

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Canfield Fair Project

Canfield Fair Experience

O. H. 253

CHARLES V. BLUNT

Interviewed

by

Carrie Stanton

on

May 12, 1983

CHARLES V. BLUNT

Charles V. Blunt was born in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of Ruby and George Blunt on September 8, 1914. He served in the Navy and has been self-employed all of his life, first as a plumber and later in the automobile business.

He served on the Canfield Fair Board both in the position of director and president. His duties include erection of new buildings, but he has served in many other positions.

Mr. Blunt is married to Caroline Blunt and they have four children. His special interests include golf and crafts.

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INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES V. BLUNT

INTERVIEWER: Carrie Stanton

SUBJECT: Canfield Fair Board experience, buildings erected

DATE: May 12, 1983

S: This is an interview with Charles Blunt for the Youngstown State University Canfield Fair Project by Carrie Stanton at the fairgrounds administration building on May 12, 1983, at approximately 10:00.

B: I started out on the Fair Board in 1955, twenty-eight years ago. George Bishop helped over maintenance, that is the electric, and the water, and the sewer, and buildings. In about 1957 I guess it was, something like that, George retired from that and I took it over. I don't know whether you want this.

S: Oh, whatever you want to say.

B: In 1962 we remodeled a 4-H barn, and another 4-H barn, that was eleven, twelve, thirteen. The 4-H beef barn and the 4-H tile horse barn, that was in the 4-H pony barn, the cattle barn. Each year the Fair Board tried to spend so much money on a different department. 1962 was the year we spent money on the 4-H, which changes every year.

S: The fair board pays for all that?

B: Oh, yes.

S: The 4-H doesn't kick in anything?

B: No, the Fair Board pays for all of that.

S: It pays for all of it?

B: We don't even get any money from the county commissioners.

S: No?

B: No, the Fair Board pays for all of it. Some of these years are mixed up a little bit, in 1968 we built a police building that was called 18A. We remodeled the Colonial Inn in 1965. These years are going back and forth. That Colonial building, that used to be the old chicken house years ago.

S: Is the restaurant in there?

B: The restaurant is in there now, yes.

S: What restaurant is that?

B: Well, they just call it the Colonial Inn. It will seat about 180 people. The church in Austintown has it at fair time.

S: That is the one with the big line in front of it all the time.

B: Right. In 1962 we remodeled the administration building, this building here, and the bank and the commercial building. We remodeled that over there, in 1967. We remodeled the dining room, that is this dining room down here, put a kitchen on it, that's building number twenty-three. They did some more work on the exhibition hall and the 4-H block building, which is twenty-four and twenty-five. In 1963 we built the hay and grain building. All of these buildings are pole-type buildings.

S: What year was that?

B: 1963.

S: That's a pretty new building.

B: Yes. In 1964 a company had built this building for display and then they got to use it two or three years and reverted it back to the Fair Board, that's when we put the Red Cross building in there. We remodeled the grandstand, the part that was built in 1936 and did some work on that. In 1964 we moved the band building over, that was an old building we had, and moved it over for the bands to use. In 1958 we built barn 33, 34, and 35. 33 and 34 are the big pony barns at the south end of the grounds. In 1958 we also built the poultry and rabbit building. That was probably \$68,000 to \$80,000 at that time; it was a lot of money.

S: Where did they used to keep them?

B: They used to be up here at the north end in barn 11, which the 4-H uses now. These were all new in the south end since I've been on the board. In 1961 they built the sheep barn and the swine barn, that's also down at the south end. In 1960 they built a new speed barn, building 38. It was 64 X 150 for \$30,000. In 1964 we built another pony barn, that was a smaller barn, \$10,000. Also in 1964 we built barn 40, which was another pony barn, they're also down at the southeast end of the grounds. The blacksmith's shop down at the south end was built in 1966. The draft horse barn was built in 1966, that was barn 42, that's a big barn, 60 X 204. I think there were 64 stalls in that. In 1968 then we built barn 43, which is another speed barn. In 1964, fine arts and crafts building. That was one of our better buildings, I think the contract on that was around \$65,000. In 1969, 45, 46, and 47, those are pony barns down around the green. We have about eight barns that hold ponies at fair time. In 1964 one night we were playing bridge with some of the women that were on women's club number one, and they had put in about \$1500 in the Whittlesy building, which was the beginning of pioneer village. That was set up on the green in Canfield. They were going to have to give it up so they asked if we could take it to the fairgrounds. I told them I would bring it up with the board. Bob Rose and I got talking about it and did bring it up here and the board decided to take it and move the Whittlesy building in 1965 down to the fairgrounds. It was a solid brick building and Clempy wanted to know what it was made out of. At that time we didn't know because it was so heavy. A few years later when we were remodeling it and the roof leaked a little bit we found out it had a brick ceiling in it. You don't see brick ceilings very often. We took the plaster out and put it back to its original. That building originally cost about \$7,000 to move down.

