

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

O.H. 2161

Clyde Wagner

Interviewed

By

Michael Kenneally

On

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: Clyde Wagner

INTERVIEWER: Michael Kenneally

SUBJECT: YSU History

DATE: February 22, 2004

P: This is an interview with Clyde Wagner for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on YSU History, by Michael Kenneally, at Mr. Wagner's house, on February 22, 2004, at 3:00 pm. This project was funded by the Ford Foundation.

K: Alright, Clyde, I'd like to start with some general background information. Could you tell me when and where you were born?

CW: August 4th, 1930, Kokomo, Indiana.

K: Did you live in Kokomo long?

CW: Oh, just approximately eight months. My dad was on his way, my dad and mother, were on their way to Pittsburgh, California. I had an older brother, Donald, and my mother, my dad, and she was pregnant with me, and they were hitchhiking, because they had no money and they were going out there to look for steel mills, and get a job, my dad tried to get a job there. And he got as far as Kokomo, Indiana, at the steel mill there, and

he waited, and his time finally came up with a guy sitting behind a cage, interviewing applicants sitting behind a cage with bars in it, and he said to my dad, "What the hell do you want?" My dad said, "I want work," and the guy said back, "There's been a hundred guys in here today looking for a job, and you're the first one that said you're looking for work, and by God, I'm going to give it to you." And so my dad went to work there in the steel mill in Kokomo, Indiana, and lived... was there long enough for me to be born, and they ran out of orders after about, partially eight months he did there, and maybe even less, but he got laid off, and he heard there was work in the steel mills in Ohio, so they hitchhiked back to Ohio, and he got a job in a rolling mill. And so I was reared around here.

K: Where did you move when you came to Youngstown, where did you live?

CW: McKinley Heights, on Tibbets Wick Road. He rented a house first, and then he got a chance to buy a house for \$1,200, it was a house... a six room house, three bedrooms, and an outhouse in the back, and then right behind the house there was a well, and we would get the drinking water from the well.

K: Tell me a little bit about your childhood. What was your neighborhood like?

CW: Spread out, typical McKinley Heights. Went to an elementary school, Harrison Elementary School, the building still stands, it's used now for another business, but it belonged to the Niles school system, and had first and second grade in one room, third and fourth grade in one room, fifth and sixth in one room, and that's where we in McKinley Heights went to Niles schools.

K: When you were going to school did you have any favorite subjects?

CW: When I got in to high school, I loved history, so I took history courses at Mount Union college my freshman year, and Youngstown State, when I graduated from Youngstown State after first going to California and pursuing one of my favorite sports; boxing.

K: Tell me a little bit about your boxing career.

CW: First of all, I was fifteen years old when I won the Youngstown 126 pound novice championship. And then I went to the military for four years, I won the Kenosha, Wisconsin 3rd Naval District Championship. Actually, I have to confess, I won it but they didn't give it to me, and they crowd booed terribly, wouldn't let the fights continue, until they finally announced that they were going to give me the most promising boxer award, which didn't please me. I was in the Navy, seventeen years old, and while in the Navy I took four years, two years on land and two years aboard the ship. And right then... I mean I went to different schools in the Navy, always when I was aboard ship if something came up and they had to send somebody off to school in my division, I was the one that went. When the officer in charge recommended me, the officer in charge says, "He's going," and I went to all the schools. You had every once in a while three-

week, two-week, month schools, and then military style is they shove everything right down to you, and it was just the way you learned, you earned it. Right now you got two weeks of school, maybe normally it would take six weeks, but you're going to do it in two weeks.

K: Did those go to, did you get academic credit for those after you had got out of the Navy?

CW: I got some, yes. When I come out of the Navy I went back to high school. I got discharged in the very end of November, I had taken the G.E.D. test but they wouldn't recognize it, and so when I got out of the Navy, I went back to high school in Niles to earn my diploma. They put me right in to my senior year, this is the very end of November, put me in my senior year, and I graduated the class in '52 where I was supposed to graduate the class in '47.

K: After you had gone to the Navy?

CW: Yea, I graduated the class in '52. I was twenty-one years old.

K: Did you go straight to college after?

CW: I went my freshman year in college at Mount Union. I finished up my freshman year, and then immediately went to California, and boxed professionally out there for a year and a half. And I spent a total of about three years in southern California; Arcadia, Pasadena, is where I was at the time. When I finished up my fussing around out there, I came back east, my dad had a rooming house that he owned and he lived in on Lincoln Avenue, right off of Belmont Avenue in Youngstown, which was just three blocks away from the college. So I lived there and walked down to the college everyday. My one-year at Mount Union and the first year at Youngstown State, I went under the G.I. Bill, then they ran out and I had to work my way through college after that.

K: What year was this that you first started going to Youngstown State University?

CW: About 1955, or 56, about 1956.

K: Why did you choose Youngstown?

CW: One, it was close. Two, when I started it was the G.I. Bill, and I had free board and room, that helped out too. When I lived in my dad's rooming house I had to live on my own, my own hot plate, my own refrigerator, and so I lived as a bachelor.

K: What was your major?

CW: I had two majors, I had a History major, which I got because I loved history, and I just took the extra course every time I got a chance to take another course I would take a

history course. And then I had the elementary teaching course, and so actually I had a major in history, and a major in elementary education.

K: Where there any memorable or influential professors?

CW: Specifically I don't remember any one, but I enjoyed my tenor at Youngstown College, it wasn't Youngstown State then it was Youngstown College and then it became Youngstown State.

K: What was the campus like?

CW: It wasn't... it was mostly people who lived off campus, they drove back and forth. The people around here they had rooming houses such as the one I lived in, my dad's rooming house. Most of the people, or at least a lot of the people that went to Mount Union had... a lot of them lived in the Mahoning Valley, Youngstown Niles, Girard, Boardman, Austintown, that was people when they drove back and forth everyday to Youngstown State University.

K: Was there enough parking for you?

CW: Yea, of course I didn't worry about that, but there was adequate parking on Lincoln Avenue, everything was... college students were down there, and all the other small short streets around where people parked. And then on campus too, if you were lucky and got there early enough in the morning you got a place to park on the campus or around the campus close to it all day long.

K: Could you describe a typical day of yours on campus?

CW: I guess... mostly just simply going to class, and if I wasn't going to class I was back in my rooming house on Lincoln Avenue, which was right off of Belmont, and so that was...

K: Did you take day classes or night classes?

CW: Mostly day classes, sometimes in the evening class. Like I said the first year at Youngstown, after that I had to pay my own way.

K: How did you do that?

CW: Working summer jobs, working on weekends, just anything I could make a few bucks, I did.

K: Was there any recreational areas on campus, or places where students would get together?

CW: That's the one I can't remember, I think there was one on campus, I just don't

remember the name of it right now. But... well at Mount Union they had the same thing at Mount Union, I worked there to make extra spending money at Mount Union, there was a little...

K: Cafeteria?

CW: Cafeteria type, but it was small, it was a hangout for students. Mount Union had that and also Youngstown University had that when I was there. And then Youngstown State University had their little places where people would get a cup of coffee and communicate with other students.

K: Did you participate in any sports while you were at YSU?

CW: The only sport I participated in was boxing.

K: You still kept boxing while you were at Youngstown State?

CW: Initially I did, then I won the Youngstown... well my last year in high school I won the Youngstown-Cleveland Golden Glove Championship, two years in a row I won that.

K: Where did you buy your books?

CW: Place on campus had them, where you could buy used books, new books, you could buy the new books right on campus where you could buy all the books that people turned in after they finished their course. So you got second choice and it was reasonable, that was the best part of it.

K: They were reasonable, reasonably priced?

CW: Yes. When you're going to college, I don't care if you're from a good family, you look for cheap books, or if you can, free books, so that's where a lot of books were picked up.

K: Did you attend any of the Homecomings, or any of the extracurricular activities that Youngstown State offered?

CW: Not many, no. I was older; when I graduated I was thirty years old. So I was older.

K: Were they popular, was Homecoming very popular?

CW: Yea, basically, but I was in to many other things.

K: Like what?

CW: The Masonic Lodge.

K: You went to the Masonic Lodge?

CW: I was going through the chairs in the Masonic Lodge while I was attending college.

K: Were there a lot of masons at the university that you were aware of?

CW: I can't say a lot, but there were some there that we would communicate back and forth with each other. If you were a fellow student you would communicate back and forth. And I was going through the chairs of the Masonic Lodge.

K: So that took up some of your time?

CW: Yea.

K: What were some of the major issues on campus when you were attending?

CW: There was always talk about becoming affiliated with the state, becoming a state university, state college. There was talk about that all the time; of course then, all of a sudden out of nowhere it was a state college.

K: Was the talk that was going on, was it... were they figuring it?

CW: Yea, well then Youngstown prior to that was a private school, and the state school they get cheaper rates, they're more covered by the state, therefore there are financial advantages to the state university.

K: Was tuition ever an issue, a large issue with the students.

