YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Resident Experiences

O. H. 770

RALPH MADISON

Interviewed

by

Joseph Drobney

on

October 22, 1985

RALPH MADISON

Ralph Madison was born on March 7, 1914, in Youngstown, Ohio. Mr. Madison, the son of Isaac and Ida Madison, was educated in the Youngstown City School system and graduated from South High School in 1933. Mr. Madison, after graduation from high school, participated in the government sponsored Civilian Conservation Corps. He was employed for 36 years by the U. S. Steel Corporation, then was an employee of Bliss Manufacturing from 1972 to 1974. Mr. Madison was a Mahoning County Sheriff's Deputy for eleven years.

Ralph Madison and his wife, Florence, lived at the Westlake Terrace Housing complex during the first decade of that project's existence. Mr. Madison and his wife raised four children, three sons and one daughter. He was a member of Tabernacle Baptist church. Ralph Madison, an articulate, easy to talk to individual who made this interviewer's job truly a pleasure, died on November 17, 1985.

Joseph C. Drobney

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INTERVIEWEE: RALPH MADISON

INTERVIEWER: Joseph Drobney

SUBJECT: resident conditions, Civilian Conservation Corps, life in Youngstown

DATE: October 22, 1985

D: This is an interview with Ralph Madison for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Joe Drobney, on October 22, 1985, at 2634 Stocker Avenue, in Youngstown, at approximately 10:00 in the morning.

Mr. Madison, just to get started could you tell me a little bit about your early life, for example, when were you born, where were you born, a little bit about your parents, how many brothers and sisters that you had?

M: I was born in March 1914 on the south side of Youngstown. I was the second oldest boy. My older brother was one year and a half older than me. Altogether there were eight children, three girls and five boys. During my childhood we moved onto Earle Avenue where I attended Delason Grade School and Princeton Junior High School. Later we moved. We traded our home for a farm. We found out later that they had several mortgages on it, so we went to court to obtain our home back. Between time, I went to a school, Science Hill Junior High, and I finished my last year of schooling at South High School.

D: You mentioned that you were one of eight brothers and sisters.

M: Right.

D: As you were growing up, was there a big gap in age?

M: The first three of us were close together, but there was more space between the younger ones. My younger sister, Pearl was ten years older than my youngest sister, Lelia. My youngest brother was seven years older than Lelia. First there were three boys and then I had a sister, another brother and a

sister. They came in that line, but the three boys were the oldest. We learned how to do the housework.

D: During the first ten or twelve years of your life which would put us into the mid-1920's, were both of your parents alive?

M: Yes. My father died in 1946 and my mother in 1949.

D: What did your father do for a living, Mr. Madison?

M: My father was a bricklayer for U. S. Steel.

D: So he worked in a foundry.

M: Yes, steel mill.

D: Where was that? Which foundry was that?

M: Then it was Carnegie Steel Company Ohio Works.

D: That was in Youngstown?

M: That was in Youngstown.

D: Growing up on the south side, again in the first ten or twelve years of your life, did you live in a house or in an apartment?

M: Yes, my father bought a home. It had just been built, and we moved into that. During those days we had outhouses outside. We didn't have the running water convenience. We had gas for lights and that type of thing.

D: That first home that you can remember, what street was that on, on the south side?

M: I don't remember the one I was born in on Cleveland Street. The first one I actually have more memory for was on Earle Avenue.

D: There on Earle Avenue, from what you can remember, how would you characterize the neighborhood? Was everybody kind of the steelworker or was it all working people?

M: Earle Avenue was all working people. We had all types. We had streetcar conductors and people working in the different mills. It was a mixed neighborhood. We had people in most all walks of life.

D: You mentioned it was occupationally mixed. How about ethnic? Was it all black or was it mixed?

M: No, it was a mixed neighborhood. It was mostly white with a mixture of black in it.

D: Would you say it was Italian, Slovak, Polish?

M: Ethnically it seemed to be mostly Anglo-Saxon Americans more so than foreign extraction.

D: You lived on Earle Avenue until about what year?

M: Up until 1938 when I got married. There was one time when we moved to trade for this farm. We moved from the farm and between that time we moved from place to place until we were able to get our home back.

D: Originally the trade was your house on Earle Avenue for this farm?

M: Correct.

D: As you were growing up you mentioned you went to Delason Grade School.

M: Right.

D: And then Princeton Junior High School.

M: I carried the Vindicator during the time I was going to Princeton Junior High.

D: Tell me a little bit about that. What was your area of delivery? Was it very wide? How did you get the papers around?

M: No, it wasn't that wide because I would pick up the papers on my way from school at one of the streets near the school. Then on my way home I would deliver the papers because my route ended on Earle Avenue.

D: How did you get around? Was this on foot?

M: That was on foot until eventually I got a bicycle, but it was mostly on foot.

D: How about school itself, Delason Grade School and Princeton Junior High? What were your general impressions of the school? Did you like school?