In 1965 the log cabin was brought in and the railroad station was brought in. In 1966 the country store was brought in. In 1967 the schoolhouse was brought in. In 1966 the caboose was brought in. In 1966 the railroad tower was brought in and we also built the entrance then. The lumber and so forth came out of a barn which was in the 1700's from Canfield. In 1967 the library was brought. In 1968 we built the blacksmith's shop. At that time we probably had pretty close to \$100,000 in the pioneer village.

S: Can you tell me anything about any of those?

B: Bob Rose and Gibby took that over.

S: Where did they come from?

B: The log cabin came from Columbiana County and the railroad station came from Canfield. The country store came from Austintown.

S: Was it still in use when you brought it in?

B: No, it wasn't in use anymore. There were a lot of old things in it though. Bob does a good job, he buys old candy and old barrels and stuff and has it fixed up nice. The schoolhouse came from Greenford township. The caboose came from the old Pennsylvania Railroad, I think. The railroad tower came from the Pennsylvania Railroad, I believe. The library came from, I can't remember that. You'll have to ask Bob that, he'll remember. The blacksmith shop, we built that the same as the entrance way, we built that.

S: Is that the only thing that isn't original besides the entrance way?

B: That's the only thing that isn't original, but they're made out of old lumber from different buildings around here in the late 1800's. I think the log cabin was 1710 or something like that.

S: Really?

B: It's an old baby.

S: Is that the oldest you think?

B: The Whittlesy building might be. I imagine the log cabin would be the oldest building. The Whittlesy building would probably be the next I would guess. That was up in Canfield ever since I can remember.

S: Mr. Hammett told me that . . . Forget that, go ahead.

B: In 1967 we started building some more toilet rooms. We got the idea for them from the state highway, from the toilet rooms they had on the interchanges at that time. That's where I came up for the design for them. We built the women's at the pony ring in 1959. We're about done.

I forget what year we started the parking tower out there, that was before they used to have a lot of trouble with traffic, it was blocked up for five miles out. They fenced the fair in and put the parking tower out there and they controlled traffic for five miles out.

S: When was that?

- B: I think that was about 1964 we did that. This is the second one we've had. Each one of those poles cost \$1,000 each.
- S: Are there two?
- B: Not now, we had to tear the other one down, it got too old. The first one I built I built out of old poles. Ohio Edison gave us some poles that we built the first ones out of. This one we built out there now, that was remodeled about four years ago. That probably cost us \$6,000 or \$8,000 just to build that. They were 60 foot poles and you had to buy good poles. In 1967 we thought the water was getting high again. Years ago Canfield used to get its water from the fairgrounds, the village of Canfield, out of about six wells they had out here. In 1967 and 1969 they rejuvenated four of those wells which we are still using today. We don't use them to drink, we just use them to wash cattle and to water the race track. The toilet room down at the 4-H building, all the water from that comes from the well down there. We do save quite a bit on that anymore as far as savings go. That's about the end of the buildings, I guess. There are quite a bit of buildings there in 28 years.
- S: I understand that if it wasn't for Charlie Findley and his races that there wouldn't have been much money.
- B: That's not quite true. That helped, but back in those days they did depend on Charlie Findley quite a bit for money, there's no question about that.
- S: Since you worked with the buildings and that type of thing, did you have to be here a lot during the year?
- B: Yes, I was here probably two or three hours a day back in that time.
- S: Every day?
- B: Every day. I was the only paid board member at that time. I wanted to give it up and each one take a crack at it a year at a time or something like that, but I couldn't have taken that much time out of my business anyway, and it was taking too much off my family.
- S: Did you help start the auction?
- B: No, that was all rented out.
- S: You worked all year?

- B: I used to keep pretty good records. These are records of the beginning of 1954 when I first was on the board. I took that of the gates. In other words, the gates went from \$64,000 in 1954 to \$161,000 in 1968. That was a plus of \$97,000. The grandstand, until Bob Rose took it over, it broke even about every year. We took in \$31,000 in 1954 and we actually took in less money in 1968. That's about the year that Bob started to get the big shows.
- S: When you got the big shows you made less money?
- B: No, we made more. We didn't lose any. It did help the gates out some too, but I didn't take any records after that. Back in 1967, Bob and I weren't on the board too long then and we got to talking with some of the old-timers down at the convention and they told us the only way to go was to hire somebody to do it for you. We hired Klien in 1968, that's when Bob really took over and worked with Klien and got better shows, outside of Mr. Kilcawley who got the Lennon Sisters in 1957. The take in 1957 was \$107,200, that was almost double of what we did in 1954. It showed that if you put the money out, but the board didn't have the money to guarantee \$10,000 to the Lennon Sisters, but Mr. Kilcawley guaranteed them . . .
- S: Yes, I heard that he put the money up for it.
- B: The increase in the fair, I think, started back when . . . We used to receive \$5,000 from the concessioneer who used to sell all the footage. We would sell the whole grounds for \$5,000 and she took the footage and all the gains. The concessions jumped tremendously after we took over that.
- S: You mean one person?
- B: I think the first year we went from \$5,000 to \$13,000. Mr. Bowman took the games over. He argued he didn't want to take it to begin with, but he said he would later. He took the games over and the first year we more than doubled what we took in from her.
- S: I didn't realize that.
- B: In 1963 we weren't getting enough out of the rides and Ken Pen gave us a contract that year of a \$25,000 guarantee. Ever since then that's another thing that I think helped the fair out as far as money received. We upgraded rent and tried to make everything pay its own way. We made up our minds that we were going to get the costs out of everything and that helped out a lot on electric and water and so forth.

We opened pioneer village in 1966 and that helped. In other words, what I think made the fair grow so much was the free . . . For the dollar we charge to get in, that helped our gate and it helped our people because actually we had about a couple hundred thousand dollars of free stuff that they could see if they didn't want to spend another dollar for anything else. When I took it over in 1956 we were getting \$900 for electric and in 1968 we were getting almost \$6,000, now we're getting about \$15,000. It either paid the electric bill or the electricians. I told the board what I was going to do at the convention and I said, "Don't just agree with me and say yes." I had him up to \$1,000, I was asking for \$1,500 and he said okay. Mr. Gooding was a good guy and they all said yes before I even got any more out. We got \$750 out of the first year, but after that it went up. I think Ken Pen now pays us about \$1,500 a year. They probably run over half of their rides on their own juice because a few years ago before we put in this other line coming on the fair grounds--in fact we're the only place that Ohio Edison has two meters--we put on a new line because we couldn't handle it anymore, we were blowing transformers and everything else.

S: Mr. Bowman said they were putting in new electric . . .

B: They're trying something new now. We've had a little bit of it, but now they're putting in new pluggings. We have electricians hook up about between 500 and 575 concessions a year, that way they won't have to waste that much wire and it won't take as much labor. They will still have to hook them up in these boxes, but it will be quite different.

Salaries too, that has all gone up. Homer and Grace, I don't think the board paid them for what they were worth for a long, long time. They do now, but I don't think they did then. Both Grace and Homer have their retirement coming.

It has always been a board that has worked together very well.

S: So you work all year round?

B: I did then, yes.

S: It wasn't a matter of a couple months before?

B: No, maintenance was a year-round job, really. You were always building or doing something. It was always get the money put away for next year. For ten or fifteen years

we probably put from \$80,000 to \$150,000 in capital improvements into new buildings and maintenance and so forth every year, which is pretty good for a fair our size.

S: During the fair you would be here constantly?

B: Yes, during the fair you were here from 7:00 in the morning until . . .

S: What type of things did you do?

B: During the fair you had to make sure the men were all going and coming. You always had a breakdown in the water or the electric or something. In fact, one year in 1967 we blew two, fifty transformers over here at 5:00 in the afternoon. By 7:00 my boys had two new transformers up. Everybody works with you. I remember that time especially because we didn't have any transformers here at all. I called Ohio Edison and told them my truck was on the way and to have two 50KVA transformers sitting on the dock when they get there and they did, they were sitting there.

S: Did you have a lot of people work under you, paid help work under you?

B: Yes, we had about ten to twelve electricians.

S: All year-round?

B: No, just the five days of the fair. Homer probably had twenty men in the summertime. Wintertime you don't have very many, just one or two men.

S: Did you ever have any problems with the neighbors around here fussing about things?

B: Yes, they fuss about the dust and so forth. We tried to satisfy them, but you can never satisfy them all. The people on Fairground Boulevard, the fairgrounds were here before they moved in, but we still try to keep them happy. In other words, we've got a lot over there which we wanted to use for parking cars and they griped about it so we never used the lot. That would make a good lot to park the director's cars.

S: It must have been a big change when you went from tents to buildings worrying about the weather?

B: We still pay a good tent bill, but most of our animals and so forth are under roof now. We still have to put a few tents up. If it gets too big you're going to get so big

you're going to start to lose money. When you have 140,000 to 150,000 people a day, you've got a lot of people on the grounds. You can tell by if the concession on Canfield Road is full up in here. If the north end is full you've got around 140,000 people on the grounds. Most of the rides are on the south end now. When this end gets busy up here, that's about what you have on the grounds.

S: Didn't you used to run buses from the back parking lot?

B: We still hire eight buses a year for that, but when the traffic gets heavy you can't get around with them anyway. They just don't do that much good. What we should do probably is to have a little train ride, but then you can't even get through with that. On Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, it's awfully hard to get through when you have a big day.

S: Do you think the fair is too much midway now?

B: No because your midways have to pay for your fair. You lose money on almost everything else. You have to have something to bring that money in so that you can take care of your capital improvements and your maintenance and so forth. When I first got on the board the maintenance was about \$30,000 a year and now it's up to over \$100,000 a year for maintenance alone. That's a lot of money. You have to watch that.

S: Do you want to tell us how you judge how many people are at the fair, by the septic tanks?

B: No, not the septic tanks. Every year on a Friday, it always happened on a Friday, the manhole down at the pumpkin building would overflow. Jim Hedge was on the council up there at that time and I said, "Jim, I'll tell you what, you rod that sewer out from the fairgrounds to the Sohio station up there and I'll rod the sewer out here and if that doesn't clear it up we will pay for the rodding from the fairgrounds to that." They did it and we've never had any trouble since. We did for the next few years measure the sewer and the sewer has never been over half full, even with 150,000 people. You can tell the inches a sewer comes up how many people you have on the grounds, that's the way we found out how many people were on the grounds. Now we go out in the parking lot. We can take a ride around the parking lot and see where the cars are. At that time, we couldn't do that.

S: I think Mr. Bowman called it the dipstick method.

- B: Yes, we had a dipstick and about every two hours we would send a man down to that hole down there and measure the sewer going out. We could tell by how much water was going through it.
- S: You must have personally seen the fair grow a lot?
- B: Yes, I've seen all those buildings put up since I've been on the board. When I helped Mr. Zigger I think Springfield Drive was the last one put up, they've put two or three on since then. We've put a lot of buildings up since then and scattered things out more. In fact, moving the cattle down helped the north end a lot, now the 4-H has a lot more room. They will eventually build another coliseum down there when they get the money.
- S: How many pony rings are there?
- B: Two, one at the north end and the one down there, the original pony ring. The Kiwanis just helped put the money up for this new one up here, the building and so forth. Some of the old barns are still in good shape. They are 130 years old I guess.
- S: What would be the oldest building?
- B: I think the oldest building is the pumpkin building or Colonial Inn, one of those two buildings. Then the cattle barns would come next, and then the floral hall. The doctor's building down there is new too, I don't think that was on the list.
- S: It must be one of the newer buildings.
- B: It's probably ten years old.
- S: It was in a tent for years.
- B: Yes, they were in a tent for years down there. The exhibition hall would be one of the older buildings too.
- S: Where they have the school?
- B: No, the school building is over there; it's an old building also. The exhibition hall is Grace's building, she takes care of that and the grandstand.
- S: Well, is there anything you would like to add?
- B: No, that's about it I guess, as far as I'm concerned.
- S: Any interesting experiences?

B: We had a lot of them. Kids at the north end, they always break that fence down over there. They had one dug underneath the fence and Homer and I got the idea and we got some fresh cow manure and put straw over it. You should have seen the first three kids that came through.

S: That's terrible.

B: No it wasn't, they didn't use it anymore. The crazy little buggers could have come through the gate for nothing because they were all under twelve years old I think. Now, the young people just cut the fence. You can't keep that fence in repair. There are a couple people over there that just use fence cutters and cut a hole every year. You can sew it up one day and it will be open the next. There aren't too many that come through there.

S: That's pretty funny. There's nothing else you'd like to add?

B: No, I don't think so.

S: All right, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW