

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Canfield Fair Experience

O H. 396

HOMER MILLER

Interviewed

by

Carrie Stanton

on

May 12, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Canfield Fair Project

INTERVIEWEE: HOMER MILLER

INTERVIEWER: Carrie Stanton

SUBJECT: Groundskeeping, Growth of the Fair, Various Incidents

DATE: May 12, 1983

S: This is an interview with Homer Miller for the Youngstown State University Canfield Fair Project by Carrie Stanton at his home on May 12, 1983, at approximately 2:00 p.m.

We usually start by asking people about your early years, your own personal background, your parents and family, and where you were born.

M: I was born in Calla, down the road here about three miles. I moved to Canfield when I was two years old. I've lived here ever since.

S: Your parents?

M: My father's name was Homer Miller Sr. Both my parents are deceased now. My wife was the former Carol Hammond, also from Canfield. We have two children and five grandchildren.

I worked in the clay mines for nine years before I started at the fair. I worked for a year for the village of Canfield. I started to work for the fair in 1947 and worked there until 1979. Then I retired.

S: So there are a lot of years in between there?

M: Thirty-two years for the fair board alone.

S: That's a long time.

M: Yes, it is.

S: How did you get your job?

M: I had a good friend who married the secretary's daughter, and he asked me one day if I wanted a steady job. I said, "I sure do." About a year later, I was supposed to meet George Bishop, director of maintenance, and W. H. Kilcawley at the fairgrounds. I met them there, and they told me to go to work the next day.

S: Really?

M: Two hundred dollars a month.

S: Two hundred dollars a month? How did that compare with wages then? Was it fair?

M: It wasn't too bad.

S: Not too bad? What did your job entail? What did you do back then?

M: Well, when I started we had a wheelbarrow, garden rake, and a shovel. That's the truth. A wheelbarrow, a garden rake, and a shovel. Then we got a tractor. I think we bought the first tractor in 1949. We kept the fairgrounds mowed and did repair work. We put in a lot of the roads and the parking lot. We made all of the parking lots.

S: How many of you were there then working on the grounds?

M: I was the only year-round employee at that time.

S: You were the only one who ran the wheelbarrow?

M: It wasn't very good. You couldn't run it very long because it wouldn't stand it. I worked over there in the winter time for a very long time, a good many years by myself.

S: That's really an all year-round job.

M: It sure is.

S: I thought the county kept up some of those roads there?

M: Well, the county will do some of them, but when we put in the parking lots we also put in the roads. Just about three furrows on each side, however wide we wanted the road. Then we started hauling slag, and leveled it off. That's the way the road was put in, right on top of the topsoil, right on the dirt.

S: It's in pretty good shape. Of course, they don't get that much traffic.

M: No. They don't get that much traffic. It's ten days a year. It has held up good.

S: So you've seen the fair grow quite a bit?

M: An awful lot. There are six buildings in the north parking lot which weren't there when I started here. The women's building wasn't there. The medical building wasn't there. The big, cement, 4-H building wasn't there. The Red Cross building wasn't there. The hay and grain building wasn't there. And there was only one horse barn on the south side of the race track. Everything else was there. I wasn't there when they built the six, new cow barns.

S: When did they build those?

M: They build them the year before last.

S: They're down south. You said you went to work for the fair after the war?

M: Yes, in 1947.

S: What was the fair like then?

M: There were two midways. You knew about everybody who was there. You knew a lot of people. There was the Canfield Midway and Boardman Midway. The old race track was over there when I started.

S: Really?

M: The old race track was in the middle of the fairgrounds due west of the present grandstand which was built in 1936.

S: It was still there, the old one and the new one?

M: Yes. I can remember a big fire when the Ringling Brothers Circus was there. It burned the one barn. I think it took fourteen horses.

S: When was that?

M: How many years ago has that been? I can't remember.

S: You said there was just you when you started. How many people were there when you retired? How many worked under you?

M: Two.

S: Full-time?

M: No. The one boy wasn't full-time. One boy was full-time, and the other worked for an hourly rate. He worked pretty steady.

S: What did you do during the year besides cut grass? In the winter time did you have to maintain the buildings?

M: We cleared snow and looked after the buildings. There was a lot of work. We stored boats, built benches and picnic tables.

S: Where do you store the boats?