M: I liked it because I liked the teachers and the school wasn't too far from my home. I liked most all of the aspects of the school.

D: At that time when you went to grade school at Delason and also at South High School, did those schools kind of service almost the entire area of the south side? How did that work?

M: From the grade school . . . Most of the children from Oak Hill back to Glenwood and from Earle or Chicago down around Delason were all going to Delason School. There were quite a few attending school then.

D: Of your general impression, from what you can remember while you were in school back in the 1920's and into the early 1930's at South High School, how about the ethnic mix of all of the schools you went to? Was it pretty much like your neighborhood, a mix?

M: Yes. Actually in my graduating class in high school there were six blacks who graduated that year in that class.

D: Out of the entire graduating class?

M: Out of the entire graduating class of over 200. There weren't that many blacks in the neighborhood.

D: At the time when you ended up graduating from high school in 1933, your general impression was that it was something unusual or unique for a black family to have a high school student graduate. Did blacks usually go on through the twelve years or did they have to drop out to work?

M: There were quite a few who would drop out of school. In this neighborhood there weren't that many blacks living there. They were on the other side of town. There were more blacks than in this area of the neighborhood.

D: What do you mean by the other side?

M: I mean on the northwest side at a place we called the Monkey's Nest.

D: You mentioned your father was a bricklayer for what was first Carnegie, and then it became U. S. Steel.

M: Right. My father came to Youngstown from Pennsylvania. While working in Pennsylvania, he was a bricklayer there. When he first came to Youngstown, he was told that they were going to put him in the brickmason department but not as a bricklayer. He proceeded to talk to whoever was in charge. They sent word that he left Pennsylvania as a bricklayer and he was going to be a bricklayer here. He was the only black bricklayer at that time.

D: When he worked in the U. S. Steel plant in Youngstown during the 1920's as you were growing up, did he work as a bricklayer?

M: He worked as a bricklayer, yes.

D: Did he ever talk about or give you any impression about what the steel mill, the steel plant, was like in the 1920's? I'm talking about things like conditions, his working hours, the salary, anything like that.

M: Salary was low and his working hours were long. He would leave home in the morning and it was dark. When he would get back home, it was dark. They were working a twelve hour shift. They had horses in the mill and working conditions weren't . . . What you wore to work was what you wore home from work.

D: You mentioned twelve hour shifts, so he was gone a full part of every day in that mill?

M: That's right.

D: Was this five days a week, six days a week?

M: Sometimes, but then work would get slow. Some days he would be lucky to work two days a week.

D: You mentioned that for a long time he was the only black bricklayer

M: Only black bricklayer, yes.

D: Did he ever give you an indication as far as the general makeup of some of these steel plants? Was it a place, especially in the 1920's, that a lot of blacks were beginning to work in?

M: Not then. The few who worked there were working as laborers. He would talk about . . . It seemed to be in certain departments certain groups worked just like your open-hearth floor and things like that. There were some Irish in the department he worked in, and English. That seemed to be the makeup of the plant.

D: You mean the different ethnic groups worked in the different parts of the plant.

M: That happened then when I was down in the mill, the same thing.

D: Let's talk a little bit about Youngstown in the 1920's. You are still on Earle Avenue and you are first going to Delason and then onto Princeton Junior High. Did you go downtown a lot, down into the center of the city?

M: We walked down or rode. We had streetcars that you could go in. We would walk one way and usually ride back the other way. There were certain places that you didn't go, and there were a lot of places that you could go. In some theaters and restaurants you didn't go into.

D: Why didn't you go?

M: Because you wouldn't be served, besides money was scarce.

D: If you were black, you wouldn't go?

M: You wouldn't go, right. It was the same thing in theaters. They had a certain place for you to sit in theaters. It was upstairs in the theater. We would sit there.

D: You can actually remember going to theaters as a boy and being told to sit in a certain area?

M: Oh, yes. You knew just where you would go to sit.

D: Were you directly told by the management or was this kind of something that everybody knew?

M: No, this was something that they didn't say. They only sold you tickets to certain places.

D: Where the ticket said you sat that was where you did?

M: That's where you sat. They didn't sell you tickets for sitting downstairs. You might ask, but you wouldn't get it.

D: Of course, at that time Youngstown was a literal city of theaters. Can you remember particular names of theaters where you, as a young, black boy, had to sit in certain places?

M: I had to sit in the Palace Theater like that. There were very few theaters that . . . In the Strand you sat near the back, and Park Theater you did the same thing. I remember that.

D: Did the black community in Youngstown in the 1920's . . . Was there a certain theater or nightclub or recreation hall where blacks could go as kind of a community?

M: Yes. There were all black places, and there were certain beer gardens that weren't all black but that you could go to. The ones with any class, you didn't go to.

D: Compare Youngstown now to Youngstown in the late 1920's, early 1930's?

