

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ohio Democratic Party

Personal Experience

O.H. 954

FRANK O'CONNOR

Interviewed

by

Mark Connelly

on

April 16, 1975

C: This is an interview with Mr. Frank O'Connor for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Democratic Party of the Mahoning Valley, by Mark Connelly, on April 16, 1975, at Mr. O'Connor's residence, at 11:30am.

Mr. O'Connor, would you talk a little bit about your family background?

O: Well, from what I have been able to learn, my family dates back in this area to the early Nineteenth Century. On my mother's side of the family, going back through George Sherman Riffle, who was my mother's father, to George Washington Riffle, in Austintown, who was born in Poland Village, and his father and probably grandfather here before. My mother's mother was a Brenner. The three Brenner brothers came here in 1851, or thereabouts, and were quite active in business and political life here. Conrad Brenner would be my great-great-great-grandfather, I think. He manufactured barometers and was well known in various businesses in Youngstown. Conrad F. Brenner, his son, I think, was county Chairman, chairman of the Executive Committee, county auditor, active in politics here. There is a book of the history of the Mahoning Valley that has considerable information in it. On my father's side of the family, my grandfather was a prominent painting contractor here. He came from down around Mount Vernon, Fredericktown, Ohio. There are literally hundreds of descendants of the various Brenner and Riffle families in this area. As a very young child I was told various things that attracted my interest to being more active in public affairs than I otherwise might have been. However, my mother died when I was five. My father went to California, and so for some time I was with other people and finally came to live with my grandfather and I grew up there.

I think my first business venture was made when I was in first grade of school. I sent away to a New York company that advertised some pictured seen envelopes and I collected seeds in my grandfather's flower garden and sold them at a penny a packet. As the years went by, I grew and grew and grew until I was fourteen, and grandfather had a heart attack and was in the hospital unconscious. I became the sole support of the family. For that reason, I was forced to drop out of school. I went back the last day of eight grades and passed examinations. I got credit for my year of high school that same way.

C: When were you born, what was the date?

O: I was born September 16, 1911. Now from a historical standpoint, of things that I remember, that might have some casual interest. I remember standing in Austintown during World War I, to travel along the road and watch the long lines of Army lorries go by until they literally pounded the pavement into the mud. Somewhere around the age, I am not sure, but it must have been three to five, my father took me on a motorcycle over to East Youngstown after the East Youngstown Riot, and they burned the whole town. I can still see those buildings with the stark windows and the question of why did it happen? I picked up stories later. My uncle manned a machine gun on the bridge to prevent them coming across the middle. As I grew up, granddad told me stories of labor

problems and being a businessman. He was president of the Master's Painter's Association. His attitude was that a man was entitled to double or triple pay if he earned it, but he did not like the idea of being assigned bums he had to pay with equal pay. With all the anti-labor arguments, it was years before I saw the fallacy in some of them. I did not know it in all of them. I really had the problem of running the business myself. I think I managed.

I peddled stuff all over the South Side of Youngstown on a bicycle. As a matter of fact, the rhubarb that I grew in I still have. While I lost everything there, a friend, Mr. Opendwarfer, was discussing it but, I would like the same variety because it was a good one. He was kidding me, that was easy. I said, "Well, what is the name?" He did not know and after about an hour then he finally told me. He said, "You have forgotten, but you gave it to me thirteen years ago. So I have the same variety."

Anyhow, as I grew up, I was so busy seven days a week, all hours of the day and night, stocking the greenhouse of the floral business. I got interested, granddad was a great floral. He had a little greenhouse back of his house on Warren Avenue before he moved out here to Boardman.

C: Is that where you grew up, on Warren Avenue?

O: No, that is where he lived before he moved out, 1918. Moved out to West Boulevard, on the corner of Route 224 and West Boulevard. And during that time, I did not know, but I understand that he was quite successful in business and had money galore. It was many, many years later that I found this out. In our library there was the twelve volumes of Luther Burbank's work, put out by the Luther Burbank's Society. By the way, I have them. I came to this by a long round about way many years later. So, as a very young boy, I read the message and what not of Luther Burbank and started to apply them to pansies. After about ten years, I had a pansy that was four and a half inches across the bottom that nobody anywhere, well for that matter I suppose, the whole world let alone the United States, had. Without advertising, I had people actually come as far away as Maine and Oregon.

The way that happened was they were at the teacher's convention and saw them and it spread like wild fire. The day after I got cars pulling in from all over the United States. Unfortunately, when I lost the business, about two years before I could find some ground, the seed did not germinate and I lost the string.

C: How did you lose the business?

O: That is a part of a political thing.

C: Okay.

P: This really cheered me up when I found it. We were talking about original editions. Just

out of curiosity, I have had them here for five or six years. Someone called me, and we had that old book case up in the attic that came from our home. Knowing I never got anything from the home at all, they asked me if I would like to have it. And I said, "Sure." When I went, it was full of books. Many of the books were these twelve volumes of Luther Burbank. Apparently granddad put up money for the society to publish the works. You notice they are all hand pasted in, to get, as Burbank said, "The natural colors." Photography was not developed then sufficient to print it in the book to his satisfaction.

C: Do you have any idea how much this collection is worth?

O: Not the least idea. There is probably quite a few volumes, but it is just the idea that my grandfather's name is printed right in the volume itself. It is not pasted in it. I found Morgan Robinson's six volume there. The autobiography has a sticker pasted in there that he donated to have those books, I do not know how many others. Anyhow, due to this, I remember in sixth grade of school the teacher assigned us a ten minute English assignment on a subject we picked ourselves. Now this was about probably about 1924, 1925, 1926. And I picked as my subject a run down theory on heredity because I had been in this plant advertising the selection process. I may say that Burbank was not too scientific, but he did not let forgone excepted rules stop him from trying something. But anyhow, I knew it worked and was quite impressed with it. I put a good outline of that on the board. I can understand today the physical expression on the teacher's face because it was far over her head and she did not know what I was talking about. But I also discovered that credit did not take place until about that day either. I was treading on dangerous grounds. I got my education, mainly out of school. I read every book my grandfather's library had.

C: What schools did you attend?

O: Well, I went first to Austintown School. I remember the first grade that, for some reason, there were too many students in the class. There were two of us in session with the teacher and somebody else had to decide whether I or another student would be put in the second grade to start because we were the two best in the class. But I was very, very small, even for my age then. My birthday falls September 16, just about the time school opens. So I got a year up that way and I was smaller physically. So they decided I was too small. Then my mother died and I was pulled out of school. I do not know, it seemed to me that much more than a year went by before I got into the Boardman Schools. But when I try to check the dates I cannot account for it. I do know it was quite embarrassing at the age of thirteen, that every time a new relative showed up, I was a year younger. And so I was thirteen for three years. But when I check it, I cannot account for it. Anyhow, at that age, six grade it had reached a climax of the Ku-Klux-Klan bigotry in this area. They had a big farm over in Canfield and everybody was all for taking over the government.

- C: Were they planning this locally?
- O: Well, you know the history of the Klan, but it was particularly bad in this area. Now the joker in this is that my mother's family, I do not recall what Protestant religion, probably Lutheran or Presbyterian. Anyhow, I remember that my mother was confined to bed, but she would not let me have my breakfast until I went to Sunday School. I had to be five or younger. And it must have been a mile or more up there to Austintown's little church on the south side of route 18, just west of South Turner Road. As far as I could find out, I did not know what my grandfather's religion was, if he had any. I always got the impression that he was an Orangeman. But it is probably for business reasons, and I was just a kid and he did not have to explain that to me anyhow. His second wife though, did go to the Catholic Church. With the name O'Connor, the unwanted assumption was, among the kids in school and others, that with an Irish name I had to be Catholic. I heard it expressed that they were not going to tolerate a Catholic in a public school.
- C: Who did you hear saying this?
- O: The kids.
- C: Any teachers say this?
- O: Well they said it with a rubber hose. I do not like to put it on. But it was as vicious as is gets. I had all my front teeth knocked out on the corner of a school building by four kids that dragged me out of a school room when I refused to leave because the teacher confined me to the room for fighting with them before. Every time I got into a fight, which I could not avoid, I got a licking.
- C: From the teacher?
- O: Yes. Let us back up a little bit, the very first time I went to Boardman School was in the first grade. All the hoodlums threw a bucket of water off the top of the school building. I got my back up against the wall so that I could not be attacked from the rear. They dumped a bucket of water off the roof and I got wet. I nearly got my arm twisted off by the principal for getting wet. He did not ask who did it or why, and at that time it did not dawn on me, but I felt that there was a continuing pattern. It was not until I was in the Army that they caught up with him. I think there was some fifty charges of brutality.
- C: Against the principal from Boardman?
- O: Yes. That was tied in with the political thing in the first place and that he

belonged to our family.

C: Can you mention his name since he was charged?

O: Now I was in the Army and only got it second hand, but I guess there is a record, you could look it up. Well, I do not want to put on record how vicious he was, but there were times when my body was black, blue, and green all over.

C: From the principal?

O: Yes. In fact, one time he kept me in his office for six weeks.

C: Everyday you would have to go in?

O: Everyday. Oh it seems so childish to put on this.

C: No, go ahead.

O: What happened was this: I was very good in mathematics. There were two columns of figures. The teacher assigned it to take the first one and multiply everyone by the second one, divide, subtract and what not. It made a whole six weeks or work, which consumed hours at home. I did not have the time and I got behind and as the end of the time came up, I thought I could catch up, but I did not quite succeed. That I had one or two assignments that were not ready for. Anyhow, I computed and I had an average grade of something like a 97 or 98, taking zeros for the rest of it. When I turned it in, the teacher gave me a zero for the whole six weeks. She must have read my thoughts, of course, with no way of proving whether I found or in any way gave it away, I do not know. But she immediately demanded that I make a public apology to the entire class, and she never told me why. I refused to apologize, at least until I was told what I was apologizing for. She sent me down to the principal's office and that took six weeks.

C: What happened while you were there?

O: Ultimately, it got so bad that I was groaning in my sleep and granddad discovered it. I would not go to him because he had heart trouble. So he went up to school with me and he happened to have the contract for painting the school at the time. Of course, the principal fell all over him shaking hands, and whatnot, because I was just an unknown orphan up until then. He said that there must have been a mistake and that nobody had asked me to apologize. Granddad had not disappeared down the hall until he told me I had to go down and apologize to the teacher.

C: Was this principal, was he in anyway connected with the Klan? Did it ever come out?

O: Oh, I do not know, he probably was. In fact, almost everybody in any position that he was, even my closest friends, my best buddy was in the junior Klan, and had robes and everything.

C: Can you mention his name?

O: Well it might embarrass him today. Even then, if it had not been for him, I would probably have got beaten a lot worse. I do not know if I should tell who it was.

C: You can have this restricted.

O: The Boardman News carried the other day, that one of the first Democrats elected in Boardman was Mr. Ratmond who is justice of the peace. I even checked since to see if my memory was wrong. He was a Republican. It got into the paper printed and it was absolutely wrong. He was prominent enough. No one wants to admit it today, but it was a pretty nice percentage of the population out here. Anyhow, part of this was probably that. I made up my mind that regardless, I could not take anymore of that kind of monkey business. I walked clear into Saint Dominic's, a parochial school. Rode a bicycle part time. Sometimes I would get in there and I could not get back because the snow was too deep. I had to drag the bicycle. Hitch-hiked and walked.

During that period of time, in public school, I was psychologically brainwashed and no matter how I tried or what I did I could not get a grade over 78 to save my soul. The minute that I arrived at this city school that had a higher rating in all the tests and everything, I was the head of the class. I was given the lead part in the Christmas play. I played the wiseman. I was lucky that Sister Beth Tista was the seventh grade and Sister Petranella Baphista was the eighth grade. I think that of all the teachers that Sister Petranella of all the teachers in all the public school, college, and everything else, she was outstanding, there was no question about it. We had three or four other Protestants in the class. My only knowledge of the Catholic religion, at that time, was out of the Encyclopedia Britannia. Because being constantly hounded by name calling and what not, being called a Catholic, I got curious of what a Catholic was. So in a very real sense the Ku Klux Klan converted me to the Catholic Church. I did later join.

There were certain things that I intellectually questioned. As the priest put it, "It had to be logically acceptable or I did not have to accept it." So I do not know whether that qualifies me as a Catholic or not, because about that time Sister Petranella and Sister Baphista got a determined idea that they were going to make me a Catholic Priest. They got the parish priest interested. I remember a session with him where the church offered to pay for my education all the way through college and seminary if I would become a priest. As young as I was, I still felt that I would run into the problem of moral

responsibility of myself to do what I thought was right and the bishop might think otherwise and I would be a fact, but I suspect strongly that when they had to give up on me they started on the young Malone boy, who is now the bishop. I wanted to compare notes with him some day, he was in the class behind me, Bishop Malone, I got a very good background of the Catholic viewpoint. Sister Petranella was quite broad in her coverage of the historical divisions of the Christian Church back in Luther's time.

C: The basics?

O: Yes, because I have run into pretty bigoted Catholics too, including clergyman.

C: Did you notice any trouble or disturbances caused by the Klan at Saint Dominic's while you were there, or did they stay away from those sort of places?

O: It seemed to begin to die about that time. I do not remember whether that was the time the Supreme Court ruled that they had to make their membership public, and they just almost collapsed.

C: But even after it died, you continued to go to Saint Dominic's, to make the long trip in anyway?

O: Oh yes, I graduated, as a matter of fact, the eighth grade. Sometime in September or October granddad got sick. We were supposed to study at home, I was just too busy to even look at those books. The day before the final exams, I stayed up all night and I read every textbook for that class, through the whole semester. I went to class the next day and passed the exam. Sister Petranells would not give me the exam papers. She said that I could not pass. Well, I said that it will not cost you anything to let me try. So she let me try and I graduated with the class.

C: Did you ever run into problems with people in the Klan other than teachers or fellow students?

O: One thing was this, that gangs would wait for you and try to catch you on the way to and from school or during recess. It was never one; it was three, four or five.

C: But these were kids?

O: Yes, of course, they would not act that way if it had not been their parents baiting them. They did not all act that way, because many times I would have been in pretty bad shape if it had not have been for this buddy, who was a Klansman himself, that stood with me.

C: Did your friend ever mention when his father would have told him to do

something like this to a Catholic that he decided not to?

O: Not in that form, but I could tell you a few things that were believed that are ridiculous enough to be a historical comedy. The story was that when Al Smith would get elected president, now this was just a little bit later because that would be 1928, they were digging a tunnel under the Atlantic Ocean and the papal guard was going to march under the Atlantic Ocean and take over Washington. And they believed it! You could not shake them. My buddy believed that every Catholic Church was stocked with arms for a revolution. I remember very clearly saying to him, "Well you pick any church in Youngstown, at random so they do not know we are coming and I will go with you there and we will go through the entire institution and search it." He said, "They will not let you in." I said, "They will let me in." His cop-out was that he was afraid.

C: So he never took you up on it?

O: No you could not fudge it. It is incredible because the adults that grew up from those kids, many of them became friends and I never detected bigotry afterwards. How widespread that was at that time and this is one of the things I thought was real progress, but then it shows up in other forms. Even in the form, it took me years to guess that Catholics could be bigoted against Protestants the same way. It is quite widespread right now.

I remember one corruption of the word Catholic, a Cat Licker and something to do with papas and some things I did not know what the meaning was then, so they do not stick in your memory. All I knew was that I was part of the joke.

C: Did the teachers ever slip and call you that?

O: I do not recall that. The only thing was that you got no support whatsoever from the teachers from the fact that they could not possibly have not seen what was going on in the playgrounds and whatnot. They could not stop a fight if they came upon it, but usually I got a licking for it regardless.

C: You were the only one in the whole group?

O: Well, of course, I do not know what happened to the others, I do not think they were ever brought in at all. Three or four of them would jump me and I would get a licking for a fight.

C: Did any teacher ever stand up and say that this sort of action was wrong, that you recall?

O: No, but I do not know that as time went on, whether you wanted to fight or not, you find that you have to learn to defend yourself somewhat. I found, having short arms, I could not box. So I do not believe I ever hit anybody, even in a fight. But I learned to wrestle, and quite affectively. A little of what we call jujitsu, use the other fellows weight. It got so that I could toss them around pretty good. It got, after a while, one of the bigger guys would try it. I remember one of the last times very clearly, it was the leader of one of these little gangs. Oh, for this, I hate to put this childish stuff on. Four or five of them come by me, they had great big rubberbands that hurt like the dickens, and when I started by, I come to what was happening and nailed him by the arm. That lead to a little scuffling and just that time the recess bell rang so I got out of it. But he was waiting for me to come out the next time.

C: Where did you go to high school?

O: In a sense I did not. I came back to Boardman after graduating from Saint Dominic's, eighth grade. By this time, the hotel business was taking so much of my time that I think it was somewhere around Christmas before I got into class. I got a bunch of work to make up for back time and to get credit. Let us see, I think I went perhaps three days a week up until sometime early March or February, and then I had to start the greenhouse. I did not get back to school until the day we took the exams. I managed to pass them. The second year I came in, I think it was in January, about two or three weeks before the semi-exams. I could not carry four classes. I found I was too far behind. So I carried geometry and algebra.

I had Mrs. Rookinbroad as a teacher, very thorough teacher. Not too much patience if you did not get it, but she was a good teacher. Of course, here is the problem: she would assign these long algebra problems that took a whole page to work them out stage by stage. I would take one look at it and in only one stage or two, write the answer under it. I did not know what she was talking about. They had a student-faculty discipline set up and they gave what they called discipline slips. She kept threatening to give me discipline slips if I did not do this work. I told her a number of times that I did not have the time. It was so pointless to do all that work if you knew the answer. But she came in for class one day and she said that this was the end. She was not going to tolerate it any longer and that she would have me even expelled from school, that I had a teacher's answer book, that I memorized the answers and homework. She probably assumed I was copying them out of the book. Of course, at that time I did not know that teachers had an answer book.

So I said to Mrs. Rookinboard, I said, "Well, I do not know how to convince you that I do not need to do all that to get an answer." But I said, "You make up an algebraic equation right here and I will do it in front of you." So she is doing it on the desk upside down, but an 'X' is the same upside down as the other way. I could see what she was writing. Before she had the equation balanced I had one side of it worked in my mind.

When she turned it around and pushed it over to me I just wrote the answer under it; which was worse because she did not realize that I had another ten seconds or so head start on it. I never had any trouble from her after that.

So when I come in to take the examination, I think that occurred later, but when I came in for the half year examination, she did not want to give me the exam paper, same as Sister Petrenella. She said, "You cannot pass it." I remember there was two classes and it came to some eighty students, and I ended up above the class medium. Two weeks later, they took the state scholarship contest and the same thing happened. I had a real argument with her to get those papers. I told her, I did not expect to win, but I liked to see how much I learned. Well, it turned out that there was two to represent Boardman High School and I was one of them. However, I was too busy to prepare for it and I finally told them to get someone else to take my place. So I never did go down to the county for it. Other than that I had no formal education. It must have been a good twenty years later that I went back to school.

C: That is to college?

O: Yes, so I never had a high school diploma. I had credit on the record for one year of credits and two half year in algebra and geometry. I later taught business mathematics in the university, including algebra, which I never took.

C: How did you pick up your diploma, eventually, so that you could go to college?

O: GED Test. General Educational Development Test. And, by the way, a compliment to those boys, when they had it it was the essence of history rather than memorizing the dates and names. You could detect it reading the test. Because of the nature of the test, I really did not expect to be able to pass it. I stayed until after he graded it to find out. He said, "What were you worried about, this is the same test that I took for my master's degree and you did better than I did." Later, when I went to get my transcript, the girl would not type it in. She said, "It has got to be a mistake." She went back to look it up, but it was not a mistake. They told me at the time it was the highest grade that any one had ever recorded in American History. So much for four years that the taxpayer pays for keeping students in high school.

As a teacher, later, I was absolutely appalled of students coming to college that can neither read and nor understand what they read. Nor could they add or subtract. Incredible, in that business mathematics course, I gave what I thought would be a very easy sixth grade examination to find out what was wrong. I had a feeling that I was talking to a stone wall. The most simple addition of two digit numbers of each different kind of mathematics and the average grade of the class was below twenty and I had five zeros. They did not all come from a particular high school, because I asked later and they were from all over. Apparently, as the public education system pushed students year by year by year to make room, the standards got hopelessly low. They give them a degree

that does double damage in the sense you are told you are educated and you are not. I understand the same thing is happening at the college level today. I can tell by the numbers when I see it in the paper. It would be impossible under the grading system back, twenty, twenty-five years ago, to have whole classes that everyone got A's.

C: I take it it was in between this twenty-two year break in your education that you first got interested in politics?

O: Well, you wanted a little indication of background. I will go back to that. When I was in the Army, because, I suppose, I had done some electrical work, I was an electrician down in the mill for a while, they sent me to electronic school and I took courses for telephone communication. We were to be sent from the Air Force to a Signal Corps School because the Air Force planned, as they explained to us, to take airfields behind the enemy lines, and the Signal Corps would not be fast enough to set up the terminals. That was a little unpleasant bit of news when I found that it was likely to be dropped with the paratroopers.

But anyhow, to go back now, to the time that I first learned something about the reality of the political situation, not as we get it out of the books. What is the word for it, what we dream or wish it ought to be to what it may actually be. Now I have no way of knowing whether the local situation is general, and I hope to God it is not. I think it is typical, though, of all big metropolitan areas. Now to go back to the very beginning of any direct understanding of the political set up. I was running my nursery and literally minding my own business. I had not had the slightest notion of doing anything direct. This was about the early part of the great Depression. Practically nobody I knew was employed. I remember there was one guy that was a custodian in a school and another was a custodian in one of the steel mills. Other than that, I did not know anybody that had a job. Statistics say that there were so many millions, but I think it was understated in this area. I had taken an interest in economics and, strangely enough, I predicted the 1929 crash in my own business. I retrenched a year ahead, which left me in a position that I got all my money out of the bank before they closed. I had conserved my cash so that I did not go into the red, as every greenhouse in Youngstown did. That was in the days when the farmers were out with pitchforks to prevent sheriff sales and whatnot. Anyhow, there were an enormous number of people out of work. One of the first things that was done to try to help the situation, the township did some road work in which they let you work on a township road eight hours, three times a month. There were so many people out of work rotated. If I recall right, a married man got that eight hours \$1.75, a single man only got a dollar and a quarter, same work. Now this was not loafing; it was hard work, and they expected you to do a days work. However, it was argued that some of these men might spend it on tobacco or whiskey, so the trustees of the township claimed the right to make them buy at a store that they named. On the surface of it, it would appear it would prevent them from buying tobacco, as if a starving man with a starving family would.

I was back in the back working on the flower garden and my next door neighbor

came over, Henry Lender, and he had a package of meat that had been delivered by one of these stores as expenditure of the money he had earned on the road. He said, "Smell this!" It just stunk to high heaven. He said, "I could not feed this to my dog." He was an old German, hot tempered, and he was ready to blow his stack. Now he was a machinist, a very good one of the old school. He could do anything, make the tools if necessary. I do not know just what had happened, but he got into some kind of argument over a patent that he had invested something. He lost out on the right to employment and in those days, he was literally blackballed. I learned many years later during World War II that he was working out West as a machinist at somewhere the age of seventy five or eighty. I suppose then he was in his forties. He was too old to work, but when we needed him, greater things.

Anyhow, he told me what was going on and that this was general. Now he left our place there and walked, better than a mile and a half, to this store to try to get him to give him some meat that was fit to eat. He told me later that he flatly refused. He told him he was on welfare at all, he earned it. This lead to me being interested in what was going on and sometime later I went to some of the meetings of some fifty or more people. They called themselves an Unemployed League and tried to get something done about this. Now there were three major things wrong. The stores would advertise groceries in the paper and then bill them at twice what they advertised for, the same thing, same day. I will not name the storekeeper because one of the charges is a criminal offense. No pound of butter weighed a pound, at least the ones that we weighed. The same thing was true with everything, short weight, over charged and bad meat. So, this seemed outrageous to me, that anything like this could go on. I was just a boy, but I decided that I would get concrete evidence that would stand up in court and I ought to stop that. Now, I had quite a reputation by that time as a young businessman.

C: This is still the floral business right?

O: Yes. everybody thought that I was a lot older than I was because they could not believe it. As a matter of fact, I think I was only fourteen or fifteen when I helped liquidate granddad's corporation. I handled everything but the real estate and the mortgage. He was a little bit dumb-founded when I figured out all the debts. I was a pretty good salesman. That would not have any direct bearing on this. I would go to these meetings and, finally, in the wintertime when the nurseries were not operating, I discovered that the farmers were also qualified for this program when they did not have another job, because there are several months. So I went and signed up to work on the township roads, for the one purpose only, to get evidence. Now, I do not even now have enough legal knowledge to know. I did not know what we were going to get and I thought what I had was sufficient. So what I did, so I would not be criticized on the grounds of getting this money for nothing, I made sure that everybody saw that I did more work than anybody else in the gang.

I put in the three days that was necessary to get an order, and that is all I put. I got

the newspaper and carefully followed the ads so that we would buy only what was advertised in order to get a bill for the same thing to prove the point conclusively. I had five witnesses at the house when the truck arrived to deliver it. We had a balanced scale, which I was not sure the legal aspects, but we sealed then tight and sealed each package so that it could not be said that they were tampered with afterwards. I thought that would be sufficient at least to get a public official to look at it. I took those sealed and tied packages first to the trustees. Now, first I went right to the storekeeper and said, "What is this, will you correct it?" And thinking right there and there alone that I would put an end to it. But he arrogantly said that he did not have to pay any attention to it and that he would not do anything about it. Then I went to the trustees and I knew them personally for years, very friendly, personable people. In fact, I considered then man a friend. I knew him since I was a little boy. He looked me straight in the eye and said, "I will not believe you." I said, "Here is the evidence!" I said, "If you do not believe me, come with me and we will intercept the truck and you take the evidence and I will get you fifty affidavits that this is going on all over the township. "Oh," he says, "I have known this man all my life and he would not do anything like that." Well, my conclusion, whether it is accurate or not, was that he would not do anything because it was his friend.

C: You do not want to mention any names, is that right?

O: No, but that man who was metered, he did not get tarred and feathered by that group later because I was the only one who raised my voice against it. Getting ahead of my story, I will tell you that part of it. Then I headed for the prosecutor's office.

C: Who was the prosecutor at the time?

O: I do not recall, I do not think I talked to the prosecutor himself. It was probably one of his assistants. I took those full baskets and I must have been somewhere between sixteen and twenty, I cannot recall off hand. I was quite young then. I may have been as old as eighteen. I was too young to take any direct part in politics. I took it to the prosecutor. His story was that they could not do anything. Well I think the least you could do is investigate it. No, they did not have time. Well, I said, "I can bring you fifty affidavits that this is general. It is a public thing, not just a personal thing to me. I only went into it to get some evidence of what was going on." He finally condescended that if I swear out of warrant to have the man arrested, they would act. I was told that the prosecutors can send on evidence and selectively present only what he feels like and the jury does not know what he is sitting on. If he muffs the case and the jury acquits the man he can turn around and sue you for false arrest. Now if you have property you do not risk it, if you do not have property nobody pays any attention to you.

So these meetings went on. It was decided that they would attempt to oust the trustees by political action. Henry Lender was one of the candidates, the same gentleman

who was next door and Andrew Craig from over on Ferncliff. Now one family had dominated Boardman Township as far back, I was told fifty years. The Republican Party had swept everything as far back as anybody would tell me about. I suppose the odds were ten or twenty to one, party wise, but the township elections are non-partisan by law. In other words, the political parties are breaching the spirit of the law when they make endorsements on a non-partisan election. But there is no law, as far as I know, that stops them. At times, in later years, I tried to use that as a political argument and get the Democratic Part to not endorse. One time I was out-maneuvered by the secret Republicans in the organization who got outsiders into our meeting and rushed through an endorsement while they held the press to publish it to defeat us. There after we adopted a rule that only the committeemen could vote on the endorsements so it would not happen again. We got taken. Anyhow, at that time I had no political affiliations.

I had no idea, one party or the other, and did not even know what my grandfather was. He would not tell me when I asked him. Later he became a Democrat as later he joined the Catholic Church after I was baptized. At these meetings they developed to try to elect a couple trustees and break it that way, by political action. In the mean time they sent a committee down to the governor to try to do something about it, and at that time there was a Democratic governor and these were Republican officers. A meeting over on Ferncliff in Andy Craig's home, the committee reported back. I have no means of knowing whether these things I tell you were truthfully reported by the other people, but you have to assume in politics how the circumstances looks. Henry Lender was the chairman of the group by that time and that night he was quite incensed because the committee had gone without consulting him. He had resigned the chair and went back and sat down over this. The committee reported that they talked to the governor's assistant and they were advised to go home and start a riot, and then they would go investigate why there was a riot. He said, "I think it was Governor White at that time." He said, "The governor got a large split ticket vote in this district." Now this is what the committee reported back. He said, "You have three little tin God's there and if we do anything, we will lose the cross ticket vote. So you go home and start a riot and we will investigate."

C: Who were these three God's?

O: The three trustees, township trustees. Now I happened to know the general situation from this because my Uncle, Harry Riffle, was the early, either Works Progress Administration or Public Works Administration, I forget which. He was a paymaster for the Bya Mill up in Girard. I had not seen him for several years, but we compared notes later. They were dealing with this government surplus that was sent in to feed starving people. He said everywhere they went, the township trustees was there worst. Some places they even used physical force to prevent the federal men from distributing flour. The corn was stored in the barns. The people were starving and the federal government was sending stuff in and it was stored in one of the trustees barns. We even published the fact that suspicions

are not proof. One of the guys that hauled flour had many flour sacks hung on his washline behind the house and we had quite a suspicion.

After the meeting this committee reported back and by this time it was getting pretty well along in the fight. To back track a little bit as to some of the illusions you have about American freedoms, this group tried to have a meeting in the townhall with the trustees for public questioning about the problem. Boardman willed a township hall and we had a townhall. Because this was a public issue, we felt that it could be discussed in the townhall so, of course, we had to go to the various trustees to get permission. They refused it on the grounds that it was a fire trap. Well it happened that a church was serving children dinners in the townhall during this entire period, which led us to suspect that the argument was forming. So someone contacted that state fire marshall and asked him when they condemned it. He said that he had no record but he would be in Youngstown the next day. He padlocked the place for several different things, including stoves, these big, I do not know, potbelly stoves behind the exit doors. There was a number of things. No place for the fumes to go, for they are using kerosene stoves for that. Politically, they turned it on that we did it to keep the church. That had nothing to do with it. In fact it was almost accidental that this thing happened.

Although I got into it later, I was a Reserve at first. The use of public schools, the political parties is doing. The school board turned them down. They said that if they let any group of citizens do it, then some communists might want to meet. So they could not use the public school. At that time, there were not any private halls that we knew of, not even that you could rent. They would not have any money to rent one if they had it, if they had been available. Big chains today, it used to be there was not a restaurant out here, now there are hundreds of them out here, or at least there must be twenty-five or fifty now. The net effect was that no public building was available for public meeting.

Finally Saint Charles had a little school hall that they built when they were first over on the other corner. I do not remember the name of the people that bought the corner from there on Market and Route 224. They have since moved down this side it. Granddad was a trustee in the church by that time and he advised against it. He wanted them to buy down here then, but they wanted the prominent corner. They got into debt so far I think the bishop had to bail them out. But the priest offered that hall. I do not remember if I had joined the Catholic Church yet then. But I did not know of any other Catholic in the group.

C: Do you recall who the priest was?

O: No, I do not know. By looking at the year that Lender and Craig were candidates, you could pinpoint the year. I know that they were just putting the new roof on the building. They had just built it.

C: This would be in the thirties, early thirties?

O: Yes, it must have been early thirties, before I was twenty-one anyhow. The

reason I remember that is that someone suggested taking the tar from the church there and another guy donated feathers. But get back to the meeting on Ferncliff. It followed then, after this committee had reported, one speaker after another advocating a big demonstration. Meet at the traffic light at Boardman Center. One guy donated the signs and another guy was going to donate the feathers and they were going to borrow some of Saint Charles tar. It would have, if the police had not interfered, probably ended in riding the trustees out of town in the red.

I started to tell you about a difficulty in a meeting place. Well, we met on Ferncliff. I do not know how I got off of it. I guess the continuity of the story. I had advised the group myself, being the only one close to the Catholics, that if they accepted the offer to meet there as often and as long as they wanted to while they were running a political campaign in an area that was highly Protestant, and just out of this Klan period where there was a lot of anti-Catholic feeling, that they did not have a chance. It was not that the priest did not want them, but they did not meet there for but maybe oh, I do not remember, once or twice. So they were meeting in private homes. That is why the meeting took place in Craig's home.

The committee just reported back to start a riot and they were preparing the plans. Everything was all set. There was a couple of people from Austintown over a similar situation. This is going on all over the country. They were advising this group to use methods that they found successful out there. It was just about all set and by that time that was going over into some radical action that I did not approve of. I got up and told them that under no certain terms if they went through with it that I was through helping them. I said, "Politically, what is going to happen, you know that someone has been reporting as a spy every action and move you make. They know before your meeting is over. There is somebody sitting right here tonight. When you meet there at the traffic light, you will be surrounded by the county deputies and you will be taken down to the county jail and that will be the end of your demonstration. Everybody will say you are a bunch of radicals and your campaign will be finished. If you want to go that route, I am through, I am walking out."

And of course Henry Lender had just left the chair and he is my next door neighbor, he had been the leader, and they knew he was going with me. So there was a Mrs. Mette from Austintown who got up and said, "Well, maybe Boardman was different." I had made the point that Boardman was quite conservative. She said, "Maybe it worked there, but it is not going to work here." She backed off and one by one they backed off. So the tar and feather party never came off, but it was dangerously close. They were really angry. You cannot blame them, because the children are hungry. The amount that was involved was really small. They worked very hard to get it, and it was being, at least fifty percent of it, in modern terminology, ripped off.

So they made a campaign. We even printed it in the newspaper. I was told that Congressman Krooin read one into the congressional record as a sample of grass roots rebellion against the traditions that existed. It was an octopus and each arm was marked a relative. Every relative that you could name was on there and a whole fleet of political jobs that relatives of the trustees had, because, what the word for that? Nepotism in the

extreme. I remember that there was an apology at the bottom that there was more, but we did not have room to print them. They made a fairly aggressive campaign knowing nothing whatsoever about politics. None of the others knew anything and neither did I. Sometime later, I will tell you, some of the dumb stunts I pulled for how little I knew.

Come election day, we put witnesses, we had witnesses challenge. We put witnesses in each precinct, but we did not have enough man power, some foul up because there were two or three precincts that were not covered. When they met after the election I think there were seven, or there were eight precincts and I think we had witnesses for five. All of them reported back, illegal count, just totally disregardable. Many cases according to the witnesses report back that there was outrageous miscounting. The law very clearly was written to prevent fraud in an election. Basically, this is when you had the paper ballot and it is still I understand the condition in some parts of Ohio. The ballot box was suppose to be, not dumped but you were to reach in the ballot box and take one ballot out at a time in the presence of the judge of both parties. The clerk, one of each party, was to record this directly in the tally books. Now this prevented either anybody monkeying with the ballot or anybody misreading it because the other judge watched that you read it right and of course the tallies had to agree.

Now what they actually did in practice, because it was a long hard job, sometimes it took all night. If you did it according to the law it might have taken two days. They are already tired from being there twelve hours. So it became a common practice to break the board up, usually four or six members, and tell them to take maybe bond issues or school issues down to one end of the table. Someone else take something else so that there was only two people instead of the ones that the government or the law required. Then they would dump the ballots box on the table and then they sort the ballots in various categories. One would read it and the other on scrap paper would tally. The guys reading it, nobody is watching him. He reads anything he feels like if he wants to fell dishonest or gets too enthusiastic over some candidate. If there is no recount, it will never show. The guy that is tallying, he does not necessarily have to tally what the other guy is reading. Of course the witness reported that this is going both ways. One guy is reading it wrong the other guy is tallying it wrong. In the end they might end up right. According to their reports it was just outrageous.

So they formed a committee to protest the board of elections. I was on that committee. Now at this time, I had no political affiliation. I am not even old enough to vote. We went down to the board of elections because we analyzed it that the three precincts, we had no knowledge of whether it was honest or dishonest, legal or illegal. We were ahead, and if they throughout the five precincts counted illegally, we win the election. It was so close, the county clerk, they were, Boyce reported back that, he could not hardly hold his pencil, he was taking the last tally off up in Forestglen. Of course, in a wealthy district, that is where they were the strongest. It is not unusual to find the very wealthy people do not understand the problem of the people who are very poor, so this was expected.

But anyhow, there was a reporter by the name, I think, Naminia from the Vindicator at the board that day. If I recall correctly, the whole board was there. I

remember that when we presented this to the board of election that one of the members of the board of elections, I do not recall whether he was Democratic or Republican. He said, "Now boys, when you went to school you learned one thing, but in real life we do not do it that way." The fact that they were disobeying the law, this was calmly accepted. Here is an official board of election member telling us. One of the members of the committee, a great big barrel chested fellow, I think he lived down on Shield's Road, he got so angry that he almost struck the board member, his fists doubled up nears his head and his neck turned red. About that time if I recall, right, John Farrell finally spoke up and said, "Well, if you put your charges in writing we will consider them."

In the meantime Namania from the Vindicator comes up with a croper. We had gone to the board of elections as absolute amateurs and asked how many precincts there are in Boardman and their total rate. I believe it was eight then. No one ever told us that several hundred people over in Poland Village voted in Boardman Township. We neither campaigned our had any watch there. There was about a hundred solid votes against us, which they threw into the total and which threw totals off that we had. We cannot figure out, everything seems wrong, which might have defended us. I do not know how it would have come out that way, even if we had the law enforced. I suppose when illegal counting is what widespread, what they should have done was have another election.

The committee, in discussing it afterwards, looked at it this way. John Farrell was the Democratic chairman, I am almost sure it was him, my memory gets faint sometimes. Even if he carried the three Democrats on our side we would have three Republicans against us because these were Republican office holders. So then it would go to the secretary of state for a discussion and he was a Republican. We figured it was absolutely useless for us to try doing it. Now to me as a boy been taught that a "Law was a law and it was enforced equally under equally law and justice." It just absolutely incensed me. That was one experience. Probably the thing that caused me to try to build opposition by building a Democratic Party in Boardman because there was many precincts out here that did not even have a Democratic committee.

I recall vaguely that there were seven known Democrats in precinct four, which was almost a quarter of the township. It went from Route 224 to Shields Road and from Market Street to Tippecanoe. That was the precinct that I was first elected committeeman in. Then I moved over here after they took my residence away from me. That is part of the story. In the meantime, trying to build an organization to put up some opposition. I searched for a Democratic in this precinct and could not find one. Finally got the wife of, I think, he was a steel executive here, and I think a well known Republican. There were a lot of people wavering in 1932. I got his wife to file or to vote for herself for committeewoman. So I had a committeewoman in this precinct. Because one vote you cannot do much in a county, you need more, so I was going to try to fill the blanks.

In the meantime, to back up to my precinct, this was part of my motivation and you get in deeper things you get quite involved. You never know where you are heading and sometimes you are a little bit surprised. Anyhow, anticipating the possibility in the future that I would try to do this, Granddad had worked on the board of elections and there was no committeeman in that precinct. So I figured that if I got his name on the

ballot it would be easier for me when I got to be twenty-one. Of course, this is the origin of a story that was told around Youngstown for many years that I was committeeman four years before I was twenty-one, which is somewhat true in this sense. Legally, grandfather was committeeman. Granddad was not particularly interested in politics, not deeply anyhow. I asked him if he would like to be committeeman and I said, "Then you could still work on the board of elections because you could appoint yourself." As it had been up to that, I suppose, you had to get through downtown somewhere. How he got on I do not know or what.

So I got a petition for him and took it out and got it signed. I remember being very careful to follow the law. I remember that one signature in particular that I got. It was one of the township constables that was in the neighborhood and his wife was ill in bed and he said, "How about my wife?" He was going to sign for her and I said, "No, I have to have her signature." Being a little bit embarrassed about going into the bedroom, I stood off at an angle where I could see her hand where she signed it. I could not see her face but I knew she signed it. So I had personal knowledge absolutely that each one of those signatures was individual and I filed it.

Granddad, he said later that this is probably what caused it. He shook hands with the postmaster downtown and he was apparently associated somehow with some political faction. Someone got the notion that he might belong to one side downtown. They challenged the petition and notified him that all the signatures were made by the same person and to appear for a hearing to challenge the validity of his petition. Granddad said, "Tell them to go jump in a lake." He would not go downtown to bother with it. So they threw it out. The fact was their signatures were good. But it was not easily put down that way so in those days a write in legal.

C: Who was it specifically that said that it was no good?

O: The board of elections. I do not know who challenged it down there, who brought it out that evidently thought that Granddad was not a safe vote, the powers be that. While these are just little straws in the wind when you find out which way the storm blew later, they are significant. I went out and asked people to write his name on the ballot and he got elected anyhow. So I do not recall whether it was one or two term that he held it. Then when he died I planned to run it.

Now I ended up slight of suspicion that I would not continue my business there because Granddad had always made it very crystal clear not only of my business, but that he was even going to till me the property on top of that. The situation that existed there is almost incredible, I could never believe that what happened could happen. But there was trust funds that I had operated in my own name from the time I was a very young child. I put all my money back in. I kept records from back when I was in sixth grade of school. Unfortunately, when I was in the Army somebody destroyed them all. I had checks for everything ever bought and a receipt to go with the check and the people who sold it to me.

Now, I never doubted that that did not entitle me to what I owned of my own

personal tools. I found out later that it did not. A judge put them up for sale to some one he knew for three-eighths the appraised value. Refused to let me buy my own tools on the contention that I did not have any money while he sat on every dime I owned including trust funds that were overdue. Then even took me for part of the trust funds.

C: Was there not anybody that was going to help you?

O: You are getting ahead of my story again. Let us see now, well we were back where I was going to run for committeeman. I am planning in the back of my mind, but I am very busy running this business. It is very time consuming. You work all day and all night. Often times I was stocking the greenhouse at two o'clock in the morning and I had to be up at day light again to wait on trade and get my work done. No, holidays never, except in the wintertime. So I had not got around to it yet when John T. Hewitt, who was then state representative and happened to go to Saint Charles up here, came down to me and said, "Would you run for committeeman?" Well I planned to anyhow. He has a petition, but he does not explain anything more that he was as a friend bringing me a petition. So I took them out and filed it. Well, here is my baptism in politics, everything started to break loose. First, a car pulls in the nursery with five or six guys in it. I will not tell you who they were. Of course, I knew who the main guy was, a young attorney, and he wants me to withdraw.

C: Is he Republican or is he Democrat?

O: This is Democrat. He wants me to withdraw. It turns out that John Farrall was being opposed as county chairman by a group calling themselves the New Dealers, probably taking it from the Roosevelt thing. Although it seemed kind of early for that name, I try to see in my memory how that name came about. But that is what they called themselves. Comparing notes years later, Joe Gorman, who was county treasurer was one of the lieutenants in that office at the time, probably his next buddy to the guy, it turns out that the guy who wants to be county chairman fell in the same precinct.

Now, I do not know absolutely how, I know nothing about it. Granddad had died. I am being dragged into probation court with the claim that everything I owned belonged to the estate. My personal property, my tools, my equipment, my business, everything. The story had developed there that was pretty crystal clear to me that the judge was not an unbiased judge. So that when the man claimed that the judge and him were in together on this political move and he knew the ins and outs of the case, of course then I learned later that any attorney could get that. He seemed to know a lot of outside information that just a casual outsider looking at court records would not know. He said first that he had a list of my wholesale. I sold cut flowers to various greenhouses and that they all would quit buying from me if I did not withdraw. Well, first he offered to pay me off.

C: How much did he offer you?

O: Well, amounts were not discussed, but he made it clear that he would pay enough. Then I told him that I was not interested and then he came along with the threat. First of all with wholesale. I told him, I said, "Well these guys get their flowers from me for less than they buy them somewhere else and they are better quality. If they do not want to buy them from me it is their hard doing." Of course, in the back on my mind I am a little worried about some of these things, but I had learned never to let anybody know that they got you scared because it just gets worse. So, I figured I would give them a brush off that they did not bother me. I think, well, as far as the retail customers, they could not reach enough of them to harm me. Then he comes up with the real copper. The judge is in with him on this and that they would not only take my business but they would take my residence away from me and I could not hold it if I did win.

C: How would they take away your residence?

O: Well, if you get a court order to move out. See it was not my property, what is granddad's property. His estate goes to his creditors and to his second wife and then after a life of state I might be one of his many heirs. As it turned out, I never got a penny anyhow, so I could have waited until dooms day, it would not have made any difference. They managed to get rid of the entire estate. The court records, anybody that wanted to delve into it, would find that it is a pretty questionable situation. It sounds more like it is personal, but you cannot separate the two. You would not ever know why I jumped the given direction if you did not know what the pressure was on me.

Anyhow, I did not know who General Farrell was. I did not know even of him. I was too young to pay too much attention or I would not have known what it was all about if I had read the paper. My political knowledge was virtually blank, except from that other experience. I did not know a Republican from a Democrat. So I thought, well, this is not the time for me to get caught in a factional fight. If the judge is on one side I am having a hard enough time to get him to look at the evidence as it is. I had nothing to gain because I did not want any political job or anything. I thought, well it does not mean that much to me, I better just fall out.

So I talked to a couple other people over there and they strongly advised that I do not want to try to buck them. I did not like knuckling under to what wound up to a blackmail threat. I do not know whether there is any law against it or not. Today the law is different then it was back then. I would have known if there was. I decided that I would just take the attitude that it is not important to me. I typed up a letter stating that I was too busy to take care of the position, addressed to the Board of Elections, sealed it and put a U.S. postage stamp on it and come out with the letter. They were in the car yet. I said to him, "I am going to mail this tomorrow and withdraw." "Oh," he said, "You cannot wait until tomorrow. The deadline to withdraw is noon tomorrow and it will not

get there. I will take it in and mail it for you." Well, I am a naive youngster and I think U.S. postage, no one would dare tamper with the United States Postage. So I trusted him with the letter. After all, in the back of my mind I knew there was nothing he could do with it because if he destroyed it, he would have defeated himself. He wants me to withdraw and he got what he wants and that is the end of it.

That is when the lid blew off. First thing I get a call on the phone from the family doctor, Doctor Rosenbloom, known in the family for years. I had not the slightest suspicion that he was interested in politics. I learned later that he was one of the value of the party. He said, "Frank, why in the world did you not call me before you did that?" I go to church on Sunday and a half a dozen people jump me, including John T. Hewitt, the state representative. He said, "You got me in trouble with John Farell. I told him you were one of our boys." Well I did not belong to anybody. Nevertheless, then it comes out that he was on the spot because he asked me. Then I found out that what was suppose to have taken place, I suppose there were hundreds of witnesses there, dozens of witnesses there, that this guy walked into the Board of Elections and threw this letter on the table in front of the county probably both Republican and Democratic county charimen. They were usually on the board, the entire board. He goes, "Ha, Ha," to John Farell. He said, "I brought your man off."

End of Part 1