M: We had boats in the hay and grain, in the medical building, in the floral hall, under the grandstand, in the women's building.

S: Do they still do that?

M: Yes, but they don't have as many boats. Every nook and cranny was full.

S: I didn't realize that. Did you do the painting?

M: We did a lot of painting. Until I retired we did almost all of the painting.

S: They kept you really busy didn't they?

M: Yes. It was a busy job that required boys to do that.

S: During the fair what did you do?

M: Just kept the show running. Anything they hollered for, you were supposed to grab it right out of the air then and give it to them. Not tomorrow, but today.

S: Were you in charge of all the kids who would go and clean up after?

M: I had a guy who took charge at night, but during the day hours I tried to keep things going.

S: Did they have wooden bleachers?

M: They had a wood grandstand stuck right about where the exhibition hall is now. It was down when I started to work.

S: What do you remember about some of the old-timers like Mr. Kilcawley and Mr. Zieger?

M: I wouldn't know what to say, but they were a bunch of nice guys. They were really nice. They wanted you to work, but they appreciated what you did. I remember one time Mr. Kilcawley had locked his car and came to me and said, "Can you get in my car?" I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "I locked it." I said, "Sure I can get in." But I said, "I can take you home if you have another key." He said, "I don't have time. I just want in there." I just picked up my hammer and walked over to his car and broke the window. He said, "Christ, why didn't I think of that." He never said anything.

S: He never blinked an eye?

M: Never blinked an eye. (Laughter)

S: I hear people talk about the old-timers.

M: Oh yes. Lester Burton, Howard Kohler, Fay Heintzeman, Fred Moherman, Ralph Courtney, Hugh Bowman. We broke a tractor one time, pretty near in pieces; I went out to see Mr. Bowman to tell him we broke it. I was feeling pretty bad.

S: How did you do that?

M: We were going around a tree and hit a root. It didn't have power steering. It hit the root and took the wheel right out of the guy's hand. I talked to Mr. Bowman and he said, "Now don't get excited. Have you got the parts?" I said, "Yes." So we took it out to Bares Farm Equipment and they welded it back. We used this tractor for years after that. They were nice guys.

S: Where was Mr. Zieger from?

M: As long as I knew him he lived here in Canfield. He was Secretary for years and years.

S: I thought his name was Zeigler, but it's Zeiger. I've heard of him.

M: A really nice man.

S: What did he do, Mr. Kilcawley?

M: He was the Secretary and the Treasurer of Standard Slag. I used to have to go out to his place and grade his drive. He didn't like the way his farm guy graded it, so I'd have to go out and grade the thing. He could do just as good of a job as I could.

S Does he live around here too?

M: Kilcawley?

S: Yes.

M: He lives on a big farm out here on Leffingwell Road. Well, he bought a farm on Raccoon Road when he moved here. Then he sold that and moved out to Leffingwell Road and fixed that farm all up. It's a nice, big farm now. George Bishop, I forgot him. He was really my boss for years, and then Chuck Blunt was my boss for what seemed like ages.

S: What do you mean he was your boss? I know they all had their own department

M: Chuck was in charge of grounds and maintenance and then he was my boss. George was the first boss I had, and then Chuck. I don't know how long George was there; I guess from 1929 until 1969. Then Chuck took over. Chuck was in to buying tractors and stuff to work with.

S: Do you remember Charlie Findley?

M: Oh yes, sure. Phil Heim, he was on the board.

S: They were telling me Charlie Findley brought in a lot of extra money for the fair and that's why they were able to start buying more and building more buildings.

M: He ran the automobile racing. The big stone by the grandstand was moved there in 1958. The G. F. Howard Construction Company moved it.

S: Where was it moved from?

M: Straight back to the grandstand. After it was moved that rock used to be the main place for hippies.

S: Really? My kids like it there and they were just little. They hung out before?

M: When the hippies were so great, that's where they hung out--around the big rock.

S: Did you have a lot of trouble with them then?

M: One year we had quite a bit.

S: Did you?

M: Yes.

S: What were they doing, smoking pot and things like that?

M: Yes.

S: Is that the only time you really had trouble with kids?

M: Oh, I'd say one year was about all. We had trouble more than that, but not like that one year.

S: Nothing bad?

M: No.

S: Did you know Esther Hamilton?

M: Oh yes.

S: Did she used to spend a lot of time out at the fair?

M: She sure did.

S: She was a great promoter of the fair. Then I guess Janie Jenkins took over.

M: Janie's great, too.

S: I heard she's a really nice person.

M: Really nice.

S: So you got along with Esther?

M: Oh yes. I was surprised. Of course, if I saw her coming down the midway and I had a chance to shoot someplace else I would.

S: You mean you got along with her because you avoided her?

M: No. She just never lit into me. Some people she would just light into them and tell them. She never did that to me.

S: You probably got along well with Grace though? I think everybody did with Grace.

M: Grace is one of the nicest people we know. She can't be beat. The first time I ever met Grace was when I was twelve years old. I raced a mule at the fair and won a little money; she wrote me out my check.

S: Was Zieger the Secretary?

M: He was the Secretary and Grace worked for him. Then Grace became the Secretary when he retired.

I worked steady longer than Grace. I was hired steady longer than Grace. Maybe Grace has caught up with me now. Grace really helped make that fair.

S: Did she?

M: She sure did. She was so nice to people. Do you know what I mean?

S: She seems to know everything about everything.

M: She does.

S: And everyone.

M: She's so nice really. She just can't be beat.

S: She started the rooster crowing contest I think.

M: I guess she did in 1962, I think.

S: Did you ever go around to other fairs? Some of them tell me they go around to other fairs? Mr. Groves was telling me he has been to every one in Ohio but one.

M: Is that right?

S: Yes.

M: I never got to do many fairs because in the summer time I was too busy over here. A couple years ago we went to Burton, and that's really nice. We went to Lisbon, Jefferson, Ashland, and Delaware.

S: How do they compare with Canfield?

M: They're small, like Jefferson. Every one you go to you will learn something. None can compare with Canfield.

S: Did you ever go down to the Ohio State Fair?

M: No.

S: Too busy probably.

M: Too busy. We went to Delaware for I don't know how many years, down to the little brown jug.

S: Did you go down to the pumpkin show in Circleville?

M: Never to Circleville to the pumpkin show, but we've been to Circleville. We were also down at Fairfield; we went to the fair in Lancaster. We used to go down there and stay a couple of days. We knew the old caretaker so we'd go down. I liked it down there. This summer we're going to see more of other things.

S: How do you like going to the fair now? Do they still put you to work over there when they see you?

M: No.

S: They treat you like a king?

M: Yes. Very good.

S: Do you remember any of the storms they had?

M: I remember one. They had the chickens in a tent; the wind came up pretty bad and it was raining. We went down and tried to hold it from blowing over. Finally, it got away from us. People were hunting chickens until 4:00 in the morning.

S: Were you responsible when cars would get stuck in the mud?

M: Yes. I pulled hundreds of them out. They have never had a muddy parking lot yet since I retired.

The one year it was really bad. I think there were seven or eight tractors pulling out cars. You would use about five tractors going to one car, cutting it up worse than anything. I told Carol what I wanted to do, to put a tractor at each station and have each one take care of so much ground. She got a hold of Chuck and he announced on the speaker to get in your car and blink your lights. I think about 1:00 we had them all out. That really worked and saved all the running around needlessly.

S: When was that?

M: It was back quite a few years. I guess in 1974.

S: So they keep you really busy during the fair?

M: Yes. I used to go at 7:00, and if I was lucky get home by 11 00. I have gotten home at 2:00 in the morning and been back at 7:00 the next morning.

Ringling Brothers has been over there. I had more fun when Ringling Brothers Circus came there.

S: They used to be down on Meridian Road didn't they?

M: Yes.

S: Then they moved out here?

M: They don't come here anymore. They go to Cleveland.

S: At the Coliseum.

M: I used to sit over there until 2:00 in the morning talking to them. I'd be by myself and I enjoyed every minute.

S: They must have told some real stories?

M: I'll never forget, George Bishop called one morning and said, "Boy, I wish they wouldn't let this circus in. People are just calling in. They're scared to death of the circus."

S: Why?

M: I said, "George, I don't know why they're scared. I'm out here, I'm not scared of them." He said, "You're not?" I said, "No, not in the least." I just loved it. We had a retarded school over there for three or four years, I guess. I really learned to like those kids. I learned from the circus and I learned from the school.

S: I didn't realize that there was a school there.

M: About the children, I learned more about them and real education. I mean an education.

S: You mean they actually had a school on the fairgrounds?

M: Yes. In the Secretary's office, before Grace moved in; before they remodeled it.

S: Do you think that was the beginning for the Mahoning School for the Retarded?

M: That's when it kind of started. I guess they had it, but I guess they picked spots where they could have it. That was a real education.

S: I imagine it was.

M: Those kids couldn't even hang up their coats when they came out. They couldn't take off their boots. Before school was over they could hang up their coats, put their hats away, and line their boots up as straight as a string.

S: That was probably one of the first schools around for the retarded.

M: I sure enjoyed them.

S: Grace worked all year-round out there, didn't she?

M: She worked uptown first.

S: You mean they didn't always work out here at the grounds?

M: Oh no. They had the office in Youngstown when I started. Then Grace moved out here. Next, Ed Craig was President and he wanted to get a good Secretary. Each President had something they wanted to do. So Ed got the Secretary's office and Grace moved in there.

S: When did they do that?

M: I can't remember. I guess around 1962. We had a woman from Akron call one time who said she lost her glasses at the fair and that there was probably no chance of finding them. I had this box right in front of me and I asked her what they looked like, and she described them pretty good and said she had just bought them. I looked them over and I said, "I think I have them." She said, "If you don't care, I'll come down." I said, "I wish you would because glasses cost money." She came down and looked them all over and she said these are them and put them on. Praise the Lord. Then one time we found a guy's driver license in the south parking lot.

They used to have big dog shows and things like that. I think they were larger back a a few years than they are now.

S: Where did they have them?

M: They had them right on Canfield Midway.

S: Outside?

M: Yes.

S: Did they have cat shows too?

M: Yes. Rabbit shows, chicken shows, pony shows, and horse shows.

S: I never realized so many things went on out there.

M: Oh yes. We also had an auto auction every week.

S: The auctions weren't during the fair.

M: When the auction first came there, Carol worked for it from the day it started. Then they sold the auction and they built a big auction in Akron. She went up there and worked then. She still goes up there when they have a Board of Directors meeting.

S: Do you know what I wanted to ask you? You can edit this out if you want. I heard that the Ku Klux Klan had a farm on the fairgrounds property. Is that true?

M: No. Never on the fairgrounds property. But it's the first farm when you go down route 46 here, as soon as you go across the bridge. It's the first farm to your left.

S: I had heard that this was one of their main places.

M: Yes, it was.

S: They used to say be careful out at the fairgrounds. People would get upset.

M: I remember when that farm was for the Ku Klux Klan. They had it all fixed up in the back end. It was really nice.

S: What did they do, just farm? Did they have a bunch of people living there?

M: They just had the woods, and I think they just held meetings back there.

S: With their sheets and things?

M: Pardon?

S: They had their sheets on?

M: Yes.

S: That's interesting.

M: One time at the fair Grace laid down on the track and let an elephant put its foot almost down on her face. She was a good sport and always game to do things. They wanted me to ride an elephant and I wouldn't do it. I have kind of a tricky back and I wouldn't want to get on that elephant. Here's a picture of the rooster on the truck. We set it by the office.

S: How did they get that rooster out of there?

M: Carol and I used to walk every night, and I'll bet they were up there taking the rooster when we were walking on the fairgrounds because we saw a guy at the gate. He was a total stranger who had a squawk box, and I think he was telling them to lay low and so on and so forth. Grace was sure thrilled when she saw that rooster in the morning. That's her rooster.

S: What is this picture of you being a blacksmith down in Pioneer Village?

M: That was some publicity shot for the brown section of the Sunday newspaper before the fair. I don't know why I went over early that morning. At the Pioneer Village they were taking pictures of the horse in front of the blacksmith's shop. They wanted a blacksmith, so I just picked up his foot and swung it around, like I was working on it.

S: It didn't kick you did it?

M: Oh no. I think they got \$40,000 for that horse, and he didn't amount to a dime.

S: Who was the fellow they honored at the dinner the other night? Do you know?

M: Probably Harold Brown.

S: I was at their board meeting and they honored this fellow.

M: It could be Riley; it could be Harold Brown. I don't know. Anymore we don't know what's going on.

S: He had been there like 35 or 37 years.