M: As far as the buildings themselves, downtown Youngstown used to be a busy place, but anymore after dark you don't see anybody down there hardly. During that time there was always something going on. People were downtown shopping. You had better bus service because the buses used to run all night. Now they have stopped.

D: Growing up in Youngstown in the 1920's and into the 1930's you are saying that the public transit system used to go all night?

M: Yes. After the last streetcar or bus went at 12:40, then you would catch one on the hour during the night. People depended a lot on public transportation riding to and from work and practically anywhere you went. People didn't have cars like they do now.

D: When you went downtown, did the family go down on a Saturday or was it a special day when you went down, or did you regularly go downtown during the course of the week?

M: No, mostly on the weekend. When I was a kid, we would go down usually to pay our paper bill. Usually the Vindicator and the Telegram would have treats and prizes for carriers that if you got a new customer, then you got to see a free show. Those things happened on Saturday.

D: You got like, little privileges from the Vindicator?

M: Privileges, right. They were competing. They had the Vindicator and the Telegram, so if one would have a show, then the other would have the show too, if you got new customers.

D: Mr. Madison, once we get into the 1930's by this time in the early 1930's you are into high school. You are going to South High School. We are also getting into the Depression. Can you remember exactly how the Depression affected your family, other families you knew? For example, did your father get laid off? How did that work?

M: Yes. When the Depression hit, we hadn't gotten back into our home on the south side. We were living in the area called the Sharon Line. We moved off of the farm and we were living there until that litigation got finished. I remember soup kitchens out on the Sharon Line. You took a pot and you would go up there. They would give you a pot of soup and bread. They had the meal three times a day. If you knew the right people, a lot of times you would get meat in with the soup.

D: With this Sharon Line are we talking about over in Pennsylvania or Ohio?

M: Streetcars ran from Youngstown to Sharon, Pennsylvania. It was known as the Sharon Line or the line to Sharon.

D: Who ran those soup kitchens? Was it the church or the community?

M: No, the state seemed to run it. They appointed people to work the soup kitchen.

D: The state of Ohio?

M: Yes, or the city or someone like that. They had them located in certain areas.

D: How about your father now? Did he get laid off?

M: Yes, he got laid off occasionally or he would work one day maybe on a pay. My father spoke several languages, so he knew a lot of people. A lot of people would see that he got meat and different things like that.

D: By several languages do you mean like Italian, Slovak?

M: Italian, Slovak, Croatian. He was in the mill. They would call everybody into a place they called the machine shop. He would address the safety meetings. They were required to have safety meetings every so often. Since he spoke these different languages, he would address the safety meetings.

D: Many of the people working in the mill like Slovaks and Italians probably couldn't understand English very well.

M: Right, that's right. That was part of his job.

D: Because of his ability to speak these languages, your father was kind of an interpreter?

M: Right. People would be surprised. They would say that he spoke their language better than they did. He got to be known. Everyone knew Isaac because of that.

D: At this time in the 1920's and into the Depression did you hear many different languages being spoken on the street and in the stores in Youngstown?

M: Yes, especially in certain stores because certain people went to certain stores. They would speak their language. He used to go to Hughes and the Deluxe Markets. I forget if they were Croatian or what. I forget what language, but he spoke to the workers in their own language.

D: At this time Youngstown had many different . . .

M: Many different ethnic groups, yes.

D: And many different languages.

M: Right.

D: Getting back into that Depression time, you indicated that your father would work for a while instead of being laid off all at once.

M: That's right. He might work a day or two. Then he might work a while, especially during the Depression. There wasn't much going, so you didn't work.

D: You mentioned soup lines out on McGuffey Heights. How about downtown?

M: They had soup lines all over not only just out here. They had a place over on the west side that later gave flour. They gave you a card and on certain days you could take that card. You would go get flour or grapefruit. They would give you commodities like they are doing now. They had a big place right where the brewery is on West Avenue.

D: Where the brewery is?

M: Yes. You would take your card on certain days. I remember we would take the wagon and go. We would pull the wagon over there and we would get certain commodities.

D: You would pull a wagon.

M: Yes, a play wagon, a kid wagon. We had wagons when we were kids.

D: Did it seem like everybody on Earle Avenue there was being affected by the Depression? Was everybody out of work?

M: Everybody about all of the time was affected by the Depression.

D: Of course, during this in about 1933 or so, was that when you graduated?

M: It wasn't as bad in 1933. When I was on the Sharon Line, it was worse. During 1933, it was practically still in the Depression When I graduated from high school, you weren't able to dress like you are now. We went down to one of the secondhand stores to get me a blue coat and white flannel pants.

D: For graduation?

M: For graduation, yes. That was where I got mine, in the secondhand stores on East Federal Street. My dad was still working now and then in 1933.

D: How about the rest of the family? You mentioned you delivered papers. How about your brothers or sisters or even your mother? Did anybody get little, odd jobs here and there to help out?

M: The majority of them weren't old enough. My mother had so many kids that she had her hands full at the house. My oldest brother was helping to work. He stopped school so that he could help to work.

D: He stopped his high school?

M: Yes.

D: Did he ever end up graduating?

M: I think in later years he went back. He quit early in order to help, yes.

D: Can you remember some of the jobs or the work he did?

M: Yes, he worked at a laundry. There were a couple of laundries there that he worked at. Then he was a bellhop for awhile. He was a bellhop down at the Ohio Hotel. He did that.

D: He was a bellhop down at the old Ohio Hotel?

M: Yes.

D: As a bellhop was that the type of job that a young, black kid got if he worked at the hotel?

M: Yes, that was the only thing you got. You picked up tips and things as a bellhop down there. He did quite a bit of that.

D: When you graduated then in 1933 . . .

M: I graduated in 1933 and I went to CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] In one line that I was in they were asking you if you were on relief. I got in another line. One of the girls who was signing them up I had graduated with. She asked me if I wanted to go. I told her yes. My buddy and I went down on Monday. Tuesday we got the notice that we would leave on Wednesday.

D: This was in 1933 and you were in the Civilian Conservation Corps?

M: Right. I was there a year and a half.

D: You mentioned about being on relief. Was this a government provided relief?

M: Yes, government and state. If you didn't have any income, then you would have to go down to the Allied Council. They would take care of you, food and things like that.

D: Did they give people money or just things like food?

M: No, they gave you food and things, yes. I know some people got what they called script papers that were worth so much.

D: They could kind of trade those for groceries.

M: Trade for groceries.

D: You said you were in for a year and a half. What happened when you came back to Youngstown? What did you do?

M: When I came back, I got into the mill in 1936.

D: Was there any specific reason you left the CCC?

M: Yes, I got tired. I talked to my dad. He said that they were beginning to hire in the mill. I had enough. I spent eighteen months and I was driving truck. I wanted something else.

D: In about late 1935 or early 1936 was when you would have come back to Youngstown.

M: Yes. I forget what month I started in the mill. I wasn't back too long. My dad told me that the mill wasn't any place for a young fellow, but I wanted a job.

D: What did he mean that the mill wasn't any place for a young fellow?

M: He wanted me to try to get a job some place else if I could. My older brother was working down in the hotel and doing things like that, but I didn't want any of that kind of work. I wanted something where I could pick up a little money. He knew conditions in the mill and I didn't. He said that the mill wasn't any place for a young fellow.

D: Because of the bad conditions?

M: The bad conditions, right.

D: When you first started then, this was at U. S. Steel?

M: Right.

D: Which plant was that? Where was it at?

M: That was Ohio Works.

D: What exactly was your job?

M: I was a laborer, general laborer. You did anything that they wanted you to do.

D: Do you remember what your hourly wages started out as?

M: I was making $3.76 a day.

D: About how many hours were you working a day? Do you remember?

M: Ten. You were just getting paid a straight rate. There wasn't any time and a half or any of that stuff then.

D: Was this five, six, seven days a week? How did that work?

M: Usually five days and sometimes six. It all depended upon the

work and how much work they had.

D: How about things like accidents or dangerous conditions in the mill? Do you ever recall a mill accident while you were working there in the late 1930's?

M: Yes, I saw fingers get cut off and things like that. People seemed to be more careful than they are now. If you got hurt, then you might lose your job.

D: Tell me about that. Was there any type of protection for the worker at all as far as insurance, health insurance, anything at all?

M: No, they didn't have that much. If you got hurt, they sent you to a hospital. It wasn't like they had later. They didn't have the safety meetings and they didn't have the protection like you have now. You would get a shovel and pick and you would be digging ditches and doing different things like that. Then they had an open-hearth that would be torn down by hand. It was a furnace that they would make steel in. You would take a bar and go in and tear that furnace down. You would throw out bricks. Sometimes you would go to grab a brick. You would have pads on your hands. You would grab at a brick. If you missed the brick, you would keep running because it was hot in there. They eventually came up with wooden shoes that you would tie onto your feet. That would keep your shoes from getting burnt. Sometimes the shoes were burnt anyway when you came out.

D: During the time when your father worked down there at what was Carnegie works, and then Ohio Works of U. S. Steel, and in the first few years that you worked there before the war, how about the union? Was there a union?

M: There wasn't a union when I started there, no. There was no union.

D: There wasn't a union. Were people talking about getting a union?

M: Yes, later they talked about it. Foremen discouraged it. Before they had a union in there, they would send you home anytime. They would holler at you. I worked in the brick part. Since my dad was a mason, they got me into that department. They had me unloading or stacking brick on wheelbarrows and wheeling them to the furnace so they could build them up. They never gave me a chance to work with him. I went to general labor because I wasn't getting a break there.

D: You are saying that generally this talk about union or organizing was discouraged by the foreman.

