

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Niles, Ohio

Personal Experience

O.H. 1605

MICHAEL PATRONE

Interviewed

by

James Allgren

on

November 5, 1993

MICHAEL PATRONE

Michael J. Patrone was born November 19, 1914 in Niles, Ohio, the son of Italian immigrants Louie and Angelina (Russo) Patrone. One of nine children, his family has been prominent in Niles since the turn of the century when his father emigrated from Bagnoli-Irpino, Italy to work for the Niles Fire Brick Company. After graduating from Niles-McKinley High School in 1934, he worked at the Niles plant of Republic Steel Corporation until 1940. A veteran of the Navy Reserve, Mr. Patrone received his Bachelor's Degree in Education from the University of South Carolina in 1943, and received his first teaching experience instructing illiterate soldiers at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. He held a wide variety of teaching positions including: Ashtubula City High School, 1944-1948; Hower Vocational School, Akron, 1950-1951; Warren City Schools, 1953-1957; Lordstown Military Reservation, 1958; Lakeview Junior High School, 1959-1960; and Howland Junior High School, 1964-1970. Mr. Patrone was also the proprietor of the Bachelor's Home boarding house from 1951 to 1971. Known locally as the "Mayor of Langley Street," and has been active in the Niles Youth Task Force since his retirement, and has maintained a keen interest in the history of Niles.

A: This is an interview with Michael J. Patrone for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Niles Fire Brick Company, by James Allgren, on November 5, 1993, at 4:00 p.m.

As far as the Niles Fire Brick Company is concerned, who was the first member of your family to work there?

P: My dad. He was still my family even though I was not born. He was hired in 1902.

A: What was his job there?

P: Labor, pick and shovel. He had to dig the foundations of this place and the place in the back with a pick and a shovel. His wages were ten cents an hour, twelve hours a day.

A: He started out on the construction crew for the place?

P: Yes.

A: What were they building in 1902? That was the new plant?

P: They were building the foundation of this little house here, this office.

A: This was the office building that we are in now?

P: This was a new office, it was moved from across the street.

A: What all can you tell me about the Fire Brick?

P: You mean in general?

A: Yes. In general and then maybe we can talk about some specific aspects of it.

P: Fire Brick as a whole was a company that manufactured fire bricks and in order to qualify physically, you must have a strong back. It was not the cleanest job in the world. The pay was not, I would say, it was fair compared to the other industries.

A: Compared to like the steel and the iron industries?

P: Yes, because it did not require too much skill. It was more physical work, but it was steady employment. You could work six to seven days a week, sometimes double turn or even triple turn. It depends because they could not make people come into work.

A: So, it was not a desirable job?

P: Not a desirable job is right. It was dirty. All during the years that I operated, most of the people that worked there had big families and the income was sufficient enough to support the families. Now if you needed a little more money, you had to send your kids out to see if they could compensate with a little more income. Picking up side jobs or selling newspapers whatever it is. That helped, and that is what we did. All the boys sold newspapers. I said sold, not deliver.

A: Right, the Niles News Boys.

P: Yes. We had to sell them. Not like today, you deliver them today. The customers would pay either through the mail or through the office monthly. It was not easy. In rain, snow or shine, the papers had to be sold, you had to be there.

A: At the time, the papers you were selling were the Niles Times?

P: The papers we had, at that time, were the Niles Register. That was a local paper, then the Tribune, The Youngstown Vindicator, which is the daily paper. Now the Sunday papers, we had also the Vindicator, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Pittsburgh Post, the Pittsburgh Gazette, and also the Chicago Herald.

A: You would sell all of these different papers.

P: On Sunday's. We had a special route that covered so much of a section of town. My route, this happened, but I inherited a good section that needed to be developed. I started at a hundred newspapers, then inside a year or two, it added up to two hundred and forty.

A: Just on Sunday.

P: Just on Sunday. I had a wagon with a big box to put all of the papers in. According to where your route was, you started at the bottom of Robbins Avenue and go all the way up to the top of Robbins Avenue, and all the side streets to the left, and up to so far. We had to yell to let the customers know we were coming. They could hear you for blocks. They would say, "Oh here comes my news boy." They would be waiting for you. You had to take the paper up to them where they were at. You did not just throw it on the porch because you had to collect. You had a few that you might carry for credit, but most of the time you would get your money. But you still had a few or you would take a loss.

A: Right, you would have to carry them.

P: No. Who took the loss, the news boys, not the distributor of the newspaper. I call them the newspaper distributor. We had to pay our bill. They sell you up, that is what you called it, sell them up. Most of the time I would always make about three dollars. Ten cents a paper.

A: You were making basically, how many on the dollar?

P: I made two hundred papers, they would give me three dollars. There were a few that I might have to carry. My mother was happy when she saw that I brought in three dollars.

A: This money would go to supplement the family income?

P: Right. The three dollars on the Sunday route and what I made on the evening route. The morning route, I did not make too much with nine cents a morning. Eighteen papers of the Cleveland Plain Dealer. Then the evening route I had about sixty papers, that was the Tribune and the Vindicator. That was a three cent paper. We made a cent on the paper.

