

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Irish Americans

Personal Experience

O H 876

ANN DONNELLY

Interviewed

by

Beth Choppa

on

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C This is an interview with Ann Carney Donnelly for the Youngstown State Oral History Project, on the Irish Community in Youngstown, by Beth Choppa, on March 24, 1981, at 1225 Kensington, at 1:00 p.m

Let us start off by you telling me something about your family

D My grandparents came from Galway, Ireland My grandparents had six children, five boys and six girls All of them married, except my Uncle Tom. He did not have any children Although, he did marry

C You were from the East Side?

D Yes My grandparents settled on the East Side at the Immaculate Conception Parish They were charter members. I remember Father Kenny the most at Immaculate He was the pastor when I was in school He was a very wonderful man, and he did a lot to improve the conditions on the East Side He was very active in every way

C What were some of the things he did?

D He had the Republic Street Bridge built I do not know what else he did, but he was a very strong personality I know that before he came to the United States, he rode horseback through Australia like a missionary We had a wonderful bunch of friends in school

C What was a typical day like for you in school?

D First, we had prayers, and then, we had catechism We also had reading and spelling Most of the pupils went home for lunch, and the nuns had their lunch in the convent

There were eight of us in my family, five girls and two boys Actually, there were three boys, but one died when he was eighteen months old We all attended Immaculate

C Where did you live on the East Side?

D We lived on Washington Street at one time, and then, we lived on Forest Avenue I made some very strong friendships with many people from Immaculate

C Were there any outstanding teachers that you remember?

D Mother Paul was the eighth grade teacher, then. She taught the girls, and I think that Sister Francis taught the boys We used to have recess, too. The morning classes took place, then, recess, and then, lunch Recess was really fun

C What kind of games do you remember playing?

- D Jump-rope and running. I do not think that it lasted that long
- C Was Washington an Irish street, or were there other nationalities?
- D Neither one of them were completely Irish. When we lived on Forest Avenue, the man across the street from us was a Ku Klux Klan member. He would have twenty men or maybe more meet at his home. They would put on their robes, and they would walk from where I lived on Forest Avenue to Shehigh Street where there was a Methodist Church.
That was where they had their meetings. We all sat on our porches and watched them. We were friends with them. They would come out in robes with a whole sheet on them and walk up the street. We would all sit and watch them.
- C That was interesting because some people have told us that they could see the cross burnings and stuff like that
- D If you drove out Canfield Road, you could see them burning their cross up on the hill. We used to drive out and watch them. We were not afraid of them at all
- C Around what year was this?
- D Probably, in 1924. As far as I could see, they just wanted to show their strength in their numbers with their sheets
- C What kind of dishes did your mother cook?
- D My mother used to garden. She could grow anything. We always had fresh vegetables. She made apple pies, jellies, and jams. She used to make her own bread, too. She would cook anything. She would can, too. We had fruit trees in the backyard—apple trees and cherry trees
- C Do you remember how you celebrated Christmas and Easter?
- D We celebrated Christmas with a bang. In our home, we did not have midnight mass. We went to mass early in the morning. You had to go to mass before you could see the Christmas tree and before you could see your presents. My mom had special cakes that she always made for Christmas. We always had a beautiful tree and all that sort of thing
- C What kind of special cakes did she make?
- D She baked fruit cake, and she baked a cake that she put big, fat walnuts on.
My sister, Helen, just loved to buy things for the tree and just fix the tree for Christmas

- C: Were the decorations for the tree all mostly home-made?
- D No, they were all bought. They were just like today, but it seemed to me that a lot more work went into them. The girls always got baby dolls, and the boys got bats and things like that. I had a brother and a sister younger than me, a brother older than me, and the rest were girls. I had a nice place to fit in the family.
- C What did your father do?
- D My father was a mill worker. When they came out of the mill, they were pretty hot. Every year, my father would get the flu. They called it the "grip" in those days. I suppose that it was from the change in the temperature. They did not have cars to ride home in those days. They had to wait for a bus or a street car.
My mother would do anything that she could. My sister was a private nurse. She was trained to carry hospital equipment. Helen was the second one. When she died, she was the vice-president of the Richards Merchant and Plant Exchange.
- C You said that you worked for Truscon?
- D Yes, I was a secretary to the safety director at Truscon Steel Company who was Dyke Donners. He was also an Immaculate Conception member. I did not know him when I went to school.
In those days, every nationality had their own church and school. The Irish people built Immaculate Conception School. The Germans had their own school. Those who did not go to those schools went to public school. They completely had to build their own schools. They did not have any help from anybody.
- C You said that you went to high school at Rayen?
- D Yes, I went to Rayen High School. When I got in the business world, I had different positions. I had quite a variety, in fact. I worked with a credit agency. Then, I worked for an auto company. Then, I went back to the credit association. I was a legal stenographer then, too. Finally, I went to Truscon. From there, I was married and did not work anymore. I have four children. Two boys and two girls.
- C Were there any teachers at Rayen that stood out?
- D There were very nice teachers at Rayen. Mrs. Altman and Mr. Tuttle. I cannot think of any other names. That was such a long time ago. It is strange, but I remember the nuns at Immaculate more clearly than the ones I had in high school. I suppose that they were more impressionable in those days.
- C Where did you meet your husband?

D I met my husband when I was coming home from work I liked to walk home He was coming in a different direction with a friend of my sister's When I met him, he asked me for a date From then on, that was it

C How long did you stay on the East Side?

D Until I got married in 1928. My parents lived there until they moved to Hubbard My mother died first, and then, my father lived until his nineties. My sister moved in, and they stayed in that house until she bought one in Hubbard That had to be ten years

Another thing was that we always had mass on Saint Patrick's Day My father left us all a copy of a paper, which said that his parents were shifted from three different towns Three of his brothers were born in different towns because they had to move on an account of the persecution. He said that he hoped that we would always remember to bless them and pray for them My Uncle John came over much later than my dad He did not come over with his parents

C You said that your father was an Irish Patriot?

D He was very proud that he was Irish That was all He said that it was a very wonderful nationality, and the people were very high-class, wonderful people

C Do you remember what any of the wakes were like when you were in Ireland?

D The wakes that I attended were no different than the ones now I do know that when my Uncle John was dead, we took our four year old brother, Brian, with us They had the wake in the house Everything got quiet, and Brian pipes up and says, "What is Uncle John doing laying there dead?"

I do not think that Irish people show their feelings like most people do They tend to cover it up more and pretend that they are not hurting when they are

C Is your family traditionally democrat?

D Really, it was a big help I remember my Uncle Tom His wife had died, and he had no children His money was in the bank, and he could not get any money out of the bank There were no jobs, so he came to live with us We were glad to have him because he was a wonderful help. We had a family that he did not feel too good about, but he was really welcome with us The new deal was really welcomed because it gave many people an opportunity to get back on their feet again The banks were closed, and there was no money When I tell the kids about the things that we did during the Depression, such as serving lunch, they are really amazed

C I would like to ask you if you remember the Irish days out at Idora Park?

D I cannot remember having any Irish dancing. We used to have picnics at Lincoln Park. The Immaculate used to have big picnics.

C Was this when you were in school at Immaculate or before?

D I think that I had to go to school when they had those things. We did have picnics out at Mill Creek Park too for a long time. Also, the Immaculate used to put on pretty good plays.

C When you worked at Truscon, do you remember anything about union organizing or labor unrest going on?

D No. When I was out there, nothing was ever mentioned. I got married in 1928, and then, I left. I know that the unions were in there because my husband was working for Presidential for years before the unions came in. If they wanted to go on vacation, they had to hide every account up-to-date, and everything had to be in perfect order. There were so many stipulations that they had to have. They would be working until midnight the night before their vacation. When the union came in, it made it a lot easier for the men.

C Did your family subscribe to the Telegram or the Vindicator?

D All that I can remember is the Vindicator. My husband's aunt was the first editor for the Vindicator. When my mother and father were young, they would go to a dance, and they would take all of my mother's sisters with them, too.

C Where did they go to the dances?

D The Immaculate used to have dances. I think that there was a fellow that started a fight one night, and that spoiled it. That was the end of it. Another thing that happened was while we were on our honeymoon in 1928, the school was struck with lightning, and the third floor was burned off. I do not think that they ever rebuilt that. Father Ready was the pastor then.

C How did you family celebrate Easter?

D We used to color eggs. We celebrated Lent by having a fast. We never ate butter, eggs, milk, or cheese on Good Friday. We would have beans and corn. They called it succotash. We had that with fish, and we had oysters. On Easter, we had Easter baskets and eggs.

I can remember when I first started school. School was so crowded that we had to sit with the eighth grade girls.

C Why did you sit together? Was it the class?

D They took us into this room and put us together. They debated about where they were going to put all of us. I often think back to how did the nuns teach all of us kids. There were so

many of us. When I started school, they sent me to public school, so I could start a half and hour later. They took me out of school and put me back in Immaculate. It was really different. At public school, you had your own crayons, your own desk, and your own paper. At Immaculate, there were two in a seat.

C What was it like on Christmas Eve?

D On Christmas Eve in our house, everybody had to get a bath, and then, you were put to bed. My sister, Helen, was the enthusiastic one, and she bought the tree and the trimmings. We always had a very nice Christmas. Then, on Christmas morning, as I said, we always had to go to mass first. I remember walking to mass with my parents. It was still dark, and there were still big snowflakes falling. It was very pretty.

C Do you remember a lot of music in your house?

D My father sang, at the time. Everybody would sing for entertainment. My dad used to sing all of those Irish songs.

C Do you remember any of the songs?

D Yes, but I am not about to sing them.

C Do you remember the words or the names of songs?

D We used to sing "Wild Irish Rose," ". . . .," and some other popular songs.

C Would you say that your family was liberal as opposed to other ethnic groups?

D Did they oppose any other ethnic groups?

C Yes.

D Never. They loved everybody. We had friends who were Slavic, Italian, and Greek.

End of Interview