M: Yes, it was discouraged. They finally worked it in. They used to have members at the gate wanting you to join. Well, you didn't have to join. Finally they got so strong. They used

to have membership checks. They wanted to see your books to see if you belonged. They would try to keep you out of the plant. A bunch of them would be at the gate trying to keep you out of the plant.

D: You mean the union members were at the gate.

M: Yes, they would try to stop you, right. They would call it dues check.

D: They didn't want you to work in a plant if you weren't in the union?

M: Right.

D: We are getting into that time of the big 1937 strike. What do you remember about that?

M: I know they had pickets on the gate, but the biggest one was up around where they brought the state out. That didn't affect us too much because we had practically been laid off. I had been laid off. I worked a while and then they laid us off. I remember when they had the army in here and things like that. They were walking the streets and doing things like that.

D: They were walking the streets where?

M: Up around Brier Hill. Up around Sheet & Tube.

D: Did you go over to see what was going on during that time?

M: You went and looked. You could see the soldiers marching and patroling the areas.

D: Did you know anybody who was directly involved in that strike?

M: No.

D: How about the general talk back in the neighborhood or around? Were people sympathetic to the workers? What was the general atmosphere?

M: Yes, people were sympathetic because they were out of work and they weren't getting money. That was what they wanted. They figured that unions wouldn't make conditions a whole lot better. We went from $3 up to $5 a day when they started the union.

D: About when did they start the union where you worked, 1939, 1940?

M: I think it should have been around 1940.

D: Are you saying that after 1937 the union was allowed and things began to get better?

M: Yes, right. Things did get better, definitely. We got $5 plus they stopped those long hours. I saw quite a bit of improvement in the union. They stopped the long working hours for one thing.

D: It was down to eight hours a day.

M: We got the eight hour day. There were a lot of other improvements.

D: In 1938 you got married?

M: Yes.

D: At that time then, when you got married, when you had been working at the mill since the time you had graduated high school and had gone into the CCC, you had been living still on Earle Avenue, right?

M: Yes, up until I got married.

D: Where did you and your wife first live?

M: We moved on Harlem Street up on the north side. We rented a room from some people we knew. We lived there for two months. I got called back to the mill. Then I rented an apartment on Griffith Street.

D: What did you do after you got married and you were still laid off from the mill? Did you get a little odd job?

M: Yes. First I got a job downtown. A friend I knew got me a job in a poolroom in a billard hall. I worked down there for a while. My wife got pregnant and I got laid off. Next we moved in with my parents on Earle Avenue. I went to South Side Hospital. I told them that I wasn't working and that I would be willing to work. They told me to give them $10 and they would keep her for three days and longer if necessary. My sister-in-law told me about a fellow who wanted his walls washed, so I went down there and washed his walls. I got enough money and took it straight up to the hospital.

D: This was when your first child was born?

M: That was the first child. The first child cost me $10.

D: Did they ever require you at South Side to work at all?

M: No, they said they would take care of it for $10.

D: Speaking of the hospital, was South Side in the 1930's a big hospital?

M: Yes, St. Elizabeth's wasn't that large. South Side was.

D: Was South Side segregated?

M: It definitely was segregated until the period of the sixties. It was the accepted practice at that time. Over a period of ten years, my wife gave birth to three children, each time in G ward. Labor rooms were segregated, and after delivery, the white mothers' beds were lined up on the right side of the room. When it was nursing time, the white mothers were given their babies first and the black mothers were given their babies last.

D: Your first child was born in 1939?

M: Right.

D: At that time were you folks still living in that little room on Harlem?

M: No, we lived on Griffith Street across from where the project is now from October 1938 until June 1939. Then we lived on Earle Avenue with my parents until June 1940 and then moved into the Westlake Terrace Apartments.

D: What do you remember about that area while you were living on Griffith Street? First of all, before they started construction what type of area was it?

M: They called it Morrison Hill. There were a lot of houses up there. It was all black up in that area there.

D: That whole Morrison Hill, Westlake Crossing was . . .

M: Practically. Further up it was mixed, but right down around where I was living . . .

D: South of Madison Avenue?

M: Right, south of Madison Avenue was all black.

D: That originally was a black area.

M: Yes.

D: At that time when you were living there, you were living right next to Covington School.

M: Right.

D: I understand that there was an old Covington School there that was torn down.

M: Then there was this new one. The old one was there when I was living up there.

D: How would you describe the general conditions of the housing in that Morrison Hill, Westlake Crossing, south of Madison Avenue area before they began clearing them out?

M: I would say it was porr.

D: Would you say they were slums?

M: I would practically say it was. In some neighborhoods you had some fairly good houses. Some of them are still standing.

D: You are saying that that whole general area, especially south between Madison and Federal, was black even before construction.

M: Right, Madison and Federal. St. Peter and Paul, a white Catholic church on the corner of Covington and Arlington Streets, still had some parishioners living in and about the neighborhood at that time.

D: Can you remember when construction began?

M: Yes. I was living across the street when they started digging and tearing down.

D: Do you know what they did with the people who were living there? Did they get moved someplace else?

M: They did. That is where I think some of them moved over into the Monkey's Nest.

D: What exactly is that area called the MOnkey's Nest? What are the streets there?

M: Dakota, part of Rayen Avenue, and also Caldwell Street. Monkey's Nest area contained both black and white residents.

D: The west part of Rayen before it runs into Federal there. Right around there is the Monkey's Nest.

M: Yes, up through there. That was as far as Rayen Avenue.

D: For those people who were living in the housing that was torn down, were you under the impression that the government helped them to move? Were they on their own? How did that work?

M: I think there were quite a few of them. Most of those houses weren't owned, I don't think. They were renting those houses, so they were told to move. Some of them moved as far as the Monkey's Nest. I don't know too much about that.

D: You can remember construction. Do you remember any certain dignitaries or important people or officials at that time around the construction site like in 1939? For example, Mrs.

Roosevelt came to Youngstown and visited the construction site. Do you remember any of that, ever see anybody?

M: No. They had started construction . . . I remember that place being there before and I remember leaving there. I knew Morrison Hill before they ever built anything, not by living across from it so much as by being up there. I used to go around because my wife lived on the north side and I lived on the south side. That was how I got to know people I knew by knowing the Morrison Hill area and all that. It was later when we moved on Griffith Street that the work began on the Westlake Terrace Project.

D: You moved then from Griffith Street to . . .

M: From Griffith we moved to my mother's house back on the south side.

D: On Earle Avenue.

M: Yes, because I got out of work and we moved back on Earle.

D: When you got laid off . . .

M: When I got laid off again, we moved there because we couldn't keep the rent up.

D: Was it from Earle that you ended up moving into the Westlake projects?

M: I'm not sure whether we moved from there to the projects. I think it was, yes. I got called back in the mill. We moved from Earle Avenue into the projects.

D: Tell me about the actual process of getting your place at the Westlake housing project. For example, how did you find out about the apartments being available?

M: They advertised them. You had to take your marriage license and things like bills, like for lights or some other bills. You had to take all of that to the office to make an application.

D: The office down on Federal Street?

M: Yes, I think the office was down there.

D: By the YMCA?

M: Yes. Through Mr. Strait we got a chance to put the application in.

D: You dealt with Mr. Strait down at the office?

M: Yes.

D: You mentioned a marriage license.

M: Yes, you had to have a marriage license.

D: You were under the impression that everybody else had to have one too?

M: Right, yes.

D: How about some income requirements?

M: Yes, that was required too.

D: That you had to have an income?

M: You had to have income, yes.

D: You had to have some type of job or something?

M: You had to have some type of job to get into the place.

D: Didthey kind of check up on you about this?

M: Yes. I don't remember if I took a pay stub or something, but they knew where I was working. They wanted to know what you made and things like that. You had to have a certain amount of income, and you couldn't have over it. I doubt anybody ever had over it. You had to have a certain amount.

D: Did an interviewer ever come to talk to you or look where you were living from the housing project?

M: Yes, they wanted to know where I was living. I was living with my mother then.

D: Did somebody come over to your mother's?

M: I think they did, yes. I think they were trying to find out where you lived and how you were living. I'm pretty sure.

D: Was it tough in 1939, 1940, for a young, married couple to find their own place? Was housing short? What was the situation?

M: A majority of the time you didn't have the money to pay for a place that you would find.

D: Was this pretty common for young, married couples to live in rented rooms?

M: Yes. I think we got married on about $15 a week.

D: That was what you were making at the time you got married?

M: Yes. I was earning $10 a week and my wife was earning $5 a week.

D: Of course, in 1940 when you moved into Westlake, you had a young child as well.

M: Yes.

D: Do you remember moving day? What season of the year was it when you moved to Westlake?

M: It was June 26, 1940.

D: Had you been down to see the apartment you were moving into?

M: Yes, we checked. First they had one apartment there that you could see. They had a couple of them fixed up so that you could go in and see how it would look. I inspected it. We looked at this model. They furnished a refrigerator and a stove. They furnished that.

D: You had to bring everything else?

M: Right.

D: Did you have furniture to bring?

M: We got some from her uncle. Her uncle was in the moving business and she was working, so we got some from him.

D: When you moved in were you given any booklets or told that you had to keep your place up with certain rules and regulations?

M: Yes, you received rules and regulations. On certain days you had to wash; on certain days you had to cut grass. We got all of the rules. Nobody could come and stay with you over a certain length of time, like a visitor.

D: Tell me about that. In other words, you couldn't have somebody stay with you, like for a month or something like that. How did that work?

M: I think the time was limited to two a month.

D: So only residents were permitted really to live there?

M: Yes. For a while there they would have people come around and inspect. They had that later because then they weren't letting single people in. Later when they got single people in, they would come around and check your apartment. They would even do it then.

D: Right at the beginning it was your impression that only married people or mostly married people were permitted to live in the

project?

M: Right.

D: Of course, soon after you began living at Westlake the war came. During the course of the war were you in the service? What was your situation?

M: No, during the course of the war I went up to Cleveland and got examined and they put me in limited service. Then the mill got me deferred. The service didn't bother me at all.

D: You received a deferment because you worked at the mill?

M: Right. There were certain types of machines that I ran. That is how I got deferred.

D: By this time you worked your way up from just being a laborer to actually being . . .

M: The laborer did this type of work too. I did have to run these different machines. You didn't have a steady job. They said on this deferment that I could run certain types of machinery.

D: From 1941 to 1945 what was your mill, U. S. Steel, putting out?

M: The steel that they were putting out was being used, quite a bit of it, for the service.

D: For war material?

M: For war material, right.

D: Were you ever laid off in those four years?

M: No. Everybody was working. I didn't get laid off, no. The last time I think when I got laid off was before the war. I never got laid off after.

D: Beginning with about 1941 if you weren't in the army, it was pretty easy to find a job in Youngstown.

M: Yes. We had some fellows who would work for a contractor in the summertime, and in the wintertime they would come in the mill. We had a lot of fellows who did that. They had even gone out in the streets asking people to work in the mill.

D: During the war?

M: Yes.

D: How about women?

M: Yes, we had quite a few of them in there.

D: How about before the war? Were there many women in the mill?

M: No.

D: Because of the war a lot of women started work?

M: That's right.

D: When the war ended, did a lot of those women go back home?

M: Yes, quite a few of them went. Some of them stayed; some of them who had halfway decent jobs.

D: What type of job did a woman do in the mill during the war?

M: Running the crane and clerks and things like that. We had quite a few running the crane. The ones who were unloading boxcars and things like that left.

D: Women had to do heavy work?

M: Yes, they did a lot of work that the men did. They unloaded boxcars and dug ditches and things like that.

D: How about wages at the mill during the war? Did they go up or were they controlled?

M: No, they were froxen. I forget exactly when they froze them, but we couldn't get a raise.

D: Were you under the impression that it was kind of a government policy?

M: I was; I really think it was.

D: You thought the government had something to do with keeping . . .

M: Right. The unions made a deal that they wouldn't try to ask for raises.

D: So the union was cooperative with them during the war.

M: Yes.

D: How about back at home at Westlake during the war? How did the war affect you and your wife as far as buying food and getting things you needed? How did that work?

M: We were able to get practically everything we needed. If you went to the black market, you could get more stuff. They had coupons.

D: Ration coupons. Tell me about those ration coupons.

M: You were allowed to get different food and things. Just like anything else, a lot of people took advantage of them. If they knew you, they would take two forms on anything. Then there were some gas stations. There was one down there on Griffith Street. They had a gas station that you could take trucks down where you could get gas and tires with them.

D: So you needed to have stamps to get gas and tires as well as food.

M: Right. There were some places that would sell you gas without stamps.

D: Did you get the stamps every month or every week?

M: Every month.

D: How much gas could you get in a month? How much was rationed?

M: Everybody seemed to get enough gas.

D: You had a car during the war?

M: Yes. You would go places. Gastown I think sold quite a bit of gas.

D: During the time you were living there at Westlake, I believe you lived there from 1940 through 1953.

M: Yes. We moved before we were ready to because I got another job. I was working in the mill, and I got another job. Every time you got a raise your rent went up.

D: You had to go down to the office and report that?

M: Yes, you reported your increase in income. I thought I would get the other job to get out of the project because every time you got a raise, up went your rent. For a long while it stayed down. Then they brought this idea that about one-quarter of your earnings should go into rent.

D: You mentioned before in the beginning that there seemed to be a lot of strict rules and regulations and everybody had to keep their own area clean. During the thirteen years after the war, into the late 1940's and early 1950's, did it seem that they still kept these strict rules and regulations?

M: Yes, in a way they really did. They would be coming around and inspecting your place and things like that. In this first apartment Imoved into . . . When we first moved in there, we had a tenant council.

D: Tenant council?

M: There would be one representative for four buildings. I was the representative of the four buildings. I had a key to the laundry room down there. Every so often you would have a meeting with the managers of the project. Any problems you had you would bring them up or any questions you wanted answered you brought in for discussion.

D: So you got to meet with YMHA [Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority] officials?

M: Yes.

D: Like Mr. Strait, for example?

M: Mr. Strait, right and the manager of this place up there and several of them.

D: Mrs. Knauff, I believe.

M: Yes. Mrs. Knauff was there first. There were several different ones. The tenant council would meet with them every so often.

D: Would you say from your impression at these council meetings where you represented the tenants, did the YMHA and Mr. Strait seem genuinely concerned as to what was going on?

M: They seemed to listen. They seemed to really listen. If there were certain things we might need, then we would bring them up. They would listen. I know when we first moved up there, it was really nice.

