

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Mahoning Coal Railroad Company

O. H. 616

EDWARD G. MANNING

Interviewed

by

Elisa Calabrese

on

October 28, 1985

EDWARD G. MANNING

Edward G. Manning, a lifelong resident of Youngstown, was born on March 20, 1913 in the area coined "Smokey Hollow". In 1916 the Manning family moved to the north side of Youngstown. Edward Manning graduated from Rayen High School and currently attends Youngstown State University.

Employed by the G. F. Business Equipment Company for twenty-eight years, Mr. Manning retired September 30, 1975. The organizations of which he is affiliated include: Saint Edward's Church, north side Citizens Coalition and Citizen's Action Council.

Special interests of Edward Manning include history and football. His expertise in Youngstown Urban History is a valuable resource for students of history.

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INTERVIEWEE: EDWARD MANNING

INTERVIEWER: Elisa Calabrese

SUBJECT: business-commerce in Youngstown, housing developments, community structure

DATE: October 28, 1985

C: This is an interview with Edward G. Manning for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Westlake Terrace, by Elisa Calabrese, on October 28, 1985, at approximately 9:30 a.m.

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, your origin, your family background?

M: I've lived here in Youngstown all of my life. I was born down in Smoky Hollow in 1913. Then we moved up to the north side in 1916. I can truthfully say I've seen the north side go from the finest residential area in the city to not being the best today.

C: What do you remember about Youngstown in the 1930's?

M: The first golf course in Youngstown was on the north side of Youngstown west of Wick Park. It was sixty acres. The first clubhouse was built in 1897. The clubhouse is still standing at 240 North Heights. In 1906 they built a new clubhouse on Redondo and Ohio Avenues. In 1912 they moved out to Logan Avenue where they are located now.

C: Prior to construction of Westlake, what was the atmosphere around that place? What were the businesses around the Westlake area prior to construction of Westlake?

M: As far as I know in Westlake Crossing there were all those small neighborhood stores. H. E. Henrye, Coler, Hinely's and Rose & Son's were some of these stores.

C: We know there were slums in the Westlake area. During that

time period in the 1930's were there other slums in Youngstown?

M: Yes, there were slums on Poland Avenue and South Avenue in the inner city. The River Bend area was called the Monkey's Nest; that was around Crescent Street, Central Avenue, and Caldwell Street. That was a very old neighborhood.

The worst slum housing in Youngstown was the 28 unit Edgewood flats located on the lower east side. Edgewood Street ran from Shehy to Center Street along the railroad tracks. The flats were beyond repair and demolition was delayed because there was no suitable housing for the occupants.

C: Do you remember some of the important people in Youngstown during that time period of the 1930's, politicians, important figures of the community?

M: Michael Kirwan was a councilman at that time. From 1937 to 1970 he became a powerful Congressman in Washington.

The industry didn't do much from the Depression up until World War I. That is what made this a boomtown; they needed the steel. In the 1930's we had two newspapers in Youngstown. All the business places were located downtown.

C: Do you know of anyone in the Westlake Project?

M: Paul L. Strait and Dennis Strait were two dedicated men. Morris Scheible was the architect for the Westlake housing project. There was a lot of controversy about that; a lot of people figured the government shouldn't be building houses for people.

C: During the time period of the 1930's do you remember any significant events, happenings, political factions, or labor disputes?

M: In 1937 they had the "Little Steel" strike. They brought the National Guard in here. They called this the "valley of decision". These men wanted to form a union. The companies were operating; men stayed in the mill working there. They wanted to open the mill one Monday morning and fellows were down there with guns and knives and everything; it was just like a battle. The governor of Ohio, Governor Martin L. Davey, sent the National Guard in here and nothing happened because the Guard stopped it. There was some violence like there is in anything else. Two men were killed. There were a lot of pro and con arguments as to whether the mill should be unionized. Eventually the union did get into the mills. Tom Girdler was president of Republic Steel and he was very much anti-labor. He was the one that kept the union out. Finally, they signed up with the union because they didn't

want to lose any steel production during the war.

C: What type of work did you do during the 1930's?

M: I was working for a newspaper.

C: Tell us about an average day at work for you.

M: It was just distributing the papers to the newsboys. I think there were about twenty of them that delivered papers here. It was in the worst part of the Depression; Hoover was president. There were two newspapers in Youngstown, the Telegram and the Vindicator. The Telegram was owned by Scripps-Howard. They had twenty-six papers. Originally it was a Republican paper. In 1932 they came out and supported Roosevelt and lost thousands of subscribers because the people resented the newspaper supporting a Democrat. They went over and subscribed to the Vindicator.

