Federal there was a train station down there as you are coming into the square.
- R: That would be the Erie.
- D: Was that a passenger terminal?
- R: Yes, passenger terminal. As you went down Federal Street right at Spring Common was the old Pennsylvania depot there. Then they moved up the street west a little bit.
- D: Who had the biggest terminal?
- R: B & O, I would say, had the nicest one. It was big.
- D: Did there always seem to be . . . From what you can remember even up to World War II . . . Did you ever get a chance to ride a train?
- R: Very little, but I rode it, yes.
- D: Were there a lot of passenger trains coming in and out?
- R: A lot of passenger trains, yes. A lot of time the Capital Limited would come into Youngstown from Washington and Chicago. That would probably come through Youngstown on the B & O at 12:30. It went from Chicago to Washington. Maybe there wouldn't be too many people at that time of the night. There were always people. You could see them on the train.
- D: It seems to me since Youngstown seemed to be a center as far as train transportation . . . Were there any big wheels or big celebrities who you remember who got out and stretched their legs around any of the terminals or

stopped over for a night or so?

R: I remember when Roosevelt came. I remember when Wendal Wilkie was running for president. He came in on the Pennsylvania depot.

D: In 1940 when he was running? \*

R: Yes.

D: How about the bus station? Was there one, big bus station like Greyhound station?

R: Greyhound had a pretty big depot, yes. They remodeled where the Hippodrome Arcade was. That was where you had a lot of shows on stage at the Hippodrome.

D: Is that where Higbee's used to be?

R: Yes, there are different stores in there. That was between Federal and Commerce Street.

D: There were live performances at the Hippodrome.

R: Oh, yes, they had a lot of good shows there.

D: How about any of the old comedy burlesque? Did any theater in Youngstown used to have burlesque? I'm talking about with comedians.

R: The Princess had it.

D: Where was the Princess at?

R: Right across the street from the Park Theater.

D: Did they just show burlesque or did they have screens?

R: They had burlesque dancing and then they had comedians. They had some good comedians. You enjoyed it.

D: You had the Princess and you had the Hippodrome, so you had at least two places where they had live performances. Then you had all of these other theaters. It seems like in Youngstown you could always find something to do.

R: Oh, yes, they had the Dome Theater, the State, the Paramount, the Regent, the Palace, the Park, Camio Theater.

D: Where was that at?

R: It was west of Chestnut a little bit. Then the Dome Theater was a little bit above that going west.

- D: By this time we begin to get into the 1930's; we begin to get into the Depression itself. You already mentioned briefly that during the Depression you would go to a movie theater if you had a can of food. What are some of the other things you remember about the Depression in Youngstown? How did it affect your father, your family? Can you remember that pretty well?
- R: It was hard times. There were six of us children and my dad and mother making it eight. Those days weren't like today where anybody goes and gets whatever they want. We lived on \$2.50 a week, but you could get a card every now and then from the Allied Council. You went down on West Rayen Avenue at the corner of West Rayen and West Avenue. They had a big building there, and they would give you surplus. They would give you a sack of potatoes, a sack of flour, and they would probably give you a basket of apples. Then they had soup lines too. With the soup lines you got a card every month. You had thirty days on it or thirty-one. You went to the soup line and got whatever was on the menu and a loaf of bread. That was for the whole family, one loaf of bread and a bucket of soup. It wasn't a big five gallon jug either. You got about a gallon.
- D: Who exactly ran those soup lines? Was it the church or the community?
- R: No, it was government funded. They even gave you army beef, but it was horse meat.
- D: How about this Allied Council? Was that a federal government deal? What can you remember about that?
- R: I just don't know how far back it went. I think it was up to the state. I don't think it was federal; I doubt it. They got a lot of federal stuff like the flour which had a red cross on it. It wasn't to be sold. A big cross was on the sack. You never got that kind of beef in the store. It was like in a yellow can. I think it said United States Army on it or something like that. I'm not sure though.
- D: You actually began to go to work when you were fourteen years old. That would have been about 1933 or 1934 which means that we were in the Depression when you really started to go to work.
- R: Yes. My brother and I went to work for this one grocer. Our dad owed a lot of money on groceries which Mr. Kuhavich knew he probably would never get back if he wasn't working or if he died. He asked my dad if we

could go and work for him. He bought a building down in Campbell; he put a store there, and he cleaned the whole upstairs where thirteen families lived. He and his wife and his daughter-in-law lived in that upstairs when I cleaned it out.

D: So in other words, your father kind of accumulated a debt to the store owner, and you and your brother kind of worked it off?

R: Yes, worked it off. He would give us half and half. Half was for the bill and half was for us. So we had money to spend and buy clothes with it. I enjoyed it.

D: Which store was this?

R: Kuharich.

D: Was he kind of like the grocery store in the neighborhood?

R: He had about three or four stores.

D: You said that at one time you went down to Campbell to help.

R: That was where he had the building he bought. He bought a building and a hardware store and I think two homes. I worked on all of them. I would help the bricklayer; I would help the carpenter; I helped the electrician. That was where I got my experience.

D: You kind of got your start then working for this fellow who had the grocery store more or less.

R: I even worked a few days for a furnace company selling coal furnaces.

D: You mentioned you made it up through the tenth grade at the Rayen School, right?

R: Yes.

D: Why did you quit? Was it to go to work for the family to help out?

R: A little bit.

D: Did you go to work immediately after that?

R: I went a little bit on Wick Avenue to a part-time school one day a week.

D: What was this part-time school for? Was it just to help

you read?

R: No, it was for where I could get old enough so I could quit. I was too young; I was under sixteen.

D: Wasn't there a particular age where you could get a work permit back then? How did that work? Do you remember?

R: When you were sixteen, you could quit with a work permit; that was the way it was. I don't know whether you were sixteen or not, but you still had to go to part-time school once a week for half of a day.

D: Did you know if a lot of your friends, once they got to be sixteen, they did quit school to try to help out the family or whatever?

R: There wasn't that much work. People survived; we had a big garden. There was an empty lot above us, so we dug that up. We put potatoes in there and everything.

D: How about people around you in the neighborhood?

R: They all had gardens.

D: Everybody seemed to have a garden.

R: Yes, even back in 1940 when I was in the steel mill, they would give us seeds in the Spring and fertilizer. You could dig anywhere you wanted to. You could dig a garden and have it for yourself. The company would give it to you. It wasn't much, but it was something.

D: When was the first time you actually got any type of job working for a steel mill?

R: I worked in a fabricating plant. I worked at General Fireproofing. I went into the steel mill when I got laid off there.

D: When you first got that job working at the fabricators, was this in 1937 or 1938 or was it real close to the time when you got out of school?

R: I worked in the projects first. I worked there from the start to the finish, and I finished in 1940. Then I went to GF (General Fireproofing). I wasn't with GF too long. Of course, before I worked at United Engineering for contractors when they were putting those big buildings up.

D: Of course, they had the big steel strike in 1937. I don't think that steel strike took place really too far from where you were living.

- R: I used to go down on the picket line. I wasn't working at that time. Later on in the Spring I started with the grocer who was in Campbell. I used to drive by that. You would see those pickets.
- D: What can you remember about that? How long did it last? Did it seem to last for months and months or like a year?
- R: That went into months. Then I was off in 1959 for 116 days on strike.
- D: Yes, 1959.
- R: Yes, that was a big strike. I think that one had to be a little longer.
- D: Did you ever see anybody carrying guns or state police or national . . .
- R: I never saw anybody carry a gun. Sheriff Elser had what he called deputized thugs. He gave them a club, and they would make sure that nobody would bother anybody if they wanted to go into the mill. Nobody wanted to go in anyway. These were the strikers at that time. Gus Hall is famous. He was down at Brier Hill. I remember him. He would stop the mill trucks when the mill trucks wanted to bring something into the mill there.
- D: Was he kind of viewed as being on the side of the factory, Sheriff Elser?
- R: Oh, yes, 100 percent. While he was getting it from the company, he was paying those guys \$3 a day to do that.
- D: At this time at 1937 during the strike was your dad pretty much on his own or was he working for Brier Hill or Sheet & Tube?
- R: I don't think my dad was in the mill then at that time when the strike was; I don't think so.
- D: How did most of the people you knew like the people in the neighborhood view the strike? Were they on the side of the union or didn't they care? What was the feeling that was going around at that time?
- R: People cared. People around the strike and then here they saw their neighbors in the mill there. Even after the strike was over they were breaking windows and everything in these homes. Those who were strike breakers who were in there didn't want to come out.
- D: So you think that a lot of hard feelings came out of

that strike?

R: Oh, definitely, yes.

D: After that strike was over from what you can remember, it seems that unions gained a little power in Youngstown, at least that things kind of improved.

R: Before the unions came in . . . This is hearsay of what I heard from old-timers who were in there. If you were a boss and I had a little farm with a couple of chickens or something, I would give you some chickens or give you a couple of dollars behind the boiler or furnace. You wouldn't work as many days as the other guys who gave. If there wasn't a union, it would have been bad. Today the union is out of hand.

D: Let's get back to the old neighborhood at North Ardale. North Ardale is just a block off of Wirt, right?

R: Not even that.

D: Not even that. You were less than a block away from that old Westlake housing area.

R: Yes.

D: What do you remember about the homes south of Madison Avenue along Wirt and along Griffith and Covington there, that whole area, but mainly along Wirt and along Griffith, the area that would eventually become the projects? What were the homes like, the houses?

R: The people kept their homes pretty good. People then were more friendly then than they are today. Today it is dog eat dog. It was nice until the different elements came in. It wasn't just the blacks. There were other ones too, and they helped ruin it. A lot of times there would be a person across the street who was paying \$40 tax and somebody else would be paying \$60 because this guy painted his house and cut his grass. His property wasn't worth as much as this guy's. Anybody who wanted to buy would buy the one that was taken care of.

D: How about right along Federal Street there? How would you characterize those houses? I have seen pictures, and it looked like some of those houses were old row houses. Were all the houses in good condition or were some of them kind of bad?

R: Not all of them. I wouldn't say all of them. There were a lot of old houses that didn't see paint for years and years and years. That would leave them a little bad.



There were a lot of houses like that. It wasn't anything bad where people couldn't walk then. I walked many times like down Federal; we never rode; we walked down through there.

D: How about the general people who lived there in those old houses that would be torn down? Was it mixed ethnically? Was it mainly working people? How would you describe it? I'm talking about the people who lived along Federal, along Madison, in between Wirt and Griffith Street.

R: Mostly working people, not necessarily in the mill. They were any job, different jobs.

D: How about ethnically?

R: Oh, yes.

D: It wasn't like all Italian or all black or all this or that.

R: Brier Hill was known for Italians; that was the only one.

D: Which one?

R: Brier Hill. That was known for Italians. Then there was the Monkey's Nest. That was white down there; then later on that was colored.

D: You are saying up until World War II, the Monkey's Nest was kind of mixed. There wasn't like all white or all black; it was kind of like half, some here and some there.

R: Yes, when that came, that was after the 1919 strike, the steel strike. I was just born then, but I heard about it.

D: You mean when the black first started coming up from the south.

R: Coming to the north, yes. The steel mills brought them up.

D: In about 1937, 1938 just prior to working on Westlake you mentioned you were kind of out on your own a little bit doing work here and there. Did you work for your father a lot as far as helping him?

R: No, very, very little. I was mostly unemployed to tell you the truth. If there was some work somewhere, I never turned it down. That's all.

D: How about carpentry work? Did you do a lot of carpentry work yourself?

R: No, I got along with what I could do.

D: What were your basic skills? What were some of the things you could do besides planing a board? Could you put up a wall? Could you do any type of electrical work?

R: I would do my own, yes.

D: What did you mainly do before you worked on Westlake? Was it like help a guy put up a garage or maybe remodel a room?

R: Painted a few homes.

D: You were pretty much up through 1937, 1938 basically what we call a jack-of-all-trades type deal.

R: Yes.

D: By now it is about 1938 or 1939. When did you first hear about some type of big government project that was maybe going to do away with that Westlake area there? You were living on North Ardale.

R: That was when Roosevelt came into town. He came in special for that. What year it was I can't tell you. I know I was young then. Then it took about four years to clean that property out. A big outfit, Cleveland Wrecking from Cleveland came down, and they were tearing down everything. They hired men, but I never got on with them. Then what they did, the lumber they could save they had piled it and sold that lumber like doors, windows, whatever was good.

D: So this Cleveland Wrecking that they brought in from outside the city was responsible for clearing out all those homes?

R: Cleared them out. If you had a home there and you were in the way, the government paid you for the home.

D: You know this personally that people actually got paid money from the government.

R: Oh, yes, for their home, yes. There were quite a bit of homes there. I just missed that; I was across the street.

D: Did you know people who were living there?

R: Oh, yes. The government gave them so much. Then they went out and they . . .

D: Where did they go?

R: Wherever they could find a home. A lot of them took it to court. They weren't giving them enough. They were already up in age. They were just giving them a little for the property. They couldn't do anything; they couldn't buy anything, and this was theirs because they paid for it.

D: You mean to tell me that a lot of those people were older people who were living there in the Westlake area?

R: Oh, yes, down in the Westlake area.

D: In the Westlake area on Griffith and Wirt there?

R: Yes, but the government eventually bought everything that was there. Only a gas station on the corner of Griffith and Federal Street was left.

D: Then there was that old YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) down there on Federal Street.

R: They tore that down and built a new one in the meantime. That was a wooden, old building. They tore that down and built a new one.

D: At the same time they put in Westlake?

R: It was where the rescue mission is now.

D: You are saying there was an older YMCA there?

R: The wooden one.

D: They tore that down and put in a new one.

R: Put in a new YMCA there for the colored.

D: While you were working at Westlake?

R: No, that was already built.

D: Oh, the new one was already there.

R: Yes.

D: You are indicating to me that a lot of the people kind of got displaced. In other words, people had to move. Maybe they didn't think all that much about this idea of this new federal project.

- R: Sure, a lot of them didn't because they had to go.
- D: How about people in North Ardale, people who you knew who lived around that area? Did you or your father or the people favor the idea of this project being built there? Did they know a lot about it first of all? Were people coming around explaining it to them? Was there any talk on the street corner if this would be good or bad? Maybe it would bring a lot of jobs; maybe it would bring a lot of people.
- R: I know one lady who was going through the field there. She lived on Rowland, and this guard was there already. They were starting to build. He told her that she wasn't allowed to go through there because it was private property. She told him that it was a dump and that it always would be a dump. When they built the project from Madison up to Evans Field, that was all big gully there and a dump; that was all fill-in.
- D: You are saying from Madison up to Lexington Street where Evans Field is that there was nothing there before they built the project?
- R: From Madison up to Lexington, right. No, there were no homes there. There were very few around Parmelee. There were about five or six.
- D: Up north of Madison did they used to have a circus there?
- R: That was the old circus grounds. Ringling Brothers when they came into the circus grounds there, they played where the project is. They would cover that whole field up with one, big tent, a seven ringer. Then they put the horse tent and the cook house in Wright Field. They took quite a bit of acreage, the Ringling Brothers especially.
- D: Do you remember when the circuses used to come into town?
- R: I lived there. I didn't miss one. The Ringling Brothers, Hagenback Wallace, Four Paw Cells Brothers, Tom Mix . . .
- D: These were all circuses that would come into Youngstown?
- R: All circuses, yes.
- D: Did they come in one right after each other?
- R: No, they would split up like maybe once a month. Then some of them would come way into the Fall, like even in September.

D: They all kind of occupied that big spare area of ground.

R: Then after a while they went from there because they were figuring the project and that. They went to McCartney Road and they played there, but they only played there two years. The second year they were there they got so much rain that the wagon sunk in the mud. They had to get the contractors with bulldozers to pull them out onto McCartney Road, and that was the end of them playing there. From there they went to Meridian Road. They played there. Then from there they played on Gypsy Lane up there on the left. There are all buildings there today.

D: Between Federal and Madison there were those slums and those older type houses there.

R: Yes.

D: Then north of Madison up to Lexington and Evans Field that was gullies and open ground where the circus used to go.

Along Griffith near Covington there was an old Covington School there, right?

R: Yes, an old, red brick school. It was an old school. I remember that.

D: That was a public school.

R: Yes.

D: Mainly an elementary school?

R: Elementary, yes.

D: What did they do about the time Westlake went in? Was a new building built?

R: They built a new school then. Bucheit was building that school there at the time.

D: Was that school, the one that is there now . . . Did they start the construction on that at the same time, after, or before they did on Westlake?

R: At the same time the project was being built, yes.

D: You are kind of like under the impression that they knew that they would need . . . Was it a bigger school, the

- one they have there now, than the older building?
- R: Oh, way bigger, the one they have now, yes.
- D: When did you first hear about the possibility of getting a job on this government project? How did you go about getting a job?
- R: I knew I had to join the union. I got the money to join the union. I had to pay so much. They told me to go up there when they were hiring and that when they were hiring I would get on. I went up there, and I was fortunate that I got on.
- D: Is this pay dues or pay a membership?
- R: Pay initiation fee. I think it was \$2.50 a month. Then if you had an initiation fee, you paid either \$5 or \$10 or whatever it was on top of that every month. You would take it down to East Federal yourself.
- D: The office was down there.
- R: AFL office was down there, yes.
- D: This was the AFL (American Federation of Labor). You were hired on the Westlake project. First of all, what company . . . Were you hired by the Youngstown Builders Syndicate?
- R: By the Syndicate, yes. In other words, that was J. D. Fowler, Felix Pesa, Joe Bucheit, and Tom Murray.
- D: Was that the Heller-Murray?
- R: No. A guy named Joyce was the cement contractor for the sidewalks.
- D: Which one of these companies did you actually get hired on with? Was there anyone in particular or just the Syndicate in general?
- R: I would say that I was mostly under Tom Murray. The most I ever did down there was tearing down those forms. That was a big job. You had two gangs tearing them down.
- D: Tearing down what forms?
- R: They would build a whole one section of the project, the first floor. Then you went down the cellar or in the cubbyhole if there wasn't any cellar in that building. Then after so many days when you figured the concrete

was dry enough, then you knocked out the jacks; then you pulled so many of them out with a rope and then the whole thing would fall down, all of these forms, four by eight, plywood, four by fours.

D: Oh, the plywood that kind of held the concrete in while it hardened.

R: Right. Then you pulled them out of the building and you cleaned them. Then a truck would come and put it to the next building where the bricklayers were almost done and were ready to put forms up there to pour the first floor. Then when they went to pour the second floor, you had it easier then. You had higher jacks for the rooms.

D: As far as skilled labor like a carpenter, for example, or a bricklayer did you have to be a member of the union to work on that project?

R: Oh, yes, I did.

D: And everybody else had to be.

R: Everybody had to. It was all union, oh, yes. I don't know about supervision. That I couldn't tell you. I doubt if they had to be, foremen and that.

D: How about like the common laborers like the water boys?

R: Oh, yes.

D: You are saying from what you remember that even the guy with the most basic job like a water boy or some guy who just walked around like hauling a wheelbarrow had to be unionized?

R: From the sweeper up, yes.

D: Was this all AFL or was it different unions?

R: AFL. Then they called it the general laborers union. General laborers were called for everything. They built a big ramp like they did the first floor. You wheeled these bricks in wheelbarrows, and the trucks would set them out six at a time. You would pick them up; you each had six and you piled them. I did that a lot of times, too. When they got the first floor finished and they poured the second floor, then when they were ready for the bricklayers up there, they would build a ramp. It would run like from here to across the street. You would wheel those bricks up that ramp and onto the second floor. Then you piled it all on the floor. Then they would build a scaffold on the

inside and the bricklayers would work on it then. It was a big job.

D: It sounds like you mainly did heavy work, not bricklaying but heavy work.

R: I didn't do too much wheeling. There was a lot of wheeling there to do.

D: Do you mean like wheeling the bricks and everything upstairs?

R: Yes. A lot of times when I was doing my job, they knew I lived very close there. The foreman would come to me and tell me to start around 6:00 in the morning to fill around the forms so that when the inspector came he wouldn't see the honeycombs in there. That was my job. Then I put water in there. That way the inspector couldn't see it as far up as it was.

D: What was he looking for?

R: You didn't want to have honeycomb in there. You either don't have a good pourer or a bad mix.

D: You don't want to have any space in between or air pockets.

R: Yes, you want to have a nice, clean, smooth column with no honeycomb holes in it. This government inspector was an older fellow. I will never forget him. He made them tear down a lot of forms and put new ones up.

D: Tell me a little bit about that. Do you mean the government was constantly inspecting the construction?

R: Oh, yes, for any inferior work.

D: You know personally that a few times . . .

R: I was the one who was there before they were; like they say the robin who wakes up the earliest is the fattest. The other ones, when they came to work, the inspector was gone.

D: So your job was to get there early in the morning before the inspector to make sure there were no air bubbles or anything in the cement and that everything was smooth.

R: No, just fill it in. I wasn't to worry about it. I would throw dirt in, maybe half a truckload, just pushing it off to the side.

D: Do you remember anything about your wages? What was it



- an hour? How much were you getting paid?
- R: My wage was pretty good. It was \$5 a day. It was \$25 a week. If I worked on a Saturday, I made \$27.50 a week.
- D: What were your hours, from when to when?
- R: Eight hours unless they would come in with a truck of cement block or something. Then the boss would tell me to get three more guys with me. He would give me four hours, and he knew we would do it the best we could in two.
- D: You mentioned earlier that the company who did a lot of the clearance was Cleveland Wrecking. Which company in town was supplying all of the heavy equipment for the actual construction of the project?
- R: J. D. Fowler. He was an excavator. He excavated all of those apartments, every one of them. He had dozers to grade them off to almost level. Then when the landscaper came in, it was his job to put topsoil on top of that.
- D: Who was the landscaper?
- R: I can't tell you offhand. He had a big, big pile of topsoil up on Belmont Avenue. It was higher than four houses. I think it was Fink that I saw on the trucks.
- D: You mean the topsoil they piled up on Belmont then was taken down to Westlake?
- R: Taking it down there, sure. All that was down there was clay, debris, cans that were already half rotted. Even before they started the project they dug test holes. They would dig a test hole and go down as far as they could until they hit clay or stone. Then they would go further, maybe across the street, and dig another hole where the apartments were going to be. They wanted to know how deep that fill-in was. When they went on that side toward Griffith, they had sandstone down there. They didn't have to dig too far.
- D: North of Madison Avenue there that was all the dumps. Where all of those apartments are really they are sitting on a landfill.
- R: Yes, but they went down to solid dirt though.
- D: To make sure that . . .
- R: They didn't go into the dump. They went down through it.

D: Down to the solid dirt before they put the base of the apartments in?

R: Solid dirt.

D: I noticed those apartments are kind of on hilly ground. Did that present a construction problem? When you start at Federal and you go all the way up to Lexington, you are going on a gradual upgrade. Were there any major problems with construction? Was weather a problem?

R: No.

D: Did rain stop you from working?

R: No, it was good drainage. After all, it ran downhill. There was never any trouble that way.

D: How about accidents? Do you remember a major accident on that construction?

R: No, there ~~were~~ were very, very little there that were minor. I had one where I jumped through a window down the cellar. I jumped on a two by eight and it had spikes on. It went right through my shoe. They did take me to a doctor, Doctor Boyd, downtown. He gave me a tetanus shot. I made about five trips to him. I didn't care; they, the contractors, were paying for it.

D: You got paid directly by the contractors, not by the federal government?

R: By the contractors.

D: But the inspectors who were always checking up on you were federal government men?

R: Oh, yes, they were federal government men.

D: At this same time over there at Covington when the Covington School was being built, who was building that? Was that the Youngstown Builders Syndicate?

R: I would say yes.

D: I was just wondering if you heard anything if it was just one of the contractors themselves or was it the whole Syndicate.

R: I think they were all in it with the brickwork like Pesa, and excavating with Fowler, and Murray was doing the carpentry.

D: You mentioned to me that you remember when Mrs. Roosevelt came to town and went down to that site.

R: It wasn't quite completed. That was the administration building. They let her go in.

D: The administration building down on Federal?

R: No, Madison. When she came, I remember there were a couple of carpenters with us guys. There were about five or six of us and a few carpenters. We were laying the planks and then the four by fours and then nailed them to that they wouldn't be loose so that she wouldn't fall. Then they took her into the administration building. It was pretty well done there. Then they took her into one of the apartments I know for sure, and she looked in the kitchen and all. They had everything set in them already. She could see how it was going to be for the people. She was very nice. I didn't talk to her or anything.

D: Did you see her?

R: Oh, yes, I saw her.

D: You were at work while she was down there?

R: I had to work overtime to do that. They paid me overtime.

D: You were on the grounds working while she was down there?

R: Yes, she came there about 5:00.

D: It was late in the afternoon.

R: Yes, later in the afternoon. I quit at 4:30, but I stayed there. I think I had to stay until 6:00 or 6:30, but I didn't care. I got time and a half for that. At that time that was big money.

D: Did you see a lot of bigwigs like Lionel Evans, the mayor, and people like that always coming through or did you notice anything like that?

R: No.

D: You mentioned about the fact that you worked the entire time.

R: From the start until the finish.

D: Which section of those projects was completed first? In other words, did you start down on Federal and work your way . . .

R: We started on the north end and worked down.

D: Up at Lexington up at Evans field.

R: Yes, first they leveled it to the grade. Then they came in with the surveyor and engineers. They surveyed it with stakes. They took a lot of dirt out of each one of those cellars. Then they hauled that dirt up to Brier Hill somewhere up there. They filled in something big up there whatever it was. They had about thirty trucks hauling dirt with two shovels going.

D: The first apartments were the ones that were built along Lexington.

R: Lexington, yes, the Hagstrum House was there.

D: Was the Hagstrum House one of the original buildings that was built?

R: It was in with it. There was nothing there. There was a dump there.

D: Then, in other words, you worked your way down Madison and then you worked your way from Madison down to Federal.

R: Federal, yes.

D: From what you can remember, was every building that you worked on, every apartment like in blocks down there? Did they all have cellars?

R: Not all of them, no. Some of the smaller ones I think had a whole cellar, those that were facing long ways with the street. Those that were long had like half of a cellar and half of like a cubbyhole where you could go in there.

D: Was that about nine or ten months when you worked on that or was it more than a year?

R: Oh, no, more than that.

D: 1939 and 1940?

R: And 1940, yes.

D: Did it seem to you from talking to some of the guys you worked with that they had a tough time finding work before this project came along? Was this project really helping them out personally as far as putting money in their pocket? Were times really tough in the late 1930's for carpenters and electricians around Youngstown? Did it seem like you could always get something?

- R: It was hard getting a job. A lot of them had to go out of town to get a job.
- D: In the late 1930's as a private craftsman it was kind of tough in Youngstown. Then this big federal project came along and kept you employed for over a year.
- R: Yes, but they would lay those craftsmen off too if they didn't need them. With a laborer he could always find something for you. You would either load scrap lumber on a truck or maybe they had you dig a hole or something like that. In those days there wasn't too much where like a back hoe would come in like they have today. Then you had to dig it.
- D: Did you work straight or did you ever like for a week or so get laid off?
- R: No, I worked pretty straight.
- D: In through the winter too?
- R: Oh, yes. In the winter then they would get something that needed something done on the inside where you could be. They had heat. They got the heat from on Belmont Avenue. They brought a big steam pipeline. It was where they burned that coal on Belmont. They supplied downtown with heat.
- D: That place down by the Mahoning River there?
- R: No, right by Thornton Laundry next door by the Belmont Avenue Bridge.
- D: They piped in the heat from there?
- R: Yes, I think it was a ten inch line. That was a good job there too putting all of that pipe in. We came up Federal Street with it and then through the center of the projects and then split it up to each apartment.
- D: That place where you are talking about, the main center where they get the heat from, is on Belmont? What is that by?
- R: Right next to Thornton Laundry. If you go up North Avenue, you would go down to the Erie Railroad. Then you would make a left and there is a little road there that goes right by the bridge. It is on this side of the bridge.
- D: They had to put the line in from there all the way onto Westlake.
- R: All the way up, yes.

- D: This whole area for those months while you were working on Westlake you had a whole area of the road getting ripped up there to put that line in.
- R: Not necessarily. They would cover it up right away. They would put in so many links and weld it and cover it up. Gallagher & O'Horo was a sewer contractor; he put the sewers in.
- D: He was the sewer contractor for Westlake.
- R: Yes, he dug from Lexington all the way down before you come to Madison on the bend there. The sewer line came all the way down through the center of the project in between the buildings, all the way down to the center; then it shot left, and then it emptied out into the main sewer on Wirt Street there. They dug about twenty feet. When they got down to about that deep, then there was clay. There was about two feet or better of clay. Underneath that they had what they called Brier Hill lump coal. I got many wheelbarrows of coal out of there. I took it home, hosed it off, and I had coal all winter.
- D: You were living really just a few minutes walk away from the site of construction. You are saying that when they were excavating all of that dirt, there was all of that coal?
- R: Underneath.
- D: It was really kind of cheap coal.
- R: No, Brier Hill lump was good coal. It was deeper than stripping at some of these places where they strip it.
- D: Was that south of Madison where you were getting the coal from?
- R: No, north of Madison.
- D: Where the old dump and the circus had been.
- R: Yes.
- D: You were getting coal out of there and burning it at the house keeping warm with it?
- R: It was nice coal. That was all mines up through there. Right where Madison comes to Wirt Street, that would be on the west side of Wirt Street, going down from Federal Street maybe 200 or 250 feet up along the curbing there, there was a big hole there where it was like an entry right in there. I don't know what they dug. I know they didn't fill the whole thing up.

- D: You mean to an old mine.
- R: To an old mine, yes, like going up Wirt Street.
- D: You were getting wages from the job and you were kind of getting a side benefit there getting some coal.
- R: I was here when they were throwing over what they shoveled.
- D: Was the Evans Field there originally?
- R: My dad started Evans Field. That was a big gully there too. They were bringing stones from anywhere they could to fill it in. That is why Evans Field has the best grading there is. Then they put dirt all over the top. Years after they put sand and that, and that is how they made that field. That is a beautiful field there.
- D: Of course, Evans Field was kind of packed down and put together even before they started Westlake.
- R: Yes, Evans Field was there for years. I was down at the old Wright Field; that was this way. Morrison Field was here at Wirt Street. Then Wright Field, that was what they called Westlake Field. I think they played professional football there.
- D: These were all kind of like athletic fields right in the neighborhood?
- R: That was the only one there.
- D: Westlake Field or Wright Field?
- R: Yes, that was before Evans Field. The Patrician's played professional football there. In fact if you go down to the football hall of fame, you will see that I think they started football there. I don't know.
- D: A professional team from Youngstown?
- R: It is right in the literature when you read there.
- D: Did you finish up your time working at Westlake in 1940? I think that was when the construction was finished.. Was it in 1941 when you were still working?
- R: No, 1941 I was at GF.
- D: General Fireproofing?
- R: Yes.

- D: By the end of 1940 your time working at Westlake was pretty much finished?
- R: Yes, and then I had the little time down at United with a contractor, but that was different. That was United Engineering.
- D: All together you worked a little over a year on Westlake?
- R: Yes, it was over a year. I was one of the last to leave. There was a guy who had a truck and another helper and me. We were the last ones.
- D: Of course, living just across the street on North Ardale, what did the finished product, the finished apartments, look like?
- R: Real nice. Then you get a mixed clientele going in there. There were kids and everything in general who could ruin it.
- D: When you lived on North Ardale, did you live north or south of Madison Avenue?
- R: North.
- D: North of Madison Avenue.
- R: Right below Rowland. Wirt Street used to come down. Then you made a right turn on Rowland, and then you hit North Ardale. Then you went down North Ardale, but then it was a steep hill down there. All they did was put some gravel there with a little tar. It wasn't actually a street, but people used to short-cut and go down that way instead of going down around Worthington or down Griffith.
- D: How about during the war years and then right after the war? Was Westlake at least up there north of Madison Avenue being kept up pretty well? Was it still a beautiful place to live?
- R: It was still, but then you got the mixed people in there. Then it started to get bad.
- D: Where you lived on North Ardale, how long did you live there? When did you move off of North Ardale?
- R: 1954. I moved over here.
- D: When you left North Ardale in 1954, were the people . . . Was it pretty much the same people who lived on North Ardale Street, or had people begun to move off of North Ardale?
- R: There wasn't that many there already. There was only my



house and a house below me. That was all there was. Then there in the Hollow a few homes were still down there. Eventually they tore them down for the Madison expressway. Then they took the whole Wright Field and moved apartments from Madison across to over there. They put them up from Rowland Avenue and down. Then they put a Chase Pool in there for the colored.

D: Oh, you know specifically that when they put the Chase Pool in that it was kind of assumed by everybody that blacks would mainly use the pool.

R: No, it was mixed.

D: Going up along Wirt and then going along Lexington there . . . Before the project was being built and then during the time the project was being built were homes there like they are today? In other words, when there was that old dump up there north of Madison before they built the Westlake project, across the street like where you were living were there homes like all the way up Wirt?

R: No, if you were going up Wirt Street on the right side, from Lexington Avenue all the way down to almost Madison Avenue, there were no homes.

D: No homes?

R: No homes on that side, on the east side.

D: How about the other side of the dump on the Griffith Street side? Were there homes across the street from the dump?

R: From Parmelee all the way down to Madison Avenue there must have been maybe ten homes that they took down. It was ten or fifteen at the most. There were a little bit north of Parmelee, a few homes there, and there were a little bit on Parmelee about three homes on one side and maybe about seven on the other, on Parmelee.

D: I'm not talking about places that would have to be eliminated to put in the project. In other words I'm talking about surrounding Madison Avenue.

R: On the outside like I would be.

D: Exactly, yes.

R: There were a lot of homes on Griffith.

D: In other words across the street from this dump there were a lot of houses.

R: Yes.

D: And across the street on Lexington from where Hagstrum House would end up being built you are saying that there were houses there too?

R: No, not between Griffith and Wirt. That was all nothing on the left side going down.

D: How about north of Lexington? You know where Hagstrum House is now. How about the street from it? Were there houses there?

R: No, that was Evans Field.

D: When the project went in and in the few years during the war years and then in the 1940's, did it seem like a lot of people either moved in or moved out of the homes that surrounded the project?

R: A lot of people whose homes were taken then they moved in there. Then you were allowed to make only so much to live in there. If you exceeded that, like if the minimum was \$100 or more, you had to go. They wouldn't even let you stay in there because it was a low rent housing project.

D: Originally from what you remember it was pretty nice?

R: Oh, yes. It was beautiful.

D: Thanks a lot, Steve. I really appreciate the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW