

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 678

EARLE PFUND

Interviewed

by

Evelyn Mangie

on

December 4, 1985

EARLE PFUND

Earle Pfund was born in Youngstown, Ohio, a son of John C. and Sophie Jacob Pfund and grew up on Falls Avenue on the south side of the city. After the eighth grade, he found employment but finished high school by attending night school at South High School.

Mr. Pfund had several jobs before he was accepted by the Carlson Electric Company as an apprentice, and it was as an electrical apprentice that he worked on the construction of Westlake Terrace. His skills as an electrician were employed by the United States Air Force also, while he served on active duty.

Mr. Pfund has now retired and lives with his wife at 252 Parkgate Avenue. He enjoys gardening and helping people.

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INTERVIEWEE: EARLE PFUND

INTERVIEWER: Evelyn Mangie

SUBJECT: electrical work at Westlake, Falls Avenue,
Mill Creek Park, Depression, employment

DATE: December 4, 1985

M: This is an interview with Earle Pfund for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Evelyn Mangie, on December 4, 1985, at 252 Parkgate, at about 3:00.

To start off tell me something about yourself. Were you born in Youngstown?

P: Yes, I was born on Falls Avenue on the south side of Youngstown.

M: Tell me about your parents.

P: I had a wonderful mother and a father.

M: What did your father do?

P: He worked down at United Engineering. My mother was a housewife.

M: Did you have a large family?

P: I think pretty good.

M: Sisters and brothers?

P: Three sisters and five brothers including myself, that made nine all together.

M: That is a large family. Where were you in this family? Were you the oldest, the youngest?

P: No, I was third from the end near the youngest.

M: Did you live on Falls Avenue?

P: Yes, I lived there for twenty-five years until I got married.

M: Where did you go to school?

P: Hillman. That was up on Hillman and Falls Avenue at U. S. Grant Junior High School. That was about the time that I tried to get a job and go to work.

M: After junior high?

P: After that then I went through night school to finish high school.

M: Did you finish?

P: Yes. I think that was at South High School, and it was night school. Then I got an apprenticeship and went down to the mill. I worked in the mill as an apprentice electrician helper. About 1929 the bottom fell out of everything and I got laid off. Then I got a job at General Outdoor.

M: General Outdoor?

P: Yes, it was an advertising company.

M: What was Youngstown like when you were in grade school?

P: I don't know; I couldn't tell you that.

M: What was school like? What would a day at school be like?

P: After a certain grade I think we changed rooms. We used to be in one room. The first grade teacher was Mrs. Evans. It only went to sixth grade. Then you went to Grant Junior High School starting at seventh grade.

M: You left school then and you got a job at the mill. When was that?

P: I worked there until the Depression. When 1929 came along, I got laid off.

M: That must have been tough. What was Youngstown like downtown? Do you remember?

P: No, I don't know anything about downtown Youngstown. I never went that way except when we went to church.

M: How long did you work for Carlson Electric Company before Westlake was started?

P: I was just an apprentice so it wasn't too long. Maybe it was a year or so when Westlake was started.

M: Do you remember it going up?

P: Yes, I was there when it first started.

M: Tell me all about that.

P: From what I can remember they might have had a building on one of the corners. That was all cleared out up the hill. When I went up there, they had already started on some of the basements. I think some of the first work we started to do was putting pipe in the basement walls, the forms, so they could pour cement. This pipe that I am speaking of is called conduit; it is an electrical pipe used just for pulling wire through it. It was made at Youngstown Sheet & Tube, Struthers Plant.

M: The electrical pipes go under the cement?

P: They are in the cement. The plug is on the wall. Those were the base ones that had basements. I remember doing a couple of them. I don't know if it was before they started the first floor or not. Up at the far end there was a building, quite a large one, where there was no basement in it. It was just a slab. They poured that in. I remember we worked on that I think for a day and a half probably. We had only about half of the pipe in the building and they wanted to pour. We hurried up and got a little more and they started to pour half of it, that half. It took them a day to pour that half of that building. Then they had to wait until we got the rest of it done. Then they poured that. As they went along they gained speed at pouring the cement.

M: They got better at it.

P: Oh, yes, they got better at it. When they got down the hill a little farther I know that they would send over to the office and say that they were going to start pouring on so and so building at 11:00. They would load up material and everything and run over there with a bunch of men and rough that floor in. Roughing in is installing conduit that will be encased in the cement, or covered, or be inside of the walls, ceilings and floors. We had to have a three hour start to rough in the deck or form that the cement would be poured on, to keep ahead of the cement finishers. If you didn't get out of the way, you would get cement poured on you.

M: Did they make the cement in trucks like now?

P: No, they had a batch plant over there, and they mixed it there. That was before the trucks came with mix in. They didn't have those kinds of trucks then.

M: Did they just make it in a batch?

P: Yes, they had a great, big tub. Of course, the bottom was slanted so that it would come out of a door. That sat on the truck. They would drive up to this batch plant and they would fill that bucket up. It made more than one batch. They would just pour that in the truck and he would take off, and another truck would drive up and he would take off. They just unloaded them that fast up there, so soon, as they would get unloaded and smoothed out. You had to watch that they didn't knock your . . . Those buckets were pretty heavy. You would tie them up with steel tie wire because if they hit it with the bucket, they just went over; that's all. That was the way they did that. Of course, when they poured the basements, they did the same thing. They brought the bucket over and poured it down through there. That wall was about one foot thick.

M: Do you remember the specifications being really rigid?

P: Yes, I would say they were.

M: Were they different from other . . .

P: I didn't see too many other projects going up in places where they had real strict . . . Up there I know the inspector would inspect the cement with those cones. You take your cement and put it in this cone, set it upside down on a flat surface, and then lift the cone up. The cement is only allowed to fall down so much and spread out. It has got to be stiff. A cone is used in testing a mixture of cement.

M: With the fresh . . .

P: Fresh cement has got to be a little stiff. If it runs too much, you have too much water in it. It won't make good cement. This way they made good cement, and there had to be just so much fall to it. If it fell too much, then that guy on the batch plant got the devil; the specifications for the cement were wrong. They were really strict about that.

M: How about the specifications on the electrical work?

P: That wasn't so bad there. You had a plan that you had to go by. That was what you had to put in. The one thing

- they particularly had their own inspector . . . Lee Starwell, one of our members for . . . He was actually a business agent for us. He was real strict.
- M: What do you mean for you, for the company?
- P: For the housing project. He worked for the housing project. They had inspectors for everybody up there, carpenters and everybody.
- M: Would he have been employed by the government?
- P: Oh, yes, I think so.
- M: Was there anything different in the electrical specifications that would have been on any other job if you can remember?
- P: No, I think at that time in a project where there were a lot of people that they always wired with conduit and then pulled the wires in conduit.
- M: Was it copper wire?
- P: Oh, yes, it was copper.
- M: It was copper wire.
- P: Regular copper wire with insulation. It was the same kind they would run any other place.
- M: Wasn't that early for copper? Didn't they use something before that?
- P: No, they used copper for years and years and years. They still do today. A lot of times the aluminum didn't work out too good. They had copper for years and years. The only thing they changed was the insulation on it. It pulls a lot easier now. Before you used to have a struggle because it had a braid on it. There was a lot of friction, and you couldn't pull it. You had to grease it and all that kind of stuff.
- M: Those inspectors who you were talking about, were they hired by the government?
- P: Yes, they were hired and paid by the government.
- M: The federal government?
- P: The housing project transcended. One of the jobs I had there was putting the plaster covers on the boxes. If they ran a conduit up the wall and they put a box there, they would plaster that in. Then you would have to bring that

- out to the fresh wall so that it would be flatter. You had to put the plaster cover on before they plastered them. They would tie the pipe up and put the box on. That was what the electricians would do.
- M: So that the plaster wouldn't get inside of the boxes.
- P: Yes, and to get it flush with the wall. You don't want the box way back in there. It should be flush with the wall. I had the job of plumbing four feet up from the floor there. They had a metal baseboard down there. That is what the plasterers left there. I plumbed from that up to where the switches and receptacles were and adjusted the box to that. The covers came within a quarter of an inch. You also have a half of an inch one, and a three-quarter of an inch one, and an inch one. You just pick out the right one to fit in there. If it didn't hold the level right and you got it too far back in, they would catch you and tell you to go over and change that. Mostly it worked out. You couldn't have them a little crooked. They had to be right with the screw holes or they would get after you. They would holler.
- M: Was it a congenial bunch? Was it pleasant working over there?
- P: Oh, yes, I think with the electricians, yes. Most everybody worked together. I don't think it was like it is today. There wasn't much friction between the trades like there seems to be today. The carpenters would help the electricians with something. They didn't deliberately put something in your way so that you had to move it or anything.
- M: There wasn't any union saying you weren't allowed to do this or that?
- P: We had unions.
- M: You had unions?
- P: Yes. All the unions worked together pretty good. When you get them a little mixed, that is where you get the trouble. Back in those days everybody knew they had to work because nice jobs were coming along and businesses were starting to boom a little bit, so everybody was glad to be working.
- M: I was under the impression that some of the companies got their start working at Westlake.
- P: Yes, I believe so. I didn't get into too much of that. I think Heller-Murray was one of the big contractors on that.
- M: They were already big. That wasn't their big start.

P: Well, they weren't that big. Nobody was that big in Youngstown. When most of them left there, they were bigger than they were when they started.

M: It helped them.

P: Yes, it helped them along quite a bit. Carlson was a pretty good size before that. I don't think that helped them too much. They had done work down around Youngstown.

M: Howlong did the job at Westlake last?

P: I don't think I was there when it finished. I don't remember wire and hanging fixtures and putting the receptacles on. I don't remember that. I was out of there. I think I was maybe moved down around town.

One good thing about the housing was that I got a raise. The standard of the housing required them to pay the men more than what we were getting. I worked up there for a month and a half or two months. My boss came up to me one day and said that I got a little extra in my pay that day because they had been underpaying us. The housing project said that we had to make so much money. I forget how much it was that I got off of that, but I was rich there for a couple of days. It must have been about \$40 or \$50 at one crack.

M: They had to bring it up.

P: Yes, back from when I started to work on the project.

M: Right from when you started.

P: Yes.

M: That would have added up.

P: It wasn't too much. I think maybe it was 60¢ or something like that.

M: You saw the projects done from the very beginning?

P: Yes.

M: For about a month.

P: Yes, I didn't see the clearing off of the land.

M: No, but from construction.

P: From construction yes, up until most all of the buildings were standing. They started the top side and worked on down.

M: Towards Federal Street.

P: Yes. The other fellows were up there while I was down here. I was putting the covers on. Every once in a while when they would pour until the boss got disgusted with me, I put these covers on. You knew where you were going, and you had better be ready to leave the place at 8:00. You would leave and go start putting covers on. They would send somebody down at 8:00 in the morning saying that they were going to pour at such and such a time. Then they would want me to come up and watch that. The boss would send somebody to come and get me. I didn't like that job.

M: What did you have to watch?

P: That they didn't knock the pipes over. They said that I lost one, but I could never find out where it was. They would have to dig it up, find it, and reroute it another way. If it was lost, then this pourer here would say that there was another deck on top. If he was to come up for a switch, they might be able to catch it from the top coming down when they did that building again. When they put the next floor on, they could get it that way so that they wouldn't have to dig it up.

M: I have heard that the only wood in any of those buildings is a beam.

P: The beams.

M: A beam somewhere. There is a wooden beam and the rest of it is all cement, stone, brick.

P: I couldn't tell you where that is or whether there is.

M: Do you remember the stone and the metal? There was a lot of metal.

P: Oh, yes, sure, reinforcing rods, sure. That was what you had to tramp all over while you were up on that deck. That is what you tied your conduit up to on to that metal.

M: Was that from the local mills?

P: I couldn't tell you. I don't know if any mill around here made that kind of iron then or not. I couldn't say. Sheet & Tube was mostly pipe and the Campbell Works was mostly pipe and then, of course, the rod and wire part of Sheet & Tube. I don't know where the reinforcing steel came from.

M: Do you remember any other companies that worked besides Heller-Murray?

P: No, I don't think I can recall any.

M: Any people?

P: No. I just like to work and get going and not talk too much.

M: What was the feeling about the project at the time? Do you remember the way people talked about it?

P: No, I don't remember anybody saying anything about it, but that it would make a good place and a good home for somebody.

M: Do you remember any opposition at all?

P: No. I don't know if any of the people up around there hollered before, but I don't know why they would have. At that time there the only thing I saw was that it was going to improve it. It was in an area where it seemed to me that there wasn't too much anyway. It could only have been for the better.

M: Was anybody worried about accepting federal money or federal help?

P: That I don't know; I couldn't say.

M: Do you remember reading anything in the paper or anything like that?

P: No.

M: A lot of important people came down and walked around and kind of looked at what was going on. Do you remember anything like that?

P: No, I never saw anybody parading around.

M: Eleanor Roosevelt came just before they were finished. Do you remember that?

P: No. That would be about the time that I wasn't there. There wasn't too much to see when I was there.

M: When you were there in the very beginning.

P: The bottom end of it was just getting started when some of the buildings were almost completed up on top. It wasn't too long when I was there all the time. All I know was that we were supposed to work. We got done as much as we could get done.

M: How long was your day?

P: Just eight hours.

M: Eight hours?

P: From 8:00 to 4:30.

M: You had to take your lunch.

P: Oh, yes. There was a restaurant that some of the guys might have gone down to on West Federal Street. It wasn't too many of them.

M: You don't remember following in the newspaper about Eleanor coming in?

P: No, I don't remember that.

M: I think I remember reading that there was a bit of a strike when they first started. Do you remember anything like that?

P: No.

M: Maybe it wasn't the electricians; maybe it was someone else.

P: Yes, it could have been one of the other trades.

M: It took a lot longer than what they expected it to take.

P: I wasn't there all the time. I don't know just how long it was. I was back once. They had free electric. The housing project paid for their electric.

M: Yes, they always paid rent and that covered everything.

P: Then I remember going back there and working with one of the old fellows who I worked with there when they first started. He was working there too. They put the meters and the troughs outside the apartments. You will see them now. Electric meters are there. We had to run wire from there down into the basement. All the apartments were split up individually with wiring and fuses down there. It made it very easy to separate them, and then everybody paid their own electric bill.

M: Now they have to pay their own.

P: Yes, now they have to pay their own electric bill.

M: That was just recently when you had to put that in.

P: Not recently, that was years and years ago. It wasn't too

long after, maybe three years after it started or something like that.

M: They changed that soon?

P: Whenever the electric bill got too high . . . I was working with Joe Barton.

M: What else do you remember?

P: I think that is about all that I had to do with up there.

M: Can you remember anything else? Did we leave out anything?

P: Not as far as the housing project. I think that is about all I can tell you about that.

M: Someone said something about Madison Avenue being the Mason-Dixon Line. Do you remember anything like that?

P: No, I don't.

M: We haven't left out anything that you want to add?

P: No. I don't think so, not that would help you any on that project up there.

M: Thank you very, very much.

END OF INTERVIEW