CW: I don't, well... if you had the money it was no issue. But I don't... there were times... my dad did not pay my way, he let me live in the rooming house but he did not pay my way, I paid my own way. And initially I had the G.I. Bill for a couple of years, and after that I had to go on my own. That was part of the reason I didn't go back to Mt. Union, with a private school it was more difficult to live on campus, or whatever.

K: I know that you came from a military background, was there a military presence on campus when you attended? ROTC or...

CW: Well if there was I didn't participate, I don't really know.

K: As far as the student population went, were there a lot of different ethnic groups, was there a lot of diversity that you can remember?

CW: There was different ethnic groups, at the college, at the university, not as many as there are today, there was a few blacks on campus too, not like today where there's a lot more.

K: How many women students would you think there were opposed to the number of men?

CW: Probably a little bit more, probably a little bit more women students than men, maybe 50/50, but maybe a little bit more.

K: Did you eventually graduate?

CW: Yea I graduated in 1960.

K: What was your degree in?

CW: Elementary education and history and government.

K: Did you have two degrees?

CW: No, but I had two different majors.

K: Did you attend the graduating ceremony?

CW: Sally, did I attend the graduating ceremony?

SW: Yes, dear, yes you did.

CW: Okay, I thought I did. Right after I graduated I got married, and I was thirty years old, and my bride was twenty-two years old.

K: Did you meet at Youngstown State?

CW: I met her at Youngstown State. It was strictly an accident. No, what happened was my Masonic Lodge had a square dance, and I asked a girl at McKinley Heights if she'd like to go with me, I grew up with her, I knew her brother, she had two older brothers, and I knew her, and she said, "I'd love to go Clyde," so we went to square dance. Took her home, thanked her very much for the date and didn't see her for another year. A whole year later there was another square dance at the Masonic Lodge, and so I said, "Would you like to go again," and she said she'd love to go, so we went to the square dance and had a good time. Then the third year came up for the square dance, I didn't see her in between, first of all, I wasn't ready to get married and she wanted to get married, and so the third year came up and I was too embarrassed to ask if she'd go to the square dance. And so Sally and I were in the same class together, she was finishing up her last year and I was picking up my hours, and so we'd have meetings when we were taking this philosophy class taught by a catholic priest, and I was enjoying it because I wanted a catholic viewpoint, and she was going there because her girlfriend was going to be in the class with her. Well the girlfriend didn't show up in the class and... what happened to Vernie Sally, was it Vernie?

SW: Yes.

CW: What happened? She didn't take that class that she was going to take with you.

SW: No, she dropped out for some reason.

CW: Yea. So Sally and I we would have conversations during our break, and I asked her if she'd like to go to a square dance. She said, "Yes," and that's just the way it went, it never ended.

K: Well after you graduated and got married, did you work in your field?

CW: I taught school in Youngstown, was hired my first year out of college, in fact I was hired before I got out of college, dependent upon my getting my degree. And I got my degree and I was hired immediately in Youngstown Public Schools, and taught grades, for the 27 years, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

K: So you moved between a few schools?

CW: Yes, between two schools on the West Side.

K: Which ones were those?

CW: Stambaugh Elementary and West Junior High School, which later became West Elementary. It was the old Chaney building in Youngstown.

K: All right, is there anything else you'd like to add?

CW: I had 27 years of successful teaching in Youngstown Public Schools, and I benefited immensely from attending YSU, doing my student teaching from YSU, and getting into the inner city schools at the time, it was the place to be. When I started in Youngstown, it was the best school system in the whole valley, and then the minority started taking over the city, and the whites fled, went to the suburbs, and that's basically what it was, blacks coming in, whites moving out. And the only reason that I only taught 27 years instead of thirty was because I had four years military credit, and a three-year buy-out. So I had 27 years of teaching and an additional 6 years on top of that.

K: So you retired?

CW: That's when I retired from teaching. Oh, my part time job was paying me \$30,000, I was making \$27,000 with a Master's degree as a teacher, and when I started Real Estate appraising, on the side I was teaching, and doing Real Estate appraising on the side, and I was making as much as \$50-\$60,000 a year. And then when I retired went into Real Estate appraising full time I was making \$100,000 a year, and that's a lot of money then.

K: It's a lot of money today.

CW: Well yea, so Sally and I were making lots of money, and that was why we were able to buy this house, and able to buy... we had a cottage over here, and a house in Florida, and rentals in Niles. We were making lots of money, Sally and I were both in to it then, so I took the first buy-out they had, and that's where I wound up with all the retirement, paid based upon having 34 years in teaching, and so, that was it.

K: All right, well thank you very much.