A: What other things would people do to supplement their income? Besides selling papers, what are other things people would do?

P: We would wait for the paper. We always waited for the extra edition. That is when we earned more. We did not have radios at the time. For example, some of the heavy weight championship boxers, like Dempsey and Firpo. Dempsey was knocked out and Firpo was heard for blocks. The paper came out at two o'clock in the morning.

A: And you are out selling.

P: Yes, two cent papers. I remind you, no radio. Those people are waiting.

A: They knew you were coming?

P: They knew I was coming. They gave me a nickel and gave me a three cent tip. I made more than my newspaper boss and the company made. That was when I was coming in. We got a lot of tips on the holiday's. That goes for the morning route, the evening route, and the Sunday route. When you get high quality service, you will be compensated.

A: Outside of selling newspapers, what other things would a family do to supplement their income?

P: Well, we were so close to town here, that is where we had the blessing of being in walking distance to the newsstand. We did not have to go up into the other sections of Niles. The only other thing would be, cleaning the basements out of people's homes and doing a good job. I did cut lawns and also make a garden. My customers were good people. That is the way I let them know that I was going to give them a good job and the work I did around their home. They knew that I came from a big family. They always kept me in mind. That is the way I got started in the Niles Tin-Plate Mill, that is the way I got my job.

A: How did you get your job there?

P: I was planning on helping this customer of mine whose name was DeGarmo. He was the assistant superintendent for the new Niles Tin-Plate Mill. He tipped me off that when we get going up there I am going to get you in. He got me in.

A: What year was that?

P: 1937. As a matter of fact, I started up in the cold strip that is in Warren Republic. They had a cleaning line there with a slotting machine that we were to clean, shear, and tin-plate. Electroplating. That is how the operation took place in the cold strip. Then when you built the Niles Tin Mill here, I was transferred down here. My assistant supervisor also came down.

A: So you are doing essentially the same job that you had been doing there?

P: Yes. I worked as an operator. I was there until 1940. I decided that I wanted to go to school.

A: What made you decide you wanted to go to school?

P: Because the fact that I did not want to spend the rest of my life in a steel mill. I was confronted with what we call favoritism. I actually had a chance to go to foremanship but I was blocked out. So I said, "All right, I am going to drop this occupation here. I am going to go and take a chance." I saved my money. I had enough for the first year of school, then away I took off.

While I was in school, I always picking up side money. The war was on. There were military stores there. I got a job there with one of the military stores. These boys were from New York. They saw me operating, they saw the way I operated and I started out at thirty-five cents an hour, and before you know it I was up to seventy-five. That was big money. That was what they said, "You were the top salesman." I knew how to handle them. It was good extra money because you eat out. We used to go to the boarding house where you would get a meal for thirty cents. That was boarding house style which was real good.

A: During the thirties, while you were working at the tin-plate in the Republic, do you remember anything about the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations]?

P: Well, we had the steel strike. I stayed in for over a week during the strike. What was coming in at that time was food being dropped down by planes. It was mostly hot dogs or wieners as they would say. It was not so much the food, but the strikers knew I was in. I stayed in the plant. They were marching up and down in front of my parent's house. I knew these fellahs, so I decided that I better get out. I did not want any trouble and something could of happened to my parents or something, so I came out. It was a thirty day strike.

A: Why did you stay in the plant?

P: Because I was at the point where I was a Flying Shear Operator. I was one step away from going up. My next move would be a Foreman, but I never got there. I was looking ahead. If I would have went out right away, then they would have that mark against me.

A: You would have gotten black balled?

P: Yes, but at least I stayed a week. I played it a little bit on both sides.

A: After you came out, did you run into any animosity?

P: No.

A: They understood?

P: Yes.

A: Do you think most people supported the strike?

P: Well, I would say so, yes. Especially the east side of Niles, you know you got all kinds of walks of life there. Even today in Youngstown and Warren the CIO's are strong. This is union territory here, even though they gave it a name of other things that happened in the Youngstown area through crime.

A: Like Riot Town and things like that.

P: Illegal operations and gambling and so forth. They should give it a name like Chicago, Murder Town. That kind of hurt the valley. It did not help us.

A: Because if Youngstown gets a label like that it is going to affect the whole valley including Niles, Warren, and everywhere.

P: I would say the Steel Valley here, as the same as in Buffalo, New York, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Detroit, all union towns. Because of the union and organized labor, they shipped us up. That is why today the South and also the West.

A: That is why they call it the New South.

P: But you see, they start out there with no union. It is a different song.

A: You are right.

P: Now in order to compete with the foreign market, we have to go in between. Union and management is going to have to become related to one another and see if we can bring down the cost of operations to the point where we can compete with the foreign markets.

A: That is good, I agree with that completely. I would like to talk about the Fire Brick a little more. You talk about your father worked there, did any of your brothers work there as well?

