

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Depression

Early childhood memories and the Depression

O.H. 35

ANN WILLIAMS

Interviewed

by

Dan Flood

on

December 3, 1975

ANN E. WILLIAMS

Ann E. Williams was born on April 30, 1891 in Niles, Ohio. Her parents were Robert Williams and Hannah Round Williams. She attended West Side School(Niles) for four years and then the Chestnut Street School (Niles) for two years. She finished her schooling at Delason Avenue School.

During the influenza outbreak in 1918, Miss Williams became a Red Cross nursing aid for the duration of the epidemic. She then worked as a cashier to Ritter and Meyer from 1920 until 1928.

Miss Williams currently resides at the Paisly Home for Aged Women at 1408 Mahoning Avenue. She is a member of the John Knox United Presbyterian Church in Youngstown.

DONNA DEBLASIO
July 15, 1977

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Depression

INTERVIEWER: ANN WILLIAMS
INTERVIEWEE: Dan Flood
SUBJECT: Early childhood memories and the depression
DATE: December 3, 1975

- F: This is an interview with Ann Williams for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Depression, at the Paisley Home for Aged Women, 1408 Mahoning Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio, on December 3, 1975, at 7:45 p m. by Dan Flood.
- F: Miss Williams, do you want to begin by going back to recall the place where you were born and certain events that happened in your childhood?
- W: I was born in Niles, Ohio, on Pleasant Avenue. I went to the West Side School, and we came here on my thirteenth birthday.
- F: Do you remember anything about the West Side School?
- W: I went to the fourth grade there and then I went down to the Chestnut Street School until I was in sixth grade.
- F: What was a typical day like? How many kids were in the classes and things like that?
- W: In the West Side School there were four rooms It was a brick schoolhouse on the West Side of Niles. Then I went down to the Chestnut Street School for two grades It used to be a church, then for a while they transferred me to the Central High in Niles, but I went for only a short time. I went back and finished till the sixth grade. On April 30, my birthday, we moved to Youngstown and we lived on the East Side for about six months and

then we moved to Struthers and lived there six months and came back to West Myrtle. I went to the Delason Avenue School and graduated from there.

F: Do you remember what school was like in those days? Today a school room would have a teacher with about twenty kids and they would rotate

W: I know a girl that went to school with me and she lived on Willis Avenue and graduated with me. I saw her one day and she remembered me.

F: She remembered you after all those years?

W: Yes, well, I remembered her, too, but she was married and I knew her by her single name. When she said she knew me, I said that I didn't know her, but then I got to thinking that she said her name was Helen Shaw and I knew her by Helen Shearer. She said, "Yes", she was Helen Shearer. Then we got to talking.

In school, we had two teachers, one in the morning, and one in the afternoon. Miss Valance was the morning teacher and Professor Thorne was our afternoon teacher. We could have all our fun with him, but the lady teacher was so strict. Boy, you had to pay attention to her. She'd slam something down and get your attention. We always liked him, but we never liked her. I guess it was because she was so strict.

F: Did they have any type of punishment that they used to give you?

W: Well, they used to send them [the students] out to the cloakroom or you would have to go out into the hall. I remember one time Mrs. Sutter, my first grade teacher, I believe, sent them off into this cloakroom. It was in the hallway and they had hooks on the outside wall. Mrs. Sutter, after we moved, was still in the same place, but I don't know how long she was there. We used to go up and visit there because we had relatives there, my uncle and aunt and cousins. At school they used to ring a bell to call us to go in and ring it again when we left.

F: What time did you start school in the morning?

W: I believe it was about 8 o'clock.

F: Was it a regular school day? Did you start at 8 o'clock and end at 4 o'clock?

W: Yes. We had arithmetic and history and reading and writing. I can't think of our music teacher's name in Niles. We

had a music teacher and we had Professor Rollen as Superintendent.

My teacher in the fourth grade was Miss Baldwin. When I went over to see one of my cousins, I saw one of my other teachers, Mrs. Simpleton. She used to live out in the country and her father used to bring her to school in the horse and buggy and then would come out and pick her up after school.

F: Did all of the kids live pretty close by the school?

W: Well, the West Side School was just about twenty minutes from our home. The school was on Warren Avenue. I believe then they called it Warren Road, but afterwards it was changed to Warren Avenue. They used to have big blocks of vacant lots there and we used to go back in the big woods behind there. Later, a baseball park was made there. I used to watch the kids play, but I never liked to play it myself.

F: Did you have sports in school? Did the boys participate against the boys of other schools?

W: Not as I remember. We used to have spelling bees. From the different classes they would get a winner. That's all I can remember.

F: Well, you graduated from eighth grade, then, right?

W: Yes, from Delason School. We had a music teacher in Youngstown, Miss Carmichel. The drawing teacher was a woman and I forget whether or not she was married. We had a writing teacher, too. We had reading, writing, and arithmetic.

F: Did you go to South High School, or did you quit after eighth grade?

W: I didn't go to high school, but I should have gone. I can see what I missed.

F: Were there a lot of kids going on to high school then?

W: Oh, yes, there were lots of them and some went on to college, too.

F: What did you do then after the eighth grade?

W: I just stayed home and did housework around the house. My brother Charlie went out to learn a plumber's trade. My brother Bill went out to Republic and took care of the boilers there. My brother Frank went to high school and graduated from Ohio State and he's now a doctor of

Chemistry. He met his wife up in Maine. He was working after in Boston. Margie and Frank got married and he quit working in Boston during the Depression and came here to Warren. He got a job there. He worked at the Sheet and Tube and then the Depression came on and they couldn't let him go. They had to stay at their jobs. He thought he'd teach school. He only taught about one year. He went to Kent to get his teaching certificate. Then came the Depression.

F: Do you remember what life was like, say during World War I, even before the Depression?

W: Well, in 1918 I took Red Cross training for a nurse to help with the influenza cases. They had all of those people in South High School.

F: Was there a major break-out of influenza, then?

W: Yes. I was a nurse there for a while at the high school. I stayed there until the flu was over, then went home.

F: Did you think much about political affairs, like the President? Were you much involved in that?

W: No.

F: Can you remember any of the presidents?

W: Oh, sure. There was President Wilson during the World War. There was a president born in Niles, President McKinley. He was born in Niles and afterwards lived in Canton. They have a big memorial in Niles.

F: What do you remember about the Presidents? What do you remember about President Wilson?

W: Well, I just remember that he was president during the war and that's all.

F: Was there any resentment against the Germans during World War I in Youngstown?

W: Oh, yes, sure there was. There are a lot of German women here. There is one next door and several of them here. They said that they had to go to German schools.

F: Oh, you mean the Germans didn't go to regular public schools. They went to their own German schools.

W: She said that when she first came over, they had their own schools, but in World War I they couldn't have any schools.

- F: They couldn't have their own German schools. Do you remember where these schools were located? Were they in Youngstown?
- W: Well, I couldn't tell you. I believe that the lady who told me this lived in Brier Hill somewhere.
- F: You mean they just wouldn't allow them to have their own schools?
- W: One of the women here said that they shouldn't have done that because they couldn't speak German. That's all I remember. She's about seventy-two and the other lady is about eighty-nine. One of them said that she didn't like the German schools.
- F: Was there any resentment against the people who were not Germans?
- W: I couldn't tell you. The only thing I know is that when we lived in the country, there was a German family and they were called in for questioning. I just can't recall. They had talked too freely and someone heard them, so they were called in for questioning. He was a very straight German fellow, but his wife had a different nature. He was rough and she was a little more gentle. They had three children, one girl and two boys. They had to leave for Germany. I remember this, but I didn't know what it was about. After, I heard that they were called in for questioning because they had been talking too much with the Germans. They had a nice big farm with over one hundred acres. They used to live down in Vienna near the airport.
- F: Can you remember anything about the 1920s?
- W: Yes, we were living on East Myrtle Avenue. We moved there in 1910 and we lived there until 1930 and in 1931 we moved out to Fowler. Then we came back here and went to Glenhaven. In 1945 my mother took sick and she was sick for five years and died in 1950. Then my brother died. He used to talk about the war a little. My brother, Bill, though never liked to talk about the war. He was in a hospital in France because he had been wounded and had a bullet in his thigh. He was in that hospital for a long, long time. He said that the doctor told him that he could help him, and Bill said that he had had so many operations already that another one wouldn't hurt. The doctor told him that he would make it so that Bill could walk. He had the operation, but when he came home, he could walk if he used a cane. I think he was there until the war was over. He was in the infantry and Charlie

was, too, but he wasn't wounded or even scratched.

F: He was pretty lucky.

W: He said that he could remember about going through the battlefields and seeing the fellas laying on the field with their heads blown off and different things. Bill didn't talk much about the war. In the French hospital, I guess they all spoke French and he couldn't understand them. Bill went to Camp Perry first to have his training. Charlie went six weeks after him and was shipped right over to England. Bill was in that camp when we had the worst snow storm.

F: When was that?

W: Well, it was in 1914. Bill was one of the first to go and he stayed there for six months. Charlie was at Chillicothe for six weeks and he was in Georgia for a while. Bill was in the longest, but he got wounded and he was in the hospital until the end of the war.

F: Can you recall how you felt when they came home? What was it like for the boys coming home? Did they have parades and everything?

W: Oh, yes. They had one the first year at South High. Charlie said that he wasn't going around parading anymore. He said that he had enough parading after the first one.

F: How about the 1920s? Do you remember the dance crazes, fads or anything like this?

W: No, I can't recall.

F: Can you remember the first car that came out?

W: Bill's first car was a Ford. They called it a "tin Lizzy" back then. Then Charlie got a second-hand one. Bill had his car before he went to war.

F: Before World War I?

W: Yes.

F: How did people take to the car? Did they actually think it was some new-fangled toy?

W: The only thing that I remember is when my brother was young and we lived in Niles on this little hill. He used to see cars, but they didn't have any tops on them. He said, "When I get a car, I'm going to have a top on mine." And he did.

- F: Do you remember any of the prices that they paid for the cars?
- W: No, I couldn't tell you. The cars just had a top and you had to pull the curtains down when it rained.
- F: There were no windows, no glass in the sides, just a top?
- W: Yes. It was just like a curtain. It was open. They were just a frame, like shutters or blinds.
- F: Was Market Street heavily used during the time by cars?
- W: Yes. In 1905 we moved on West Myrtle and my mother built a home.
- F: Where was the end of civilization? How far did the homes go until it became country, in 1905 in Youngstown?
- W: When we first came to Youngstown, my aunt lived on South Avenue between South and Market. They first lived on Joseph Street near the Oak Hill Cemetery. At that time there were no trains to come down on; there were no streetcars then either. My mother can remember when they had horseless carriages, as they called streetcars. I can remember the streetcars. I used to go to New Castle on them.
- F: Do you remember the cost?
- W: Oh, I couldn't tell you. I can remember when the car fare in town used to be five cents. Now it's twenty-five cents. Then they had summer cars and they had rails along the seats. They had curtains that you could pull down when it rained. When you wanted to get out, they lifted the rail up. There was a little platform that the conductors used to walk on. Afterwards, we had the other type of cars with the windows inside. There were some separate seats and they had like carpet on them, or heavy tapestry, or something. Now the cars are really beautiful and they have nice uniforms to match the upholstery. They have some women conductors, too.
- F: Yes, I've seen some of these. What jobs did the women get into then?
- W: There was a women's college that used to be an all-girl business college. It used to be over where Sears Roebuck is now.
- F: Could they get practically any job they wanted, as long as they had the qualifications?

W: Well, I don't know because I didn't have any experience in that sort of thing. Mrs. Shaw went to college to be a librarian. I've only been to South Library once, I think. She was a librarian there. She used to be a really slender woman.

When my mother was growing up she lived in town. Her grandfather got married again and he had six children. My mother was born in England. There were three children. She had an older brother and sister. I think they came over here when my mother was two years old. My grandfather went to California to look for work there. Then there were three children born in this country. The last one was a twin. My mother's mother had six children.

F: Do you remember prohibition, when they outlawed beer?

W: No. I was always against that. I remember Mrs. Bittner's saloon on the corner of Oakhill and West Myrtle. Her mother came out and rang a bell and told us about prohibition. After her daughter got married, they had a soda fountain. I guess that was after prohibition.

F: They had the soda fountain after prohibition was on?

W: Yes. My brother Charlie liked Mr. Bittner, the druggist. He had a drugstore on the South Side and after when we moved out to the country, he wanted to have a drugstore out in the country, so he went somewhere near Pymatuning and set up a drugstore on the main street there. We would go with my mother to see the Bittner's. They're all dead now. His daughter took over the drugstore. She's married and I think her husband is an airplane pilot. I don't remember if he was in the Second World War or not. I haven't seen him for years and of course, I don't drive a car. I'd be too old to drive. My friend Mrs. Shaw drives and she's only a little thing, weighs eighty pounds. She's short, too. I used to be about five feet eight inches tall. I don't know about now. I must have shrunk. One time I told my brother Bill, "I'm taller than you." I always thought that I was. He said he was five feet, ten and one half inches. Charlie was three quarters of an inch short of six feet. He said that the Army always stunts your growth.

F: Can you remember specific things around Youngstown that showed that we were in a depression?

W: During the war, we didn't have certain kinds of fruits, and we were limited on certain kinds of food, especially sugar. You could only get so much at one time. We used to go and get a twenty-five pound sack of sugar with the rationing booklets that we had to show them. We had to eat

corn meal instead of flour. We used egg and something else to make the butter go farther.

F: You had to make do with what you had, then?

W: Yes, and you were only allowed so much allotment.

F: Well, as far as the Depression, then, you knew quite a bit about rationing food and sacrificing and limiting food from World War I.

W: Yes. There were six of us altogether. I was the only girl and there were three boys. I guess I was too young to notice much. I wasn't really that young. The war came on in 1914, so I was 23. I was 19 when we moved down on East Myrtle. My youngest brother didn't have to go to either war. He was born in 1900. My nephew, Bill's son, went to the first World War. Frank's son didn't have to go. During the Depression you couldn't have things like you have now.

F: You had experience with the rationing that went on during World War I and the same rationing went on during the Depression.

W: Yes. I think the most rationing we had was with sugar. You'd like to have sugar for cakes and pies. We had to do the best we could.

F: Was your father dead at the time of the Depression?

W: Yes. He died in 1930. My mother died twenty years later. I can remember we had some homes and rented them. The people couldn't pay, so you had to do the best you could.

F: Was there any trouble as far as the government taking the homes from you?

W: No. The people would give you what they could and sometimes they'd stay until they didn't have any money or we had to tell them to go. We couldn't let them stay. We had to pay the water and they paid the electric and gas.

F: Were there many people at the time who could not pay the rent?

W: Oh, yes. My mother died and we were left the property and the houses, which were divided up between us.

F: Do you remember anything about the first radio?

W: Yes. We had a radio. They used to have earphones on them.

F: Do you remember any of the shows that you used to listen

to on the radio?

W: Oh, yes, like Amos and Andy. My brother used to like to listen to that one.

F: Did you ever hear of a radio show that came on around 1938? It was called War of the Worlds, where the Martians invade New Jersey?

W: No, I don't remember that. This is my own television here. We all have our own. I didn't bring my bedroom suite. This all belongs to the Home.

F: How did the Paisley Home start?

W: Why, it was named after people who owned this property and then after, they must have built some rooms onto it. On the other part of it they have wider window sills. On that side lives Mrs. Shaw and Margerette and on this side Mrs. Stump has her room. There's an elevator. There is a place for linens in this closet. You can't go to all of the rooms on the elevator. I remember one summer when the strike was on, I think it was last summer. They were playing cards out in the front and someone said that he knew the Paisleys for a long time and that he used to come hunting up there. They went on strike because their contracts ended after three years.

F: Do you remember any of the bigger strikes?

W: Yes, the Sheet and Tube strike.

F: Do you remember that one?

W: Yes, I do. I don't know how it started, but I know that they went on strike and I think that it was during the World War because the boys came back and were supposed to have their jobs back, but they didn't get them back. I think that could have been what the strike was about. We were living on East Myrtle then. Charlie went to the Republic Steel a couple of years after Bill.

As a boy, Charlie used to work at McFadden Clothing Store. He used to sweep the place. They sold men's clothing. Diamond's Meat Mart used to be right next door. After that the street was made straight.

F: As a girl, what type of amusements did you have? Did you ever go out to Idora Park?

W: Oh, yes. We went there a lot of times. Last Sunday I went to that Flower Show. We had gotten complimentary

tickets and so many of us went, about five or six. But I didn't care for the show. They had a band playing there. That ballroom isn't the same as it used to be. It was never closed in before; it was just like a porch all around.

F: Oh really, no roof to it?

W: Oh there was a roof too, I mean that there was a porch around the building and now they have it all closed in. That's the first time I'd been there in over twenty years.

F: When was the first time you went there, to Idora Park?

W: It was when my aunt was living on Kyle Street. I stayed with my mother and sister and her daughter, Marie. They took a picnic basket, and at that time, Mill Creek was just a little ways away. There used to be a bandstand at Mill Creek Park.

F: Do you remember what some of the rides were there or the swimming pool?

W: I never went to the swimming pool.

F: No.

W: No, I've never been there. One summer we went to Geneva-on-the-Lake, a couple of us women, about four or five of us. We had a cottage out at Geneva. We had to go down a hill a little bit to get to the water. We had bathing suits that you ought to see. We had bloomers and then the skirt over it you know and you wore shoes and stockings.

F: Made sure that you were covered completely?

W: Yes, I never liked the water to get in but I can ride on it, but my girlfriend, she was trying everything to learn. But she was more daring than me. She was in her forties and she was still diving. She lived on this side of town. I used to go over and visit with her and her family, when we lived on West Myrtle. She's eighty-nine. She's five years older than me. She always used to tell everyone, you know this is the first girlfriend I ever knew when I came here to town. They had a farm. I went out there often.

F: You said this girl was more daring in her younger days than you were.

W: Oh, yes.

- F: What were some of things that she used to do?
- W: Oh, she loved to ride on those rides at the Park and I went on them only once. But she had a good time. On those bumps I couldn't holler but she would holler and scream her head off. The only thing I didn't care for much was the rollercoaster, now they're all different. It's all different, there aren't any places where they sold candy and stuff like that.
- F: Yes, the concession stands and everything.
- W: Of course, I hadn't been there in about thirty years. That was the first time I've gone since that time. Of course we used to have streetcars and they used to be open cars in the summer time. We paid five cents fare to get on the trollies and go out. And one time, oh I used to go out and start to walk. One time a girl that I used to ride with, we went to Mill Creek and then went to Idora and then coming back we'd get on a streetcar. I remember all that walking and things that we used to do. Of course, at that time, they had what they called sulfur springs where you could go and get water
- F: Oh yes, right below Idora Park there
- W: Yes.
- F: They still do, but you can't get water.
- W: Do they still have it down there?
- F: They still have the spring down there but you can't get any water out of it, because it's closed up. But I can remember about ten years ago they still had it down there. It was still working and you could still get the water out of it. There used to be a place where you used to dring the water.
- F: Yes, there used to be a spigot, in fact you could pull your car over to the side of the road there and get out and then fill up the gallon containers. I can remember that.
- W: We've gone to the park many times, Charlie and I, and since I've been here we go out for a ride every once in a while. Here we're supposed to go to town every two weeks but we don't. Then for a while I used to ride on the bus to town. I had a fall downtown last July. I rode down and the bus stops in front of McKelvey's there's a straight walk for you to cross at with the light, but I was in a hurry and I thought that I'd take a shorter way and I saw this divider but I must have hit it and

went down on my face. I have a little mark there yet, but it's very light. Two men came along in a car and they said, "Lady, are you hurt?" and I said, "Oh, please help me." So they picked me up and said, "Are you hurt?" after that they left me then and I didn't think to thank them. All I was thinking about was that I had to get back to the store and exchange this. I walked down to the store and I met a woman up in Strouss in that little vestibule there and I told her about my fall and she said that I should go up to the rest room and have the nurse take care of it. I told her that it would take too much time. I took the first bus home. I told her what happened and she said that when I get home to show the man in charge and she said, "Miss Williams, you ought to call up your home so that they can come and get you." I should have but I thought that I'm not going to bother them and all I thought about was getting home. So I was waiting for the bus and I didn't get hurt or anything and I got home. At home the nurse was there, I told her what had happened and if our director saw me, then she'd scold me, but I told her and she said that she was sorry that it happened. Mrs. Johnson took me upstairs and she said, "Do you feel like vommiting," and I said no and they asked me that every once in a while and I said no, but I felt sick in my stomach and she put the ice pack on where I fell and it didn't swell and the doctor was to come the next day and the doctor comes about once a month or every two weeks. Then if he doesn't come, we'll call someone and make sure that everything's ok. He came then one day and he said that I didn't have any broken bones and I told him that I didn't vomit the whole time and I didn't have to go to bed or anything. I could walk around.

F: Do you like it staying here now?

W: Oh yes. We had a lovely Thanksgiving, there were three tables where four of us could sit and then there's a long table and I think about eight people can sit there.

F: Well, I'd like to thank you for the interview. It certainly has given us a wealth of information.

END OF INTERVIEW