I remember the bank holiday. Roosevelt closed all the banks for about four days. Previous to that a lot of the banks in Youngstown closed and people lost their money. A lot of these people were selling their bank books for ten cents on the dollar. All the people that bought those bank books waited two or three years and they got \$5,000 for an investment of \$500. There was so much of that going on; they were running want ads in the paper. There was even talk of them passing a law in the legislature trying to regulate it, but I don't think it ever went through.

In those times people had their gas shut off and water shut off. You would get into a home and you could tell they were cooking with kerosine because you smelled kerosine when they opened the door. I know one family on Elm Street, the city shut their water off. But the man said there was a law that you couldn't shut the water off if there was sickness in the home, and his mother was sick so he went down and had them turn the water on again. A lot of people in some sections were going out and getting their water at the city hydrant on the curb. That is how bad it was during the Depression.

C: During the 1930's compared to today did the people seem more community oriented in those days than they do today? Were people more together in those days?

M: Yes, more neighborliness was present. People were friendlier then. Financially today people are better off, but they don't seem to be any happier.

C: During the 1930's were there ethnic neighborhoods?

M: Yes, definitely. You had Italian neighborhoods, Polish, Slovak, and Ukranian. The Croatians lived around Covington

- Street. A lot of the Greeks lived on the lower south side.
- C: Where the Westlake Terrace homes are now, what type of ethnic make-up was that during the 1930's before Westlake was built?
- M: There were colored people there and a mix of all the others too when the 618 units of Westlake was completed. The colored people lived south of Madison Avenue and the whites lived north of Madison Avenue. They called that Madison Avenue Mason-Dixon line. When the civil rights laws were passed they integrated then.
- C: Do you remember anything about when the Westlake Terrace homes were built?
- M: Morrison Street and Westlake Street were vacated so they could build the housing project. Before the Westlake housing project was there they called it Wright Field. The first Rayen and South Football game was played there and that is also where the circuses performed.
- C: Do you remember anything about the actual construction?
- M: The floors were made of concrete, and a woman told me the kids were getting some kind of sickness on account of it. The houses were close together and there were no front yards.
- I think Westlake Crossing was one of the most dangerous crossings in the state of Ohio because you had the trains going northwest and then the traffic went west on Federal. Also Rayen Avenue would intersect with Federal Street, but that has been eliminated. The first train came into Youngstown in 1856; there was no city planning in those days. Youngstown at that time was just a farming community. Under the urban renewal program they tore down the homes and renamed the Monkey's Nest the River Bend area. In the nineteenth century it was called the Riverview area.
- C: Why did they call it the Monkey's Nest?
- M: There was a man that lived there who later became a professor and he said that a saloon keeper had a monkey in this saloon. It was more of a joke. There were names for different areas. The east side was called Bottle Hill. The Irish lived on Poland Avenue and they called that Kilkenny. People didn't say they lived on the north or south sides years ago, they would give these names. At one time Briar Hill was a town in itself. It came into the city in 1890. There used to be Briar Hill, Ohio. They tell me there is still mail coming into the post office to Briar Hill, Ohio. Hazelton, Ohio was on the southeast side.

I want to tell you about the Mahoning Coal Railroad, which was one of the most profitable railroads in the world. It

started in 1871 when it just seems that everyone was starting railroads. There were all local railroads and they didn't extend for more than sixty miles. The first railroad that came into Youngstown was the Mahoning Railroad, and it came down as far as Fifth Avenue; it came from Cleveland.

At that time there was a canal here. The canal was opened up in 1840, and it ran from Akron to Beaver, Pennsylvania where it joined up with the Ohio River. Previously there was a canal that ran from Cleveland, Ohio down to Akron, and all the way down to Portsmouth, Ohio on the Ohio River. The Pennsylvania-Ohio canal was called the Crosscut Canal, and that is what opened up the market for coal. This district was landlocked until the canal came in. In 1826 coal was discovered on Mary Caldwell's farm in the Crab Creek area; that was around Logan and Thornton. It was the best coal in Ohio because it was high in carbon and was free of all sulphur. That is what they want today. The trade name for the coal was called Briar Hill. David Tod went to Cleveland and talked to the captains of these big steamers. Previously they had been using wood. Tod talked them into using coal. They found out that was better because coal took up less space and it gave more heat. So that opened up a new market for coal.

In 1856 the canals got competition from the railroads because the railroads were faster and railroads could operate all year around, whereas canals only operated nine months out of the year. It was also cheaper to build and maintain a mile of track than a mile of canal.

The Mahoning Coal Railroad was formed in 1871 to get the coal out of Coalburg. It ran along Crab Creek on Youngstown's north side. The Brown's brothers owned an ironworks in here in 1856 and then later formed the Brown's Bonnell Mill, which was later taken over and called the Republic Iron and Steel Corporation. Joseph and William Brown were the original owners of this Mahoning Coal Railroad, along with William Bonnell, Augustus B. Cornell, and David Himrod. The company was capitalized at \$70,000. In 1884 the local owners leased the railroad to the Lake Shore and Michigan Railway. In 1914 the New York Central bought the lease and held it until the New York Central merged it with the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1968, forming the Penn Central. John Tod was vice-president of Sheet & Tube and a philanthropist and director of Mahoning Coal Railroad. Their earnings were fabulous. In 1966 they earned over two million and three hundred thousand dollars, and that was the best year. The stock was \$725 a share. Its earnings for a train mile exceeded \$25,000 so that is what made it the most profitable line in the United States.

C: Was it one of the most profitable in the United States?

M: Without a doubt.

C: How did it stand in the world?

M: There was another railroad in South America which hauled coffee. It was owned by the British. Their earnings were fabulous too so we can be safe in saying that the Mahoning Coal Railroad was one of the most profitable railroads in the world.

The railroad had 92 miles of track. They didn't own any engines, but what made it so profitable was that they owned the right-of-way. All the coal that went over those tracks, they got so much for every freight car. The coal from West Virginia and Pennsylvania was shipped up to Ashtabula where it was then loaded on boats and taken to Minnesota. The iron ore that was coming from the Mesabi Range in Minnesota, it would go by boat from Lake Superior down to Lake Erie and it was unloaded at Ashtabula and then loaded onto hopper cars and would go over these tracks over the right-of-way. That is why it was so profitable, because there was no railroad in the United States that has as much traffic on it as the Mahoning Coal Railroad.

Of course, what happened was that as the steel mills started going out of business they didn't need as much coal or iron ore and that is why the railroads went out of business. On February 18, 1982, 111 years after it was incorporated, the once fabulous railroad was liquidated by paying its stockholders sixteen million and a half dollars, or \$550 a share. Eighty-three percent of the stock was owned by Penn Central.

C: How did the railroad change from the mid 1920's to when the Depression hit? How did it change also through the 1940's when the war came?

M: During the First World War all freight was shipped by rail. In the later 1920's the trucking industry started taking their business and they were making overnight deliveries. Later on the buses took the passengers away from the railroad as well as the airplanes. The automobile was another thing that led to the demise of the railroads. In 1924 insurance companies had a lot of their bonds and money invested in railroad bonds, but they could foresee the demise of the railroad so they sold their bonds and didn't buy anymore railroad bonds. Of course, their predication came out true.

C: When was the height of the railroad's operations?

M: The 1920's and 1940's, and a little into the 1950's.

C: Did they haul anything different between the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's?

- M: Yes, that is a good question. They used to haul steel, and then the trucks came in and they started making overnight deliveries. The railroads became a little too independent. They thought they had a monopoly and their freight rates were too high and then they weren't giving the best of service. They had the idea--you ship with us or you don't ship at all. When the railroad saw they were losing business to the trucking, they got the interstate commerce commission to lower the rates on the steel hauling, but they didn't ask them to lower the rates on the coal or iron ore because a truck couldn't haul those.
- C: Was there any tension or violence during those times between truckers and the railroad people?
- M: No.
- C: When the Depression hit, how did that affect the railroad here in Youngstown?
- M: They laid a lot of them off, men that had been engineers for twenty years. Some were bumped down to firemen or laid off all together because there was hardly any coal.
- C: What happened to the Youngstown area when the war hit?
- M: The railroads were just like anything else, they were working at full capacity. The railroads did good during the war.
- C: Did they have farther routes to take rather than just going through Ashtabula and Lake Erie area? Was it more expanded?
- M: Yes, they did much more work. They were hauling all the soldiers. They had all the military supplies and everything.
- C: Did the trucking industry grow also during the war?
- M: You had the gasoline shortage then. I'm not familiar with the trucking industry.
- One other thing about the railroads is that during the First World War they didn't have any depots. What they did when they were going various places was to store all the war materials in the boxcars. In the Second World War they learned a lesson; they started building depots where they could unload the material until they needed it, and then they had the boxcars to use for something else. One of the big ordnance depots was in Lordstown.
- C: In the particular time period of the 1920's to 1940's what railroads served Youngstown?
- M: In 1941 the railroads serving Youngstown included the

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Baltimore and Ohio, Erie, New York Central, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh and Lake Erie, and the Youngstown and Northern. The latter was owned by the United States Steel Company.

C: Thank you very much, Mr. Manning.

END OF INTERVIEW