M: Harold hasn't been there that long. Nobody on the fair board now was there when I went there.

I remember when the Lennon Sisters were at the fair.

The little one was out in front of the grandstand. We had to put some tables out there so they could sign autographs. The little one was signing autographs like crazy and, finally, she just dropped her pen and goes this way and says, "Oh, your mosquitos are terrible around here." The show people were wonderful.

S: Were they?

M: They were great. I worked with a lot of them. They kept you alive. We've got our pictures taken with Bob Hope.

S: Do you?

M: You know Bob's not much of an autographer. Gibby James knew that I'd like to have it autographed, and by golly the next year he got it autographed.

S: Good.

M: When I retired they gave me a plaque, and they wanted to give Bob Hope one. Anyway, they didn't have one for Bob, so they asked me if I could give up mine so that they could present it to Bob. Then they would send me one. Gibby James can't stand still. Two minutes is his limit. I told Gibby, "It's at home, but if you stand there for ten minutes I'll be back." Traffic is pretty bad on our street during the fair. I said, "I'm going to leave, Gib." I came home and I drove the Jeep, and I got the thing and I went back there in ten minutes. Gibby couldn't believe it. I couldn't either.

S: Is Bob Hope your favorite?

M: Yes. He was there and I've always liked Bob Hope.

S: Do they hire mostly college kids?

M: Mostly.

S: Directing traffic?

M: Well, no. They're mostly in college, but the boys I hired were hired to work. I felt sorry for them. I really did. It was so hot one year at the fair that I didn't know how they would make it. I'd go around and I'd look at the piles of manure and I'd say, "Better give you some more help." They said, "Go on old man, we'll take care of it."

One time I thought I left water on and I went back down to the fairgrounds. It was about 2:00 in the morning. I pulled up in front of the maintenance barn and I could hear somebody walking, just sliding their feet. They were robbing trucks. The truck driver would pull off on the side of the fairgrounds, and they were robbing him down there. I didn't know whether to go in the barn and lock the door or to get in the car and go because the keys were in it and the motor was running. I didn't have time. I looked up and there was a big, colored guy. I mean he was big. He said to me, "Bud, where can I sleep tonight?" And I gasped. My hands were down at my side. I'm telling you I couldn't move them. I couldn't move my arms; I couldn't move my feet. I've heard about that.

S: You just freeze up.

M: I was frozen. He said, "I ain't gonna hurt you. I just want a place to sleep." I tried to answer him but I just gasped. Finally, I said, "Any goddamn place you lay down." Then I told him, "Over in the old, red shed." Do you remember them?

S: Yes.

M: I said, "Over there if you look around there's a stall with straw in it." ~~That night~~ some kids broke a hundred and some windows on the grounds. The next morning this colored guy came over and said, "Bud, you had a lot of excitement over here last night." I said, "Yes, I kind of took notice." I always got there early and I'd go around and look. He said, "I came over because they wouldn't see me in the dark, you know." He was kind of describing what was going on. So I called Bishop and I called Zieger and they were nice to him. They said, "Well, we'll give a fifty dollar reward to anybody that finds them." Pretty soon here comes a detective and he says, "You got any ideas?" I said, "Yes, I have a hunch." He said, "What do you mean a hunch?" I said, "Just like you get when you go to the race track and bet on a horse." He didn't like that at all. Finally, I told him who it was, and by gosh, he went up to the school and he got those kids and they admitted it. So their fathers came down and put the windows back in, and the colored guy stayed around for about three days.

I was hauling manure by myself so it was after the fair. He said, "You got another fork, I'll help you." It was about three days that he worked and boy could he work!

I would say, "How much do I owe you?" He answered me that a loaf of bread and a quart of milk was all he wanted. About the fourth morning he came over and said, "I have to go." I said, "Where are you going?" He answered that he was going out to the road. He then told me he would go in whatever direction his ride went; it didn't make any difference. He didn't have any place to go. He would go whichever way he got a ride.

S: That was the biggest fright you had over there?

M: When the auction was over there we got calls for about a month. At 2 00 in the morning the telephone would ring. Kids would be taking auction cars and wrecking them by hitting trees and each other.

S: What did they do, hot wire them?

M: Oh yes. You know how those kids can do that in about five minutes, without even putting the keys in.

S: Did you ever have times when they would come and damage things at the fair?

M: It would run in cycles. Sometimes they would fix stuff up pretty good, and then nothing would happen for a long time.

S: Who would guard over there?

M: At that time the auction hired a policeman. Now they have a policeman full-time for the grounds.

S: All year-round?

M: Yes.

S: Is he paid by the fair?

M: Yes.

S: How much did Mahoning County do for the fair? They paved the roads?

M: Yes. I don't know really what the setup is there. Years ago, the county didn't do much for the fair. Now, they do more.

S: The fair really grew.

M: It sure has.

S: I hear they're putting in new electrical boxes for hookups?

M: Boxes in, yes. I don't know how they're going to work them, whether they're going to have them sitting on the ground or not. I don't know if it would be better or not.

S: Here are some more minutes here. She must have put out minutes every day?

M: She put them out every day during the fair and then once a month. We had a teacher come down one night who wanted a little interview, but she got to looking at those books and just couldn't quit.

S: Peggy King? Who was that? I don't remember her.

M: She was a singer. Bob Rose came to me, and I never will forget it. He came to me and he said, "Homer, don't let her find out who you are. She'll pester you to death. Stay clear. Stay clear."

S: Did you have much to do for the entertainers?

M: We used to have to put two tents out there every year for the dressing rooms.

S: Do most of them bring their own?

M: No. They furnish trailers now.

S: Do they?

M: Yes.

Do you remember the stage they used to have in front of the grandstand?

S: Yes.

M: We got the piano up there and no stool. The guy was supposed to be on at, say, around 7:30. The guy was announcing the show and I just picked up the piano stool and shoved it over. He said, "Boy, you can't time it any better than that, can you?"

S: You had to go and get all those things?

M Oh yes.

S: What was one of the strangest things you ever had to get?

M: Probably the strangest thing we ever did was bury an elephant.

S: You buried an elephant?

M: I wasn't allowed to tell anyone. It was a baby elephant.

S: You mean from the fair or from the circus?

M: It was from a show in front of the grandstand. This baby elephant died. It was supposed to be a military secret. Nobody was supposed to know anything about it. We couldn't even go over to get it until 12:00 that night. The next morning I went over and everybody wanted to know where we buried the elephant. They knew more about it than I did.

S: You're lucky it was a baby elephant.

M: Yes, you're right. We also buried an alligator.

S: An alligator?

M: About as big as from here over to Carol.

S: Why was it a big secret about the elephant? Did you ever find out?

M: I don't know, never found out. I went over there at 7:00 the next morning and everybody asked me where I buried the elephant.

S: Where did you bury the elephant?

M: I buried it in the manure pile. We didn't have a back hole or anything. We couldn't dig a hole that night to bury an elephant. There were a lot of things going on.

Fred Merrill used to be the head man of the soil and water conservation. He was going to grow mushrooms so he would come down and get manure. When they had this circus, we got all the elephant manure and put it in boxes. We took it up and put it on his lawn. We did this first thing in the morning. Then we told the police what we did, and the police told the mayor. The mayor called him and told him there was an awful smell up there, and he had to do something about it. You have to know Fred because he just laughed. The police drove

in and they gave them the dickens. The mayor called and everyone sure had fun.

S: Do you remember when they used to have the parades?

M: Oh yes.

S: They don't do that anymore.

M: I can remember when they had the parades and you would lead a cow around the race track to get in the grandstand for nothing and see the show.

S: Oh?

M: That's right.

Fay Heintzelman said to me, "We need some help over at the grandstand right after the parade." I said, "How many guys do you need?" "Just you," he answered. I kind of thought that there was something wrong about this. Carol knew it. Chuck Blunt knew it. Right when the parade went by, Harry Camp came running over. He was the electrician. He said, "I need some help over here." I said, "I'm not going to help you hook up any wires. I'm scared to death of electricity." "No," he said, "I just need a lift." So I went over and holy cow, they said, "We want you to be a judge for the dancing contest." We used to have to move the stage out on the race track. Do you remember?

S: Yes.

M: We would push it out there and it was pretty high off the ground. Timbers were laying around it. I thought, well, I could run and I could jump off of that and just run up the track, but with all that stuff around there I just could break a leg too. Pretty soon the mayor said, "We want you to bootsie daisy with a girl." So they introduced her and I'm not kidding you, she was about that high and that big around and really nice. They turned out all the lights and had the spotlight on her and I. I was so tired anyway. She said, "Homer, if I hit you, could you roll without getting hurt?" I said, "Go ahead." She bumped into me and you had to go. There was no room. Roll? You're right you had to roll. It was funny.

S: They like to play jokes?

M: Oh yes. We had our picture taken.

- S: Where's the maintenance barn? I can't picture it.
- M: You know where the office is at? You know where the dining hall is at? It's right straight across.
- S: Did you go to the fair during the Depression?
- M: Oh yes. I don't know if I ever missed a day out at the fair. I asked my mother one time if I ever missed the fair and she didn't know.
- S: Were things bad at the fair? They've always had a fair. Did they ever miss a fair? Was there ever a year when they didn't have a fair, like during World War II?
- M: No.
- S: You didn't get to go to the fair in a horse and buggy?
- M: No.
- S: Did your father?
- M: Yes. If my father was living, he'd be over a hundred years old now.
- S: Somebody was telling me that when the fair first started it wasn't for women. Women didn't go to the fair, just men. It used to be down on the square, I think.
- M: Yes, I've heard that.
- S: Grace was trying to remember when it used to be that they would have the fair on Friday and Saturday, and not on Sunday and then on Monday. Do you remember that? She couldn't remember when that was.
- M: No. I think they've always had the fair on Sundays. They had a seven day fair once. I don't remember when that was.
- S: How did that go?
- M: They made the money in five days.
- S: So five days seems to be about the best?
- M: Yes. They run it too long in Warren.
- S: Yes. I think the Ohio State Fair is also too long.
- M: They keep bringing things in, like they would show a

breed of horses on one day and the next day they would take them out and bring in another breed. My daughter has been to the Ohio State Fair, and she said there are a lot of people of all ages.

S: Yes, I think so.

M: I've never been there. I've been to the grounds. I've been to horse sales down at Ohio State Fair, but I've never been to the fair.

I don't know what they charge for the fair now.

S: Two or three dollars, isn't it?

M: I think it's three dollars on Sunday and Monday. I don't know.

S: Do you remember when they put the fence up? Remember you used to pay when you went into the park?

M: Oh yes. Sure I remember that.

S: I wonder when that was.

M: I couldn't tell you. That has been quite a while.

S: When I was a kid I used to drive and pay there.

M: It sure has changed, I'll tell you.

S: Look at that rock. Where was that?

M: Back, straight east of the grandstand.

S: Did you know it was this big when you started digging?

M: They found out it was and we started digging around it.

S: How did they move it?

M: They dug a ramp, and they pushed the stone over on the lowboy. Then they dug a big hole where it's at now. I suppose they put in two or three feet of slag. They pushed it off of there, off of the trailer. It was just lucky how it landed.

S: How did they get it on the trailer?

M: They pushed it on. He had big equipment. He brought his crew too.

- S: I thought that was always there.
- M: Oh no!
- S: Do you remember when they built the grandstand?
- M: Yes.
- S: Do you? Back during the Depression?
- M: I think, 1936.
- S: Did a lot of guys from around here work on it?
- M: Yes.
- S: I remember when the sound tower used to be across from the administration building. That was for a long time, wasn't it?
- M: Boy, I'll never forget that one in back of the maintenance barn. I was just ready to come home, and what language I heard over that thing. We went over to see who it was. What language came over that thing. I went right up there. How many were in there? Three or four hippies. The sheriff had a tent right alongside of this, and these guys were standing there with their helmets on and their clubs and everything. They never made a move to stop them. They were rough looking. I told them, "Go on. Get out of there." I just walked in and I jerked the wires down. They were talking pretty rough to me. Finally, the sheriff came over.
- At night somebody would call that there was somebody in a barn over there. I'd go right over to the barn. You go on the end, where the light switch was, and you can walk clear through the thing in the dark. I never thought anything about it.
- S: Did you often have trouble with people just going in there? Bums?
- M: No. We never had much trouble with bums.
- S: Didn't one of the barns burn down one time with some horses in it?
- M: Yes, fourteen. I buried them.
- S: Alongside the elephant?
- M: No. I'd like to have all the pigs I hauled out of there dead.

S: Pigs?

M: One year when it was terribly hot, we hauled pigs, lambs, and sheep out of there.

S: Dead pigs?

M: Yes.

S: You were the undertaker for all the animals? Sounds like a really great job.

M: It never bothered me a bit.

S: I didn't realize they would die in the heat.

M: Oh yes. One year they lost a lot of hogs.

S: Did they have them in tents then?

M: No. They were in the old sheep barn.

S: So you had to bury the bacon?

M: Yes.

Did you know Thelma Murphy Camp? She played the organ. One night, I forget who the big attraction was, but I was supposed to pull her out in front of the grandstand, and she was going to play the Star Spangled Banner. I was supposed to get her right out there. We got out there and it started to rain. I thought Thelma had got out of the trailer when I told Mike, "Put that wire in there and we're going to get out of here." Meanwhile, Thelma is sitting in the trailer. We took off. I pulled her up alongside the maintenance barn, unhooked the trailer, and drove away. Her husband came over and said to Carol, "Do you know where my wife is at?" He went out to the trailer, and she's out in the trailer. I wouldn't have done that for \$1,000. I didn't know she was in there. She could play that organ and talk to you. She would be playing for the horse show. I kind of took care of the horses for about nine years, and I'd go over and stand by her trailer. She'd say, "Come on up and talk to me," and she'd talk and keep playing.

S: Didn't Arthur Godfrey show horses up there?

M: Yes.

S: Did you ever meet him?

M: No. I stayed away from most people. One time a guy,

Professor Gonia, he was at the horse show. He trained horses putting on a show. He came over and he said, "Mr. Miller?" I said, "That's right." He said, "My name is Professor Gonia and I want that tack room painted." I said, "I happen to be Mr. Miller and I'm not going to paint the room." He said, "Well I have to have it painted." I said, "Well, that's too bad. I'm not going to paint it." That's the way it ended up.

One night we went over to Poland Avenue to get a 1,000 pounds of ice for their ice skating show. You just think back, oh my gosh.

S: You probably didn't have the coils to freeze the water

M: Well, they had the coils, but it wouldn't freeze that fast. We had to put the ice in the water.

S: So you've been to some conventions?

M: Yes.

S: Mr Bowman was telling me about a fellow who came in and said that Canfield Fair shouldn't work. It just isn't set up right. He said, "I don't know why it works." He said, "This isn't supposed to work like this." But it did.

Billy Earhart dancers?

M: I wonder if Billy is still living.

S: I think he died, didn't he?

M: I think he did. We used to get cards from him.

S: They used to live down across from Poland High School when it was Poland High School.

M: I've always liked him.

S: Did they have harness races during the year out here?

M: No.

S: Did they use the race track for anything during the year?

M: There are year-round harness horses here. They also train down here. They were going to have a matinee last Sunday, but it was cancelled on account of the rain.

- S: There are a lot of horses over there, aren't there?
- M: Yes. I go over there every morning and take care of four. I haven't been jogging too much the last couple of weeks, but all winter long I jog.
- S: Really?
- M: Yes.
- S: They mostly run harness horses?
- M: Yes.
- S: They don't keep any draft horses over here do they?
- M: No.
- S: Aren't those new barns those draft ones?
- M: That's one draft barn now. It has got a few years on it now. That was built when I was here. All the barns on the other side were here before.
- S: Well, anything else you would like to add? This has been great.
- M: I don't have anything else. We have a book that tells when everything was built.
- S: Did you used to have to plant all the flowers?
- M: No. Carol planted them for a few years.
- S: They're really pretty over there around the administration building.
- M: They do a real job.
- S: Do you collect roosters too? Everyplace I've been, there's roosters all over the place.
- Who's Howard Moore?
- M: He was on the fair board.
- S: Who was in charge of the women's building?
- M: Bowman.
- S: I understood that the wives oversaw the work of the building.

M: The wives helped, yes, but Esther Stewart was the coordinator.

S: The duck pens are fairly new, aren't they? What did they do with the ducks before that, or didn't they have ducks?

M: Well, the flower beds by the pumpkin building used to be duck pens. They're going to build onto it this year. Mr. Schaeffer is the director in charge of the pumpkin building. He is a hardworking fair board member, I'll tell you.

S: Well, if you can't think of anything else. I surely enjoyed it.

M: I probably could go on until tomorrow morning, but I just can't think of too much now.

END OF INTERVIEW