

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Steel Strike Project

1937 "Little Steel" Strike

O. H. 715

LOUIS CAMPANA

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

December 17, 1982

LOUIS CAMPANA

Louis Campana was born in Youngstown on June 13, 1928. Approximately 1938 Louis started to work at the Pyatt Street Market, a social economic gathering place for people of the time. Louis won a local competition for Golden Gloves, and won silver in a regional tournament. Louis served in the army after World War II where he got his G.E.D. He is a member of Holy Family Church in Poland, Ohio. He was married in 1951 and has five children. He enjoys fishing.

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INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy

SUBJECT: 1937 "Little Steel" strike

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B: This is Philip Bracy for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. Today I'm talking with Louis Campana concerning the Pyatt Market located in Youngstown, Ohio.

First of all, Lou, if you could tell us about your background, where you went to school and where you grew up?

C: I was born and raised in Youngstown. I was born June 13, 1928. I went to school at St. Stan's, Garfield, James Hillman, and then quit school and went to work. I worked on the market, worked for various people there and then went to the Army. I came back and went to work on the market again.

B: Before we get directly into the market you were involved in boxing for awhile. Could you tell me a little bit about how you got involved in boxing and some of the fights that you were involved in?

C: It wasn't that much really, I just did a little boxing.

B: You were in the Golden Gloves?

C: Almost everybody did that; there was nothing else to do.

B: I realize you were a little kid at the time so you may not remember too much about this, but you were present when they opened fire in the 1937 strike. Do you have recollections of that?

C: Yes. I remember the chaos. That was done at the steel mills we were talking about. My father, mother, and sister were down there. I remember the chaos but didn't really know what was going on. I remember people running around,

being pushed, running over, firing, policemen on horses clubbing people. I just vaguely remember it.

B: You said the police were riding horses beating up on people?

C: They were beating people up, yes.

B: How were they able to do that when they were shooting? It seemed like they were a target.

C: No. The way I remember it is the other way around. I remember people were trying to get through there and other people were trying to stop them from going in. That was how it all started if I remember it.

B: They were trying to go in the mill?

C: Yes, they were trying to bring people in the mill to go to work. These guys were picketing. In those days they didn't limit picketing; people would camp there for days and days. They had nothing to do, but just stand around in front of them.

B: Could you tell me the location of the Pyatt Street Market?

C: Pyatt Street Market is located on the south side of Youngstown between Market Street and Erie Street; it's really Lois Court, Erie Street. It runs east and west on Pyatt and goes south 150 yards or 200 yards; then it goes north a whole block from Pyatt to Wayne Avenue. That's it.

B: What was the major seller there in the market? Some of the larger people who were selling, what did they sell?

C: Mostly fresh produce, vegetables. Everything was sold there. They used to sell pets, chickens, turkeys, ducks; anything imaginable in those days would be sold at the market.

B: What kind of food venders did they have? Did they have popcorn sellers?

C: There were people who sold popcorn, caramel candy, hot dogs. These were independents. The main object of this market was fresh fruits, vegetables and meats.

B: When did you first start working at the market?

C: When I was about six or seven years old. I used to shell peas. I would make 2¢ a quart shelling peas and beans. When I got a little older, as you graduated in strength and age you just picked up bigger jobs and better paying jobs. You just graduated from one to the other.

B: Who did you start with?

C: I don't know, there were various farmers who would come in that would hire you on a daily basis. If you were a good worker you would get paid to come back and you would have a steady job, otherwise you didn't last long.

B: How long did you work at the market?

C: From about seven, doing various jobs, until I was about fifteen and got a steady job. Then I graduated from the market to a distribution warehouse for century foods, which was started there on Pyatt Street Market. I worked there until they closed up in 1951.

B: The reason you were able to work there was because there was no child labor law at that time?

C: I don't know. I don't think there were child labor laws but I don't think anyone would have enforced them anyhow. A lot of people didn't want these jobs. They were menial jobs and it was a lot of hard work. The main reason we worked there was because we lived near there.

B: Did you work unloading the boxcars?

C: As I graduated on and got older in years I got a steady job there. I worked for Lou Chevlin. My first job was driving and delivering. We used to unload boxcars at the railroad site on Front Street. We would have to go down there and unload the boxcar and bring the merchandise up to the warehouse and unload it in the warehouse. As it was sold we would have to put it back on the trucks and deliver it.

B: What kind of things did you unload?

C: Everything that came in with boxcars: Perishable fruits and vegetables, lettuce, bananas, potatoes, citrus fruits, apples, oranges.

B: What kind of wages did you get in those days?

C: First I started off with about \$18 a week and worked on up.

B: How many hours was that for?

C: It was unlimited hours; you worked until you were finished.

B: That was for six days?

C: Six days, yes. You only had three full days, and then Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays were half days. What you consider half days might be eight hour work, but that

was a half of a day.

- B: What was the importance of Watt Street? I realize it wasn't directly related to the Market, but in talking we mentioned it had significance.
- C: Watt Street was really a main drag. It came right off of South Avenue Bridge. At that time it seemed that the east end of town was more popular for people. It had more services; I guess you would call them flop houses, restaurants, things of that nature. One of its functions though was if somebody came from out . . .
- B: One of its functions though was if somebody came from out of town they could go . . .
- C: There were different people that owned buildings there, restaurants or bars; they would put them up and help them get on their feet until they found a different means of working and maybe relocate to other places in town.
- B: Did you drive at all for the Market? Did you make deliveries?
- C: Yes. I started off at the bottom and then I worked up to helper, driver. I learned how to drive semi. I worked myself up to driving a tractor-trailer.
- B: What were the steps at such and such an age?
- C: It wasn't age, it was more or less supply and demand. If you were lucky you would advance quick, if not you might stay there for years. There was no union. There wasn't any set time you were in. It was a matter of demand.
- B: When you started out you started out selling peas, was that the bottom of the drum?
- C: Normally, because I wasn't strong enough and big enough to do the other jobs. As I got older and stronger, as I say, I just graduated. Maybe you started carrying baskets which were light and as you got older and stronger you went to work for people that carried wholesale, business people that had bought 100 pounds of potatoes. In those days oranges were double crates as you know them today; Oranges, lemons, lettuce, everything half the size that it used to be in those days. In those days everything came packed. Your greens were packed in ice which added weight. There wasn't anything light like you picture it today where everything is dry-packed. Everything was wet, cold and heavy.
- B: Were there any restaurants or anything else immediately close to the market area itself?

- C: There were two restaurants. One they ran in the market and Ann's restaurant was on Erie Street.
- B: They served basically . . .
- C: They served basically people that worked there at the market plus customers that walked in.
- B: I mean the type of food.
- C: Just basic food.
- B: You mentioned you worked there until about 1951 on and off?
- C: I worked there until I came out of the Army in 1953 and then they had moved from the market and bought their own warehouse on Meridian Road.
- B: What, in your opinion, caused the market to decline to what it is today?
- C: Changing the way of living. In those days people used to do a lot of canning and would come to the market and buy their stuff to do canning. Talking about the 1940's and 1950's a lot of people were doing canning then. In September and August a lot of times it was even impossible to get in there. As far as decline, our changes in living. Canning became more popular; it became cheaper. It was more feasible to go out and buy it than to pack it yourself and go through all the trouble. Supermarkets got bigger; there were a lot more stores eliminating independents. That's probably the main reason for decline.
- B: It was the shift from the smaller specialty kinds of stores to the larger supermarkets, was that the largest factor?
- C: That and canning. It's hard to visualize now the amount of people that canned and the amount of produce they would buy for canning. It's just hard to describe. It was such a big item in those days.
- The price of peaches in those days were around \$1.50 or in that vicinity for a bushel. Sugar was a lot cheaper. Now you're talking \$20 or \$25 a bushel. Plus I guess people are a little lazy. It's just as cheap to go out and buy it as it is to do it yourself; that's another reason I imagine.
- B: For someone who was your age at that time, you worked six days a week or seven?
- C: We worked almost seven days a week. A lot of times we would leave at 2:00 in the morning, Sunday morning, to go to Cleveland or Pittsburgh markets to pick up a load. By the time you loaded

your truck and came back in it would be probably 1:00, 2:00, or 3:00 the next day. You would have to unload the truck. A lot of days were sixteen hour days, a lot of them.

B: Was there livestock that was sold there and killed at the market?

C: When I first started going to the market there were quite a bit of chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese. A lot of times people would even sell pets there. As things progressed and people were going into buying chilled poultry it just eliminated it. It gets extinct from not being publicized.

B: If you worked six or seven days a week what kind of entertainment did you have to do? Being kids you must have found things to do for enjoyment or relaxation.

C: It's just like anybody else. There were always things to do. Of course, you were tired and you didn't have too much time, but you would go to the movies and drink a little beer. Idora Park in those days was popular. Geneva on the Lake was popular if you had money and you had a car to drive up there. There were a lot of things you did on the weekends.

B: You also had a lot of theaters in Youngstown didn't you?

C: There were a lot of theaters. Probably the best remembered in my mind was the Palace; they had a lot of stage shows there and I used to like watching stage shows. They had stage shows, big bands. It was probably one of the nicest theaters in town.

B: Were there other theaters?

C: Probably eight or nine or ten of them. It's kind of hard to remember them. You always had the three major theaters: Paramount, Warner, and the Palace. I'm talking in earlier days. When money was a little tighter the Reading was a popular theater. You could get in there for a dime. You would stay there all day. They used to show three full features and cartoons.

B: Is it true that Youngstown used to have some good burlesque theaters during that period?

C: They had one burlesque theater, Rand, and then it changed to the Park.

B: What kind of acts or big names played in Youngstown?

C: In the Palace you're talking about?

B: Yes.

C: All your big names played. All the burlesque queens played in the burlesque. All the top acts, I guess this was part of their circuit.

B: Youngstown was prominent in both of those circuits?

C: Yes. They were on the main circuit. All of your top-notch bands, top-notch people all played here.

B: Could you tell me if there were any professional sports being played in Youngstown when you were growing up?

C: I remember the Youngstown Browns, I think they were a semi-pro baseball team that played out at Idora Park. I remember the Youngstown Bears when they played there at the South Field House, they were a basketball team.

B: That was approximately what year?

C: In the fifties. I remember a lot of good boxers from out of this area too.

B: What division or weight were they in?

C: Welter, middle-weight. Tommy Bell fought Sugar Ray for the welter-weight championship in Cleveland. Tony Gennaro fought LaMotta. Arcido fought Lou Aires. They were quite a few good boxers; I can't remember them all. Chester Hoover, Red Damato, there were a lot of prominent boxers, it would be a shame to try to name them because I would miss someone.

B: Did you meet any of them personally?

C: I knew most of the ones that I mentioned personally.

B: Did you spar with any of them?

C: I guess on occasions every now and then.

B: Did everyone work out in one particular gym?

C: No, there were all different stables in town. In fact, the Niles and Warren stable was one of the best. They give the Cordy trophy--he got killed in Vietnam--I think they still give that trophy out for him.

B: He was one of the Marines that was in a theater status?

C: No. He wasn't in a statue, but he got killed on Iwo Jima. They give this trophy out for the best fighter, the locals.