D: What were the type of things that somebody could get thrown out of the apartment for doing? What were some of the rules that you shouldn't break?

M: Not living with the right person in there, not taking care of the place.

D: Keeping it clean.

M: Clean, things like that.

D: Did you ever know anybody who got expelled from those apartments during the time you lived there?

M: Yes, because their place was filthy. They made them move.

D: So the YMHA did inspect?

M: They inspected, yes. If something went wrong with one of the lawn mowers or something like that . . . If you were ambitious

enough and you wanted to paint your apartment, you would go up there and get the paint. I painted mine.

D: They supplied you with the paint?

M: They supplied the paint.

D: After the war in 1946 or 1947 was there an influx of ex-servicemen or new families coming into those apartments?

M: Right. Things started going down.

D: You did notice that there were whole groups of different people coming in.

M: Yes, new families coming in. I don't know if they weren't strict on them or what. I know new people were moving in; I know that.

D: This all seemed to happen after the war.

M: Right.

D: At the time you moved in and during the thirteen years that you lived at Westlake, did you realize the fact that south of Madison Avenue part of the projects were segregated black? Was it pretty much accepted?

M: You knew that right from the first.

D: How did you first find that out? Were you told?

M: We were noticing that all the blacks were given certain areas. Then when you would go up there, you didn't see any blacks up above. It changed though. There were more blacks trying to get in. To say exactly what year it changed, I don't know.

D: Were you there when it began to change?

M: Yes, I was there when it changed.

D: Whenever you met with Mr. Strait or came in contact with the administration, were you under the impression that this was a definite YMHA project that the blacks should live in one area of the project and the whites in the other area?

M: No. When this problem came up, I was off of the tenant council then. When they started making those changes up there, I was off. I don't know who brought it up. The blacks started moving, and it got so that they were moving everywhere in there. They moved them up a little bit at a time.

D: Especially in those early years when the projects were first opened, I was wondering if it was the policy of YMHA as a whole

or perhaps just one person like Mr. Strait or somebody else that thought that was the way it should be?

M: I wouldn't put it on Mr. Strait. He didn't seem to be that type of person. It might have been the board or something like that. I think they seemed to be under the impression that you keep them down there and there wouldn't be any problems.

D: You had previously mentioned that south of Madison prior to the building of the projects had been a black area.

M: Right.

D: How about north of Madison prior to the building?

M: They were scattered.

D: That was a mixed area?

M: That was a mixed area, yes. Certain parts of it were mixed because there weren't that many blacks. You would see a few on Parmelee, some up above Covington.

D: I have heard that during those years in the 1940's when Mr. Strait was the head of YMHA that you could see him regularly walking around the projects.

M: Yes, you could.

D: Was he inspecting or talking to people?

M: You could talk to him. If you saw him, you could stop and talk to him.

D: You mentioned you moved out in about 1953. By that time in 1953, had it seemed that the environment of Westlake projects had begun to change?

M: Definitely. That was one more reason why I wanted to get out of it.

D: What were some of the exact things? Were more people not taking care of the place?

M: More people weren't taking care of their property, stealing stuff out of your laundry. We used to keep the place clean like keeping the grass cut and things like that, but a lot of the people moving in had quite a few children. They didn't take care of their children. The whole atmosphere . . . They were all over. Blacks were all over the place then.

D: How about jobs with those people moving in after the war? You mentioned originally you had to have a job.

M: Right.

D: How about after 1946?

M: A lot of them I think were on relief. They were subsidizing their rent.

D: Many of the ones who moved in after the war, did they come from other areas in Youngstown or perhaps they moved up from the south?

M: A lot of areas had to be some from the south. Yes, there had to be, because of their attitude and everything.

D: Did it also seem that by the late 1940's, right at about the time you moved . . . How about the attitude of the administration? Were rules still strict?

M: Yes, they really changed. A lot of people didn't want to abide too much by the rules. I never had any contact with them because I didn't have any reason to. A lot of people seemed to be giving them a hard time.

D: Also, at about this time in 1953, would you say that into the late 1940's and early 1950's that a lot of the original residents like you and your wife, people who have moved in 1940 and 1941, had begun to move?

M: Yes, they had begun to move. As soon as they could find someplace, a house or something, they would move.

D: Basically, as far as you were concerned and the original people were concerned, would you say that it was kind of your first home and that it wasn't going to be a permanent place?

M: Right. It was supposed to give you a start. It was to try to give you a start. That was the idea of the thing in the first place. They figured the rent would be low enough for you to get a start. When work picked up, up went your rent, so you were having a time getting a start.

D: When you moved, by then you were ready to move?

M: Yes, I was well ready to move before that. I decided to get another job to get out of there. I worked two jobs.

D: Would you say that generally the first few years you spent there at Westlake, especially during the war, that they were pleasant memories and it was a good place to live?

M: It was a good place to live.

D: It was a first permanent home for you and your wife?

M: Right, and I never regret it.

D: Thank you very much. I deeply appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW