

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Trumbull County Democratic Party

Political Experiences

O. H. 783

THOMAS E. CARNEY

Interviewed

by

Mark Dittmer

on

April 26, 1977

THOMAS CARNEY

Thomas E. Carney, presently working in the prosecuting attorney's office in Trumbull County, serves to be an important source in the present day history of the Democratic Party of Trumbull County. Tom E. Carney has grown up with a heritage of family politics. His second cousin, Charles J. Carney is the present representative to the U. S. Congress from the 19th Congressional District. His father, George Carney, served as a city councilman in Girard, Ohio for eleven years. Also, Tom has two cousins John and Edward Carney who are active participants in Girard politics. Edward Carney has served as first vice-president of the Central Committee in the Trumbull County Democratic Party.

With the extensive background Tom has, he also has always been actively involved in various campaigns. Tom went to high school at St. Gregory's High School in Cincinnati and later went to Youngstown State University to receive a degree in business in 1971. Tom's interests lie in law and he graduated from the University of Toledo College of Law in 1974.

Carney received his first employment opportunity from the prosecuting attorney's office in Lucas County, Ohio and after six months was offered a position in the Trumbull County Prosecuting Attorney's Office in Warren, Ohio.

Tom's political activities prior to 1968 were those of helping with his father's campaigns in Girard. Tom actively participated in the McCarthy campaign in 1968, the McGovern campaign in 1972. In the fall of 1976 Tom had extensive

involvement with the Carter campaign and made major decisions with the heads of the Trumbull County Democratic Committee.

Tom's participation in active politics was that of running unsuccessfully for Girard city solicitor in 1975. He presently is serving as a precinct committeeman in Girard.

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INTERVIEWEE: THOMAS CARNEY

INTERVIEWER: Mark Dittmer

SUBJECT: political philosophies, background, future of
Democratic party, Carter

DATE: April 26, 1977

D: This is an interview with Thomas E. Carney for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. Today's interview is located in Warren, Ohio on April 26, 1977 at 4:00 p.m. The topic discussed will be on the history of the Democratic Party of Trumbull County.

The first question I would like to ask you, Mr. Carney, is to give a description of your family and political background and relate what or whom has motivated you to proceed in the field of politics?

C: As far as my family background goes, that is probably the motivation for my involvement in politics. My cousin, second cousin, as a matter of fact, is the United States Representative from the 19th Congressional District, Charles J. Carney. But besides him, my father, George Carney, was a city councilman in the city of Girard for approximately eleven years. He was also involved in the Democratic Central Committee for Trumbull County. Two other cousins, John and Edward, both of Girard, were also involved in Girard politics. Edward served as the first vice-president of the Democratic Central Committee for about two years. So, our family has been highly involved in politics. It has always been an endeavor which has been looked upon with, I guess, some prestige. It's also seen, at least in our family, as a way of becoming involved in public service.

I'm sure today not a great number of citizens really look upon the political involvement as public service. And that's probably a mistake and it's probably something that causes a loss to our political system in that a great number of people who would have much to offer in the governing of our local municipalities and state government and national government

never become involved.

D: Could you give me a summary of your years of service?

C: I've been involved in politics, actively, probably only for about four years. My activity sort of isn't balanced with other things that were going on in my life. When I was still in high school, I worked with my father on his campaigns, which was limited to mostly poll work and passing material door to door, which is common practice in this area. I became involved in the McCarthy campaign in 1968, again, not on a decision making level or anything of that nature, more along the lines of writing letters, preparing pamphlet literature, and actually passing the pamphlet literature out. I was involved in 1972 with the McGovern campaign and to some degree, with the local candidates in Lucas County. I was going to law school at the time. So, my involvement really wasn't too extensive, not having a great deal of time with my studies.

Then, this past year, 1976, in the spring, in the primaries I was in a campaign for Thomas Norton for domestic judge in Trumbull County and we were unsuccessful. My endeavors, you might notice, have not always been marked by a great deal of success especially with McCarthy and McGovern. However, in the fall, I became involved in the Carter campaign and that was probably my most extensive involvement as far as operating on more than just a clerical position. I became involved in the decision making work that was done by the Trumbull County Committee to elect Carter. I found it quite interesting. Also, I was able to meet people that you see on the news and you never really get to know. So, I enjoyed it.

Personally, I also campaigned or ran for Girard city solicitor back in 1975 and, holding true to my form, I was unsuccessful. But, I think as the years progress, my involvement will become more and more. I'm presently also serving as a precinct committee-man from the precinct in which I live and that offers me an opportunity for me to be involved in the decision making of the Democratic Central Committee of Trumbull County.

D: Being a student of the late 1960's, what was the politics of the American youth and how does it differ today?

C: That's a tough question. I'm sure that if you read any of the newspapers or any articles that have been prepared about that period of time--namely from about 1964, with some of the political action in Wisconsin, Berkeley, and New York up to 1972, 1974--I think the era would be labeled as activism. I'm not sure exactly that that was true. I know in 1970 with the troubles we had at Kent . . . I was attending Youngstown State at the time and I don't think that we could actually classify Youngstown State as an area in which activism was really present. There were, of course, a good number of students who were involved

in the anti-war movement and were rather vocal, especially around May of 1970, when the Kent State incident occurred.

As time passes and we're able to look back on the late 1960's, I don't think we're going to acclaim to be as active an era as it has been. I think we'll have a little bit more perspective and we will see that indeed there were a lot of movements, a lot of people involved, that there were demonstrations of great magnitude, but definitely not a revolutionary era.

And today, I think, because of what that era was the era produced activists of some sort. We'll leave that open to definition. And because of the work of these people . . . right now I'm specifically thinking of, I believe the young man is mayor of Madison, Wisconsin. I may be wrong, but I think that's it. He was very much involved in the anti-war movement in the late 1960's. In fact, I believe he was even involved with the weathermen and was, ultimately--I think in the very early 1970's--elected mayor of Madison, Wisconsin. I think he's a good example of what has happened. The activists have gone into political service, into politics so that now they are involved.

And as for the youth of today, where are they going? Are they as active? They're definitely, I don't think, as active as the students in the late 1960's. I don't know whether they have reason to be as active. The war has ended. We're not involved in any military conflicts. In a way, government work has been legitimized. I think the younger people now do see it. They see the functional part of government as legitimate. There's nothing wrong with it, your clerks, people of this nature. And the second reason I don't think you'll see the activism, political activism, is because of how the young people of today see the upper echelons of government, your senators, your representatives, governors.

We've fallen into an era which doesn't really help the image of a politician right now without considering Watergate, which definitely was a blow to the politicians, to the image of the politicians. But, that's not an isolate incident, maybe that's what makes Watergate so bad. Presently we're involved now in Governor Mandell from Maryland, presently being tried for bribery and extortion. You have several senators from the Watergate era on today that face charges of bribery and extortion. So that, I don't think the students in the 1960's saw a position as senator or representative or some kind of political figure like that, they saw them as a figure who could wheel power, who could bring about some sort of change that they were seeking. And the student in the 1970's, in this era, sees the politician as someone who is operating on a low plane, who is only interested in his own welfare and therefore, becoming involved in bribery and extortion.

I don't know whether anyone can do any statistical studies to verify the fact, but personally, I'm sure that not only Watergate . . . I think a mistake is made when people say young people are against politicians because of Watergate. I think Watergate is the pinnacle. But again, Girney from Florida, Governor Mandell, our own problems here in Ohio with certain congressmen has lowered the image of the politician. And more seriously than that, I think what has happened to these men has projected an image which is entirely different than what students saw in 1966. There isn't that force for change. It has just become sort of a degenerate money lender.

- D: Can you give an analysis of your political philosophies and creeds and how you apply them?
- C: Questions like this are tough because as far as political ideologies, personal political ideologies and philosophy, I don't think someone, at least on my level . . . Maybe a senator or congressman would get down to actually considering, "What do I think?" And then, besides not making the consideration, the other difficulty in the question, I think, is what are we talking about? Are we talking about foreign trade? Are we talking about the role of the politician? There are so many different facets.

Generally though--I don't want to dodge the question--I would classify myself as an activist. And because of that I would involve myself in, well, say for example, the campaign we just finished last fall. I was interested in recruiting as great a number of people as possible and I was interested in those volunteers as being a cross section of the community. I see politics, if its the function on the level that it should, has to involve everyone. And therefore, I think one of the most intimate political things that you can be involved in is a campaign. If you're involved in it, you're actually working very closely with people. You get to know their dislikes and their likes and they get to know yours. And it becomes, I think, something that can foster a very progressive government, a very alert government. If the people are involved in campaigns, if they are involved in the election process, then, the people they elect, in turn, are going to have an open ear to them because they're going to realize--and I know it has been said a million times before--you do have that recourse at the ballot box. So, I think my basic belief is that politics ought to be an activist thing. It ought to be something that everybody is involved in.

Taking off from that, I think I could say that I'm also very interested in young people being involved in the party. In this county I think we have a problem. We have a very strong party. I mean, that's obvious from the offices we hold. We control county government and, with the exception of Warren,

we control all the mayors in the county and a substantial number of councilmen and so forth. However, if you take a look at the men who are in these positions now, take a look at the party chairmen. Not to take anything away from them; they've done an excellent job. My point is, they are older men. They're not going to be around forever. Unfortunately, right now, we don't have a number of young people. That element is a very important element that's missing.

One of the things that I've been involved in in the past two years, and probably more specifically within the past year, is involving young people in the party. Hopefully, within the next year or so, we'll actually see some of these people getting involved in political races at least as committeemen and hopefully as councilmen or something of that nature. So, without getting too elaborate, those are my beliefs in politics, right now, in regards to this party.

D: When do you think the Trumbull County Democratic Party was at its peak of existence?

C: I think they're at the peak of their existence right now. After last year's election, I don't think there can be any doubt that the Trumbull County Democratic Party has functioned at a higher level than they've ever done before. The reason I say this is, first of all, in county government it's true that we only have one seat on the board of county commissioners. There are three seats. We only have one. At one time we had all three, but we only have one there. But then we control every other elected office in the county with the exception of the engineer and, I believe, the coroner, but those aren't very political jobs. Furthermore, the first time in Lord knows how long . . . In fact, I've talked to some of the other people who have indicated to me it's the first time ever we controlled every seat in the Court of Common Pleas. There's a Democrat in every courtroom in the county courthouse, which is unheard of. This has never been before.

The other reason that I think we're functioning now at a level that we've never functioned at before is the voter turnout in the election last year. I'm sure a lot of people will say, "Well, it was a large turnout throughout the country," and that's true, but if you check it out statistically . . . I was told in Washington that this county is fourth in the country or the 19th Congressional District really, which this county is part of, was fourth in the country in voter turnout. I mean, we are right up there.

I think this has to be owed to the fact that the people who were involved in the Carter campaign worked very hard. They did a heck of a job. They worked very hard. They worked very long hours.

D: Who were some of these individuals?

C: Well, you yourself, Mark, as you sit there smiling. Frank Cratko. I can't even think of the names now, but it's just the idea that they weren't politicians. A lot of them were carryovers from the McGovern campaign, which I liked to see. But there were a lot of people actually involved, common people that were involved. Democrats that were involved. The other thing is, for the first time in a long time the local Democratic candidates were not fighting among themselves at the general election.

Trumbull County has a history of being a very tough county when it comes to running for elections. We fight constantly in this county. The old politicians have told me for the first time ever we were able to put together a ticket that was able to work together, that was able to coordinate with the national ticket, and as a result, we were able to turn out a fantastic number of voters and we were able to take some seats in the Court of Common Pleas that we've never had before. Without a doubt, I think, the Trumbull County Democratic Party is functioning at a higher level than ever before.

D: Having accounted for the highest points of the Democratic Party, what about its lowest points?

C: Lowest points? I don't know if I can. Like I said, we have had problems before in in-house fighting. I can't say that it's all bad because I think we've had some excellent people in government in Trumbull County and I'm sure that part of this is the responsibility of the fact that when you run for office in Trumbull County, you're going to have to account for what you've done and what you want to do and how you carry on. As for giving a specific time though, I don't think I could.

D: Now speaking of the internal structure of the party itself, what is the significance of the precinct committeemen and the executive committee in Trumbull County?

C: I'm sure that the importance of precinct committeemen and the importance of the executive committee members all depends upon one's point of view. In the past I don't really think that precinct committeemen have really accounted for much other than being a vote in that instance where a vacancy would occur in an elected office and it was necessary for the Central Committee to meet and to select someone to fill that vacancy. That was about the extent of the importance and the involvement of precinct committeemen. And again, I have to go back to this September where I think we saw the beginning of some active involvement in behalf of the committeemen. I think that a lot of them are actually coming to see themselves as representatives, as how they should see themselves, as representatives of a specific geographical area. They represent the Democrats from

A Street and C Street. They are important to make the party function.

The party is not going to be able to elect a Democratic county commissioner or elect a Democratic treasurer unless the Democratic precinct committeeman in each precinct is willing to go out and say to his friends, "Hey, we have a candidate here that's qualified, that's willing to do the work and has some experience, some credentials." It has to go down to that local level. I think the idea that we have to go back to the grassroots is now clear in reference to the Carter campaign. If you want to win an election you've got to go back. And how do you go back? You have to go through the precinct committeemen, members of the Central Committee.

The executive committee--I'm sure there are going to be people that would disagree with me--but in my estimation it is the least functioning unit of the Democratic Party. Supposedly, these are the people picked and elected from among the central committeemen to actually be the leaders of the party. Unfortunately, because of the previous lack of interest and custom in the use of the executive committee, it has pretty much died. And I, for one, would like to see it rejuvenated. I would like to see some people put on it that are actively involved in the party and sincerely interested in the party and in politics. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of fun, but you have to have the interest and unfortunately, right now, I don't think we have the interest in it in the members of that board.

- D: If you were committee head of the Democratic Party of Trumbull County at this point, what type of platform would you run and what changes would you like to see come about?
- C: That's an interesting question. I don't think we've quite gotten to the point where we're establishing a platform for the county. Maybe its a good idea. Personally, if I was party chairman at this time and we were going to be involved in a county election, what I would like to see the party present to the voters is a platform which would involve a great deal of activism. Mainly telling the voters that there are ways, new ways for government to run. Specifically, I'm thinking of the possibility of federal funds for different reasons. You have the LEAA [Law Enforcement Assistance Administration]. A great deal of money is available through them. We have to go after it. I think the prosecuting attorney's office, the sheriff's office, presently are involved in programs like this. But I think there's more money. There's HUD [Housing and Urban Development]. Of course, the county gets the Federal Revenue Sharing money. But I would like to point out to the people, to the electorate, that this money is available, that our party is committed to bringing into this county.

On some recent trips to Washington, I had the opportunity

to speak to some administrators in the Environmental Protection Agency, some administrators in the Economic Development Agency of the Department of Commerce and these people seem to ask the same question: Why doesn't Ohio apply for this money? Why doesn't Ohio look for federal money? Why doesn't Ohio want federal money? The State of Ohio and Trumbull County being a part of that state, hasn't been in the forefront in seeking this money. I think it's about time we do. We've got to the point now where, I think, our industry and commerce depends on it. We can't absorb enough from our local taxes to support them. We're going to have to go elsewhere.

Besides pursuing this federal money, I would also like to see the party come out with a stand that it's now necessary to bring about some kind of order in the county as far as the relationship between the townships, the zoning regulations the townships have set up. I'm not sure what exactly a county officer could do. Possibly the county commissioners, under the new provisions for county zoning, could work on bringing some uniformity in the county. I think that's important. We seem to have lost directions as far as industrialization in the county, building in the county. We just seem to be wandering here and there. So, I think there is the need for a policy, a plan if you would, in favor of uniformity of development, which would involve zoning considerations, possibly some sort of an innovative program to get industry to come in and look at us.

We've done considerable work, I think, in the fields of sanitary sewers and water, but I think now it's just a matter of getting out to industry and telling them, "Hey, we have put together things." We have got stuff on the drawing board that is on its way. It's going to be okayed by the federal government and we're going to have money and there's going to be a lot of open space in Trumbull County that's going to be available for industry. It's going to be available for homes. The northern part of the county is not highly populated. We have room there.

Again, I think this idea of industrialization, the idea of orderly development and the idea of federal funds are all interwoven. We're looking towards a better county. In fact, possibly, that would be the theme: The Democratic Central Committee, looking for a better county.

- D: What future do you see for the Democratic Party in Trumbull County and the National Democratic Party as a whole?
- C: In the county we're obviously in a very good position now. Like I said earlier, in reference to positions that we hold, we hold them all with the exception of the two seats on the board of county commissioners. So, I think we finally arrived at a point where the Democratic Party has offered to the electorate good candidates; candidates who are capable, experienced and they've got an idea of what they want to do

and they're willing to go out and do it. I think it's necessary now for the party to bring some young people in and get them involved, maybe run a couple of them for office.

I think we're strong in Trumbull County. There's no doubt about it as long as the Democratic Party in the cities remain as it is and it is quite strong. The only city really where there's any Republican opposition is Warren. Niles and Girard, their councils are controlled entirely, to the man, Democratic. So we're in a very good position now.

I think we have to get young people involved. I think we have to start respecting each other a little bit more, start drawing up, becoming more organized, maybe that's the key word. We have to put a little more organization into our party. If we do that I don't see any way that the Republican Party in Trumbull County is going to offer any real opposition because, obviously, we are in power. We can show the people what we're willing to do, what we can do. As long as we keep doing that and as long as we bring new people, new blood into the party, and we build up our organization . . . that's probably where we are lacking the most.

We don't have an organization. We come alive two times a year, in mid-April and the first week in June and then suddenly we die as a party again and then come alive the middle of September and we go like crazy until the first week in November and then die again. So we've got two rather lengthy periods of time in which the party really isn't functioning; we're not visible at all. No, I think we've got to become more visible. We've got to become organized. Like I said, I think we're in a very good position to do that now because we are. We're dealing from a position of strength.

The national party suffers from probably the same maladies as we do on the county level, only magnified to the level of national politics. Again, they function for one year. In fact, they just died. The national party just died in November. Well, this year, we probably continued some activity on the national level up through the inaugural. Now it has become very quiet and will be so until the next presidential election. I'm not sure how you would go about remedying that to bring them alive, but maybe--I don't know this for a fact but it's just running through my mind--the more active Trumbull County becomes, the more active Mahoning County becomes, the more active the city of Boston becomes. Aren't we making the national party more active?

As you're aware, the national party has has some very bad times. In 1968 the convention was almost a shamble with the riots in Chicago. There were some people actually questioning whether or not we had had . . . Did the Democrats really have a national convention or was it just a farce? In 1972, it didn't help.

I think we made a real attempt, the national party made a real attempt to bring some of the groups who had previously been rejected by the party in. The young people, the blacks, and as a result, we had substantial problems in seating delegations in 1972. And it culminated in Mayor Dailey walking out with the Illinois delegation and an alternate delegation had to be set. That later caused significant problems in the campaign because Mr. McGovern was unable to gain the cooperation of Mayor Dailey.

But, then we have to look back to just the last convention. I had the feeling, watching the convention on the television and reading some of the material that was being printed at the time, that possibly we had solved that problem. We had brought in the balance, the representation of women within the national party, the representation of black within the national party, the Hispanics I think became very active in the last campaign, at least as far as Governor Brown was concerned. A considerable number of people he brought to Maryland to run in the Maryland primary were Hispanics. So I think the Democratic Party on the national level is moving towards a more solid position.

We've recognized our deficiencies. I think we recognized them in 1972 when we were setting up the rules for delegations. We realized that we weren't including women, we weren't including blacks, that there was a disproportionate number of white males present. And we made an attempt. Okay, it didn't work. Maybe it was wrong. Maybe we went about it too hard handed and it resulted in some problems. But I think we learned from it and we solved those problems in 1976.

In three more years we're going to be back again and I think because of the way we've set up our delegations and because we've brought these people in here, we don't have to worry about a closed convention. I think the idea of a closed convention is the final point I want to make. I think this is why the Democratic Party has been nationally a better position than the Republican. I think if you review some of the newspaper articles and the magazine articles that came out right after the election and the statements that were made by Mr. Brock in relation to the Republican Party, I think the Republicans right now are where we were at between 1968 and 1972. Right now the Republicans are saying, "We don't have any blacks in the party. We don't have any poor people in our party. We don't have any Hispanics in our party." I think they're coming to the conclusion, "We have a closed convention. We have a closed party." And now they're going to have to begin, and I think they're going to find themselves with a lot of conflict, but they're going to have to begin bringing in women, bringing in blacks. And they obviously have. Their national party has begun, almost a recruiting system, to get these people in; an attempt to expand their party.

We're ahead of them. We have six years down the road on that problem and I think it's a very important problem. I see very good times for the Democratic Party nationally and on a county level.

D: The next question will be about President Carter. Why has Mr. Carter, up to this point, received a good press and what exactly do you think he's trying to do?

C: I think Mr. Carter has a very novel approach to the presidency. He sees himself, in my estimation, as being accountable only to the people. And that's why, I think, whenever he's preparing a program . . . For instance, the energy program that was just presented last week. Even prior to presenting it to the Congress he went to the people. He said, "This is my program. You are the people who elected me and this is what I am proposing what we all do." Obviously, this break with tradition is causing Mr. Carter quite a few problems. Mr. O'Neil, the Speaker of the House, and Mr. Byrd, the majority leader in the Senate, have not always been happy with this approach. One newspaper article quoted Mr. Jackson as saying--I'm paraphrasing it--that there was nothing that the House or the Senate could do. They find themselves in a corner because President Carter is willing to go to the people and give them the programs.

I think people now are going to become more aware of what our national policy is. I think national policy was something the people never knew anything about because we never really have attempted to formulate open national policies. I think because of the Carter method of going to the people and presenting them with possibly not all the points . . . He doesn't brake it down point by point. Obviously a good number of our people wouldn't understand it even if he did. I'm not sure that I would understand everything as far as the Atomic Energy Program goes, but I think, as a people, we've become more informed as to what our foreign policy is, as to what our national energy policy is.

From what has been going on in Washington right now, I would expect that this summer sometime Mr. Carter is going to have to formulate a policy on imports. That's a big question right now. So I'm not sure if I've answered your question, but I think that's it. Mr. Carter has brought something to this country and to the presidency which I don't think anyone has ever seen before.

D: As for representation of the people, do you think that President Carter is carrying out his foreign policy?

C: I'm not sure. Obviously, in answering all these questions, possibly I should place a caveat on it. We're only just a couple of months into his presidency. His inaugural was the 20th of January, so we're three months into his presidency. And the

only really significant point, as far as foreign policy is concerned, that has occurred has been the SALT Talks. There has been some discussions that possibly he isn't doing what is right for the country. Possibly he's too hard they say. He isn't willing to deal with the Russians and other people say, "The Russians aren't willing to deal with him because they really don't know what to expect yet." And he has, I think, thrown some surprises at them. But again, his policy has been what I think the average American wanted to see. He has been willing to talk about SALT; he has been willing to send representatives of the SALT. But at the same time he's carrying on his campaign for human rights. And this has always been a point that has aggravated a portion of the American citizenry: How could he support countries that violate human rights? And I think Mr. Carter appears to be dedicating himself to the principle that the United States will become a crusader for human rights. I'm not sure how far he's willing to go in that crusade. We have to wait and see.

END OF INTERVIEW