P: Yes, I had two brothers. My oldest brother Nelson used to work there he was in high school, but during the summer vacation he did summer work there. Then my other brother, his name was Joe, the one that passed away because he got hit with Multiple Sclerosis. He worked there in the shipping gang, that is shipping the bricks. The bricks that were baked had to be shipped from the storage place into the boxcars. So they called them the shippers. They worked piece work. They did make a little more money.

A: Because they were on piece work?

P: Yes.

A: So they would pay them according to how many bricks they were able to load?

P: Yes, that is right.

A: That will explain something in the payroll. I am going to have to make a note about that.

P: That did not come at the beginning, that came later to win that point. Back then there was a lot of politics too.

A: What kind of politics?

P: The foremen's friends would get the short runs, so he was wheeling more bricks.

A: That was on the shipping gang?

P: Yes.

A: How many different kinds of jobs were there? What were the kinds of things guys did then?

P: Well, you had what they call a yard. That is where they form the bricks. They actually form bricks into different shapes and they stamp the label onto them with presses they had.

A: How did the presses work, not to interrupt you, but did they press them like that?

P: With these hydraulic presses. They did not make the bricks by hand, they used the press. Then the boys would pick them up, lay them on the carts and some of them dried them on the floors. They had steam underneath the floors. Then when they dried they had to be shipped into the kilns.

A: How many kilns were there?

P: I would say there was six rectangular kilns that cooked clay bricks. Then we had about eleven beehive kilns that cooked the silica bricks.

A: Now when they pressed them with the hydraulics presses, that was done for the clay and the silica bricks as well?

P: Yes.

A: Just a difference in the mixture?

P: Difference in the mixture, that is right.

A: So once they went to the kilns then they were baked?

P: They were baked in the kilns.

A: How long would they bake them?

P: Now this was when they were fired by coal. The rectangular kilns that had the clay bricks would take about eight days. That is 24 hours a day. The silica bricks, that is the beehive kilns, would take in the neighborhood of eleven to twelve days. It all depends on the fireman and how he cleaned the grates. If you do not clean the grates, you do not get the oxygen up into that fire. The fire is not

going to produce the right temperature to bake the bricks. A lot of times you can have bricks that were not baked right. That is where it all comes from. They eventually converted everything into gas.

A: That eliminated a lot of jobs by doing that, though didn't it?

P: Yes, because they did not need the firemen.

A: When did they convert, do you know?

P: I would say that my dad was transferred over to the boiler room around 1940, that is when that happened. He was one of the old firemen. So they just transferred him to fire the boilers.

A: Was this considered a move up?

P: I would say it was a lot better than firing the kilns.

A: Was firing the kilns one of the dirtier jobs?

P: Yes. They were hot. These firemen had to clean the kilns and all the clinkers and so forth and fire the fire. That would take a good four hours on eight holes. There were eight holes on each kiln. When they got through firing them, they were all wet. They did not have a shower room. They just had to change clothes.

A: While they were still wet?

P: They dried the clothes off. They always carried their extra clothes with them when then went to work. Then they would bring the dirty clothes back home.

A: They were pressing the bricks with hydraulic presses?

P: Hydraulic presses.

A: I have seen an example of that machine. Was that a skilled job or could anybody handle doing that?

P: Well, the press operator got their piece work going, they would make a little more. Like I say, the piece work boys were making somewhere between fifteen to twenty dollars a day compared to the others. They were considered just a fireman or something like that, they would make about eight dollars a day.

A: And the general laborers?

P: Yes, the general laborers.

A: They were paying all of those people on salary, though?

P: I do not know what you mean.

A: I mean just like the general laborers and the firemen.

P: When you went to work there you had a card. You would just bring your card in, so that way they know you worked that day, you get paid daily. I mean every two weeks would be payday. They did not pay no time in a half or double time. That is straight day wages. If you put a triple terms in, if you were making eight dollars a day for three terms, that would give you twenty-four dollars.

A: So you were paid your flat rate for each turn that you worked on an eight hour turn?

P: Right.

A: We found some discrepancies in the pay ledgers because we could not figure how somebody worked seventeen days in two weeks. That would account for double and triple turns.

P: Yes. I know my dad worked triple turns.

A: How often would they have to do that?

P: There were two men on a kiln that were working twelve hours a day. If your partner did not show up, say you went in at six o'clock in the morning and your release man is coming in at six in the evening. If he does not show up, that means you got to go twelve more hours. If he does not show up again you still go on, you carry that kiln.

A: Because you had to keep it fired at all times.

P: They would have a little break. After you cleaned the eight holes and fired them up good, you might get a break in there. You might get an hour of sleep or two. They allowed that. The night foreman would come around and wake you up.

A: They are pretty lenient about it.

P: I used to carry water from home. The thing that helped him the most was that homemade wine. My parents always made homemade wine. I would bring him

down a little brown jug of wine instead of water. That wine, when he was all sweated up and changed clothes he would drink some of that wine and that would reduce the perspiration. He had one thing going for him, that he had open pores because he sweat a lot. That helped him in his old age when he was up in the nursing home. He had double pneumonia three times. They changed his clothes all of the time. He just sweat that thing right out. Never killed him.

A: Three times.

P: He did not die because of double pneumonia. That is what will kill a person if you cannot sweat. He just died in his sleep in the chair, that is all. It weakened the body after all that, you know one time, two times, three times. But he lived to be ninety-six and three quarters. Never received any pension.

A: Why, didn't they have a pension plan? Do you have any idea?

P: The pension came later, right after he retired.

A: When did he retire?

P: He had to retire because the fact he could not do the job anymore. The sciatic nerve got caught up on the bone in the hip. They could not do anything for him. It was painful too. That is because he was hammering all of the time and cleaning those clinkers and all of that. So he had to retire early in 1948.

A: They did not have the union in there yet?

P: No. Not a strong union. They just started.

A: So they did not get the union in until the late 40s?

P: Yes.

A: When was it that the Thomas' sold out -- I cannot recall. Let me see, we were talking about the pension there real briefly, but they did not get the union in until the late 40s. As far as that goes, we were talking about how you had decided to get out of working in industry in the late 30s. Whereas the reason I say that, is because we had talked about your dad staying in clear up until his retirement. Whereas you decided to get out. You said you got out because of the dissatisfaction with the promotion policy?

P: I always wanted to be a school teacher, a coach, which I never did. I had to devote to shop. For example, whether it is electricity, whether it is woodworking,

whether it was shop. I figured for me to do a good job, I cannot be going around taking extracurricular activities, like coach football and this and that. That takes time to do a good job. So I concentrated on shop.

A: Why shop?

P: That was a job that was open. I never taught my major field. I got a major in chemistry and I never taught it. When you apply for jobs, you have to take what is open. If you do not take it, you do not get a job. So that is why I got experience. If you got a good scientific back ground, you could teach any of the scientific subjects. So electricity is a scientific subject. So what I did not know about electricity, I learned with the kids. It is in the book. Did you ever hear of teaching yourself?

A: Yes.

P: Well that is the way I did it.

A: I think it was Einstein that said -- a reporter asked Einstein for his phone number and Einstein went and looked up his own phone number in the phone book. The reporter said, "You are a genius, why did you have to do that? Why can't you remember your own phone number?" And Einstein said, "Why should I bother remembering something that I can look up in a book." That is exactly the point. You said in 1940, you had decided that you wanted to go to college?

P: I was 25 years old.

A: The first college you went to was the University of South Carolina?

P: That is right.

A: That is down in Columbia, right?

P: No, that is in Columbia, the capitol.

A: What was that like for you?

P: I noticed that I was 25 years old where most of the other freshmen were sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen. I said, "Well, there they are." I would like to make an adjustment. The adjustment that I had made was, I am down here for business. I am not here to have a good time because this is costing me. The other kids were, "I am in college know and papa is picking up the tab, and I am going to have a good time." Well, that was different from me, I did not have good time. When I

went to class I always took a front seat. I did not want to sit in the back. I did not want to see what goes on in the back. I wanted to pay attention to the professor and what he lectures and take notes, and jot down in my notebook what he shoots up on that board. When I had to study, I studied. When I had homework, I did my homework in my apartment in my room. I did not go around to a dance or this or that. I was strictly in there working. Where it took a kid an hour and a half to do his homework, it took me three. Everything I did, I printed it in my notebook. I managed to pass all of the courses. I did not fail one.

A: What were your families reaction to you going to college?

P: They did not object too much. They were a little more on their feet. After all, I put in I would say about five good years in the industry. Whenever I got my paycheck, my mother allowed me to keep half and she got the other half. That helped her especially when my dad was not able to work anymore, there was no paycheck coming. That helped. Then the kids began to branch out and get married. I took the load off. They went out in the world to raise their own families.

A: Were you the first to go to college?

P: No. The first one that went to college was my brother Joe. He got a football scholarship.

A: Where to?

P: South Carolina.

A: So you were at the same school?

P: He was the first one to go there. As a matter of fact, he was a walk on. He left the fire brick and was out of there. As a matter of fact, he had his nose broken a number of times playing football. So he had to have, what you call, plastic surgery done. He went to Michigan up there. He had that done. Then he went right back down and got that tryout at South Carolina Football and he made it. They did not care about his nose. He spent over five hundred dollars on it.

A: He went right back to it?

P: He succeeded making the first team guard. They had the Notre Dame system down there. Rex Enright was the coach. He was up there when Rochne was there and the four horsemen were there, Rex Enright. So he used the same system that Rochne did. They did a lot of, what we call, power plays. There was not too

much of the aerial arrow attack.

A: A lot of ground games.

P: Those guards had to pull out.

A: A lot of pulling and trapping.

P: They also had to run interference. We had a good line coach there too. He also graduated from Notre Dame All-American, Ted Twomey.

A: I have heard of that.

P: We had a head coach, Ted Petrosky, out of Michigan. They had a good staff there, like I said.

A: Did you play some ball as well?

P: When I was down there, the one year I went out there to kick extra points and field goals. I just like volunteered, no pay.

A: That is funny because you were specializing in an era before the kicker was a specializer. Kind of an innovator.

P: That was a common thing. I knew I could kick a ball because my right foot had plenty of power. I used to kick off with the coach over here, O.B. Smith, Niles High School. The only thing I resented was they did not give me a good pair of shoes. They were about, I would say, twelve to thirteen inches long with those leather cleats under them, the rectangular cleats, they were not the real good shoes. I could not run too good. Not the guard position, I was going out for guard. I could not move that fast. The best thing I could do was give the passer protection.

A: That you could do?

P: Yes. I did come out of it with a strong leg. I said I think I could help the team. I went out to kick field goals, extra points and field goals.

A: Was that after your brother had played there?

P: Yes, right after he graduated.

A: Were you down there at the same time he was at any point?

P: Yes. He was down there in 1938. I went in 1940. So it was two years difference.

A: You graduated from Carolina in 1943?

P: Yes, I went to summer school and picked up a lot of required chemistry so that I could finish early.

A: So you got out ahead of time basically?

P: Yes, I got out ahead of time.

A: So you started teaching at Fort Jackson?

P: Yes, Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

A: What was that like?

P: It was teaching illiterate soldiers. They were mostly coming from Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina. They did not have too much education, they could not read or write. The government was trying to give them the fundamental requirements and things that they need. We set up school in one of the barracks there and a black board. We took on about 25 men. We helped them. They learned something. When they are given orders, "I want 25 rifles," and if they did not know what 25 is, they were in trouble. The textbook we had was the Life of Private Pete. Life is simple and say anything that they are.

A: There are a couple of things I wanted to touch on, especially because we are doing the Niles project. You lived on Langley Street your whole life? Well, the time you have been in Niles?

P: Like I said, when I went to school. My residence was always 235. Like when I was going to college, I was not living here then. I did not come in here until 1951.

A: What was it like growing up on this street? What was the neighborhood like? What do you remember about it?

P: There were a lot of people with large families. With four, five, or six, my mother had ten kids. They were mostly Italians, a few were of other nationalities, like Hungarian. I think I had one family that was German. I cannot remember, but the others were all Italians. They all had gardens. I would say half of them had the outdoor oven and baked their bread outside. The husbands, most of them worked at the fire brick. A few might have worked up at the barrel works up here.

- A: The Thomas Mill?
- P: Yes. There was a Thomas Mill, the empire of steel mills and the Mahoning Valley Steel. The Mahoning Valley Steel was affiliated with the Niles Fire Brick.
- A: They were related?
- P: The Hozach's
- A: Who was it?
- P: John Hozach. He was related to the Clingan's.
- A: He owned the Mahoning Valley Steel?
- P: He was supervisor of the Mahoning Valley Steel.
- A: So there were a lot of large families and a lot of ethnicity to the area?
- P: Yes.
- A: At the same time, was there a lot of cultural customs from the old country. Did those stay intact?
- P: Yes. They would help one another. They all learned how to cook. If they felt they wanted to learn a new dish, they would go ask the neighbor. They shared vegetables with one another, celebrate the holiday's: Easter, Christmas, New year, Thanksgiving.
- A: This was a very tight knit community?
- P: Yes. You could leave your doors open and nobody is going to steal anything.
- A: This is considered then basically Langley-Pratt Street, this is pretty much an ethnic neighborhood at the time?
- P: That is right. The one's that lived out here were mostly Italians. There were Hungarians and a few black people, not too many. We had Polish people. We had more of the Slovak people. They raised their own chickens, livestock, and milked cows.
- A: What do you remember about some of the more prominent families from that time when you were growing up?

P: The prominent families from this neighborhood?

A: In this neighborhood, some of the people that you might remember that stick out in your mind?

P: The prominent family I had was the Ciminero's, right here on the corner, this brick building. That was owned by John Fusco. He has one son who became a doctor. The daughter got a high school education, that was about it.

A: That was still kind of unusual for then?

P: Yes, they were intelligent. The Fusco family as a whole, all of them in Niles, are all intelligent. They are business people, one is a dry cleaner in Niles, Eddie Fusco. I think a Fusco was a band director at Niles-McKinley High School. One had a dry-cleaning plant up here on Langley Street. That was Eddie Fusco who had one down on State Street. He is not there now. He passed away. Eddie was a hustler.

A: Tell me about him?

P: Eddie Fusco?

A: Yes.

P: Eddie Fusco would be, I would say that there that big project in the City of Niles like we say we have right now, Eddie Fusco would lead the pack. Yes, he would lead the pack, volunteer worker.

A: A very motivated guy.

P: Another one way back that we missed to was Anna Campana. She was a history teacher in Niles for many years. She was very enthusiastic. When she took on a volunteer job, she really went to town.

A: A lot of that used to go on, people pulling together to help each other out?

P: Yes. Armond Campana was a teacher at McKinley High School. He was the director of the band.

A: It seems that a lot of these people went into education of some kind?

P: Yes.

A: The Pallante brothers, you, like these Campana's you are saying. There seemed to be a lot of focus an education?

P: When you come out of a large family, that is the field that they generally go to because you like to be among the kids. You got the patience, that is the automatic to be a good teacher.

A: You are already accustomed to it in other words?

P: Right. Now some of the business people will try to stay with business. They will generally go into either business or teaching. I would not try to tackle the field of engineering or become a lawyer because I could see that I did not have that money to go on. The best I wanted to do was to come out with a degree and be a school teacher. Then we will take it up from there. Get that degree. Make sure you get the degree.

A: A lot of people felt that way at the time, not just beside yourself, a lot of people from this area felt that way?

P: Yes.

A: Tell me again about why you became a teacher?

P: I became a teacher because I felt that first, it is a steady job. Say you work nine months then you are off three. That is a jewel job.

A: That is a nice field.

P: You have the time off for vacation. The teachers deal has good pension. Now they also have good hospitalization too, Aetna.

A: Your first job besides Fort Jackson when you were teaching the illiterate soldiers, was Ashtabula City High School?

P: Yes.

A: Anything you recall about Ashtabula?

P: Yes. I went into the vocational electricity, there was opening there. I was not what you call certified to teach that, but the vocational education, you have to take so many courses on how to teach industrial subjects. That was what I had to do. During the school year while you are teaching, you go to night class. It would be classes up there in either Ashtabula High or Painsville wherever they let you go.

They were sponsored by Kent State. Some were also sponsored by Akron University. It is a lot different from the academic stand point that you will have about twenty to twenty-five kids that will sign up for vocational electricity. They will not be the brightest kids in the school. So you are going to have to take them, not for one year, for two years. Five periods a day you stay with them. Two hours related and three hours of shop.

A: What were the related subjects?

P: The related would be required math and electricity. The shop would be more of experimental, to try to see if we could apply the theory. When these kids finish shop, they would just prepare themselves for the beginning of an apprenticeship in the field of electricity. They could get a job in the industry, start at the beginning there. Or they could go to trade school and get their license which would be in the field of electrical wiring, motor repair. You could become a head electrician in a big plant. You could start at the bottom and go up.

A: This is an equivalent of the modern vocational schools that we got today, like the JVS (Joint Vocational School) and such?

P: Right.

A: Anything stand out in your mind about the Ashtabula job?

P: The thing that stands out there, the vocational job pays about two hundred dollars a year or more than the academic teaching job.

A: Why was that the case?

P: That was the case then. I do not know about today whether they are at the same level. If you want a good vocational instructor, you have a while to wait. You might get four, five, six hundred more. It is like a football coach.

A: In a way, you kind of got to coach.

P: You do not expect a superintendent to just say I want to stay with the rules, they all have to start at the bottom. Well you know what is going to happen, you are not going to find too many good people.

A: The longest teaching job you had was at Howland?

P: Yes.

- A: Eight years, I believe it says here.
- P: Eight years.
- A: What do you remember about working at Howland?
- P: I enjoyed it very much. I did not have any problems teaching Ohio History when I started out, or United States History, which was a half a day and then the other half in the shop. Then I went all of the way in the shop, no problem solved. The toughest job is teaching history. I mean it is tough, but I made it easy, in a way, to the ones that were not able to remember what they read.
- A: How did you do that?
- P: I used charts and maps. I let them even draw and I would give them credit. They could draw me a picture of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and do a good job on artistic skills, I would give them credit. What about research? I want you to take Massilon, Ohio, I want you to write a letter to a Chamber of Commerce and find out all you can find out about the Massilon Chamber of Commerce. Make sure you can find out all the information and be able to present it to the class as a report.
- A: That seems like an innovative method?
- P: I had made maps. I had advantage, I had the shop jigsaw. I cut out maps of the beautiful Ohio, maps of the United States, the Northwest Territory. I have them right in my front room.
- A: That is a very innovative technique, especially.
- P: I used the blackboard. I used newsprint. I showed them how to outline. I showed them how to just remember the facts. I called them, when you harvest plant or tree or whatever it is, I want the ripe fruit. I do not want the verbs and adjectives, I want the nouns.
- A: I see what you mean.
- P: If I mentioned to them, "Canton, Ohio." Something has to ring a bell. You jot down everything you know about Canton, Ohio. The first thing they would say, "Canton Bulldog." One of the first professional football teams in Ohio. "What else would there be?" "How about the Hall of Fame?"
- A: They can come up with things that way.

P: How about Canton Bulldogs. We start using association, and that is the way to go. Just like this project we have right now on the history of the Niles Fire Brick, and also the history of the Bagnoli. We got to find out how many of those Bagnoli worked at the Niles Fire Brick.

A: Yes, there is quite a few.

P: The same way I went to put on the display of the industrial technology. I used a chain reaction. I called RMI, I talked to Mr. Jenson. He is the industrial relations man up there. I let him know. I kept him informed what General Electric was going to do. Then the man at General Electric, I let him know what General Motors was going to do. General Motors was going to send in a big engine by air, it is going to land over here at Vienna Airport. Then it was going to be shipped over to the Memorial. I left all of the members of what we call the bicentennial. It was not the Niles Historical Society yet. They were all new. We got a winner. A big chain reaction. I got sixteen instead of eight. They heard that Ohio Edison was coming in with their exhibit of electricity from the Ohio State Fair ship right up here to the McKinley Memorial. I made the great fire brick. You noticed how I got it all decorated up on that chart.

A: I would like to ask you a few more questions about the fire brick if I could?

P: Yes.

A: They made two kinds of brick, they made the clay and the silica?

P: Right.

A: Can you explain the difference between the two kinds of bricks?

P: The difference is the clay brick will withstand more heat than the silica. So there are certain places where the temperature does not reach, say the point where iron ore would be melted and then turn into pig iron. In order to line the blast furnace it would be mostly clay brick. Now the silica brick has a place like in the normalizers and the open hearts. They were trying to get the right temperature on the steel, that is what the open hearts did. They have been replaced by the basic open furnace. Now we have the basic open furnace that will put out four times more steel than the old method.

A: And it does not need the bricks?

P: That is right. A special brick called paracase. That is why Kaiser had to move

down the road to Columbiana. Paraclase is 96 percent pure magnesium oxide.

A: It is not a matter of clay anymore?

P: No. No clay, no silica.

A: But in its heyday, the fire brick, weren't they considered pretty much the best you can get by a lot of companies? Weren't they considered the best bricks?

P: The best bricks for the old method of making steel for the blast furnaces and the open hearts. You see, that is why the sheet and tube had to close up.

A: Because they did not modernize.

P: They did not have the basic oxen furnace. They were doing the old method. The fire brick could make all the bricks, clay and silica.

A: They supplied most of the companies around here, the local corporations.

P: You ever visit the Kaiser Refractory down in Columbiana? You never did?

A: I have never been down there, no.

P: They had the same type of kiln they had down here at the Niles Fire Brick. Continuous kiln, it is heated by gas. I think they had two. I visited down there after the exhibit of industrial technology.

A: They moved the operations down there?

P: They had more land. We did not have enough here.

A: Even if you would have knocked everything down.

P: You would have to clear everything you got here, you still did not have enough.

A: You brought up the Bagnoli Club, would you like to talk about the Bagnoli Club a little bit?

P: Yes, I want to talk about the Bagnoli Club.

A: How did it start out?

P: The Bagnoli Club started in 1932. It was considered a club room. It was a little

store up on Mason Street that is located at 619 Mason Street. Most of them were men that worked at the fire brick. They all came from the same little village up there in Bagnoli or Iprino in the providence of the Avellino in Italy. It is about sixty miles from Naples in the Alpine Mountains.

A: What inspired them to put this organization together?

P: Well, I would say to bring the Bagnoli people a little closer together, family wise and to socialize. Then they also felt to help one another in case of sickness and death. Something on the same order of the Fraternal Organization.

A: Considering that the Bagnoli Club was formed in 1932, it had a lot to do with the Depression then? A matter of fear?

P: The Depression, the families helped one another. They did a bang up job. They were very close. Say one family gave birth to a child, the other friends would go to see them. They would bring them gifts. That is what I saw over here in my home. My mother had ten children, so we had quite a few visitors. Especially when they brought candy, oranges. Most of them brought chicken or hen to make good soup. The Bagnoli people, as a whole, I would say that they live the life similar to the Amish.

A: Really?

P: Yes.

A: How so?

P: How so? They baked their own bread. They raised their own vegetables. They loved their kids and made sure they did not get in any trouble. They had to discipline. You never talked back to your mother. Don't say it to your mother. Now to your father, your father might let you get away with it, but your mother will not.

A: It is a very tight knit group then?

P: That is right. They had a lot of respect for one another. In case of death, they would all go over and see one another at the funeral home to pay their respects. Now it has changed some. The next generation has changed it. That is why I say the world is in bad shape. We are living in the modern method which is not good. We have to go back.

A: Family values?

P: Right.

A: In remembering that, you see an example of the family values leading the community values?

P: Right. The Bagnoli people celebrated all of the holidays, Christmas especially. They had a terrific display, even in their own homes, of the birth of the Christ child. Most of them were members of the Catholic religion, Mount Carmel Church in Niles. They had what you call more of a religious club, called the Immaculate Conception.

A: I had heard about that, why don't you tell me the story about that?

P: From what I remember, this all took place over in Italy beginning with the priest there. I think his life was saved by a saint.

A: There is a festival every year?

P: Yes, so they celebrated that festival at Mount Carmel. I have a write up on it. You see it on the wall here?

A: Right. That is where I recall seeing it from. Is that in May when that takes place?

P: I am not positive, but I think so. They sent that article of the Virgin Mary. They sent it here, to Mount Carmel Church.

A: They got the statue?

P: Yes, they had the statue up there.

A: I am going to have to see that.

P: They bring it out on the right time. The organization is still going, women are still there attending the needs.

A: Strong parish.

P: Yes. We used to have some of the women belong to the Bagnoli Club.

A: Basically, the Bagnoli Club was more of a fraternal organization?

P: Yes, more for men. We have had some of the women belong as actual members,

but they did not take part in the running of the organization. They kind of sat back a little and let the men do it. But they joined. They would pitch in. That is what we missed up there. We do not have the women in the organization. Just the men cannot do it, and in business too. This goes in business as well.

A: Why do you feel that way?

P: Because you can depend on the women. You cannot depend on the men. What do you think? I experienced this, when I went down to start the dry cleaning business in Columbia, South Carolina. So I had to hire some pressers, you know, to press the clothes. Well, most of the black employees were press operators. When I first got there, I got former men that worked with the heart of the business that went bankrupt. Well, if I would have kept them, I would have went bankrupt too. I found out they were knuckle heads. They would not show up. Not only that, they wanted their weeks pay in advance. Then at the end of the week, they wanted to borrow money. Before you know it, I got rid of all those headaches. I hired women, and what a job they did. No headaches at all. They did a good job of pressing clothes, how is that?

A: I like that.

P: Now you find this true. You will find these committees on the Niles Historical Society, the ones we are going to start to form for the fund raising for this museum that we have in mind. If I want anyone on my committee, I am going after the women.

A: I am with you Mike.

P: How is that?

A: (laughter) I agree.

P: I got one up here at this rummage sale, I do not think she is going to be there tomorrow. She is a retired school teacher from Howland, from where I was at. She was in the elementary. I was in the middle school. I got her name and phone number, but I like to know what that Niles Historical Society had in mind. They all heard me, they said, "That is going to be good if we can get that." When I start the committee, I will call her back and see if she wants on be on the committee.

A: Yes, see if she wants to go. We have covered a lot of things today, Mike. I think we talked about a lot things I wanted to get covered. I appreciate your help.

P: Well, I mean I do not know if we covered as much as I did with, I think we

covered more with Mr. Butts.

A: I hope so. We got a lot valuable information.

P: Yes. We got a solid ball game here now.

A: We got a solid ball game, and I would like to get some more.

P: In Ashtabula, I had four good years up there. I will never forget the time I took on the best students in the Lakeshore, Painsville, Conneaut, and also Ashtabula Harbor High School. They all met down in my shop and I prepared them to see if they could pass the radar eddy test. That was a tough by the United States Navy.

A: What was that test for?

P: The radar eddy test.

A: Tell me about it?

P: That test there was to get the best students to prepare them for radar. I had seventeen students all together. And eleven went up there to take the test in Cleveland. Seven out of eleven passed the examination. The Navy said, "It cannot be true."

A: Fantastic.

P: You know what they did? They retested them.

A: How many passed this time?

P: Seven.

A: Beautiful.

P: I did the same thing down at Lordstown Military Reservation and I took on the NCO.

A: What were you teaching the NCOs?

P: The fundamentals of electricity. There I had twenty students at the end of the course that took the examination that came out of Fort Bliss. The Warrant Officers sat in my class all during the time I was teaching these men, NCOs. I was at the eight week point where I said, "Okay." They had the exam. They brought it in. They had it in the safe. It was a three hour examination. Then

when the test was over, I got the results. I had eleven pass the exam. Then the commanding officer sent the Warrant Officer to me, he says, "Who do you think was the best one in your class?" Well, I do. I told him.

A: He did not believe it?

P: No, I told him who it was.

A: What did they do with the guy?

P: They knew, they got some information, so they went on. These officers all went to Fort Bliss. They were in an environment where you figured you could not go ahead. You were stuck here.

A: Then they could move up, they had some place to go.

P: So there had to be something I was doing with this little black board.

A: You were doing something right.

P: Diagrams, I shot them up there. Not only that, but I always say the Ohm's Law. This way we have to set your life on. Reduce the resistance, increase the current flow. These people around here start knocking one another, negative talk. That should go down the sewer. You got to praise people of what they are doing.

A: Keeps them moving.

P: Right. But there are times when I find there is too much resistance, you know what I have to do don't you to get the current flow?

A: What is that?

P: I got to increase the pressure or voltage. Increase the voltage. That would be increasing the current flow, but if I increase the resistance, I will not have to increase the voltage.

A: It is easier to do it that way, more productive.

P: Right. I told Bob Brothers about that on the phone. He must never of had it that way.

A: Neither have I. You are telling me this and I never thought of this before.

P: If all of these people, especially at an old age, regardless old, young or what it is, if you want to prevent high blood pressure, you better use Ohm's Law. In fact I do it all day. You want fresh vegetables, you got to cultivate that plant. You do not want just that hard soil. I just put those fresh toppings on them to try to retain the moisture. What are you doing when you are retaining the moisture? You are cutting the fresh air to the roots.

A: So you are not getting any minerals.

P: That is the old fashioned way. I told you I got that thousand page book in there, Science and Farming. I told you. That is the way they always do it. On all of their farms out there that raise all kind of vegetables, they use a triple twelve commercial fertilizer to get the job done. You got to have the food.

A: Right, you got to feed them something.

P: That is the way you got to raise the children. A lot of these people do not want to cook a good meal for family. They send them to the fast food places.

A: Yes, go down to McDonald's, that is no good.

P: That is all I have so far. I was just hoping we can sell these people on this museum. That is the way I look at it. We got to have the whole city.

A: I think we can get the whole city behind us.

End of Interview