

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Resident of Youngstown

O. H. 667

DAN EAKINS

Interviewed

by

Joseph Drobney

on

October 19, 1985

DANIEL EAKINS

Dan Eakins was born on January 16, 1915 in Windber, Pennsylvania. Mr. Eakins, who was one of four children, moved to the Youngstown area with his family during the early 1920's. He left school after the eighth grade and entered the work force in Youngstown. During the late 1930's and early 1940's, Dan Eakins worked for a variety of employers in the Youngstown area. He was an employee of the Atlas Powder Company of Ravenna, Ohio, which produced armaments for the U.S. military forces during the Second World War. Also during World War II, Mr. Eakins and his wife (he is now divorced) lived in the government funded Westlake Terrace Housing Project. After World War II, Dan Eakins again held a variety of jobs. He lived, for a short time, outside the state of Ohio. Mr. Eakins is now retired, and lives in a Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority apartment complex on the city's east side.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

INTERVIEWEE: DAN EAKINS

INTERVIEWER: Joseph Drobney

SUBJECT: World War II, Ravenna Arms Plant,
Youngstown 1930's - 1940's

DATE: October 19, 1985

D: This is an interview with Dan Eakins for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Joe Drobney, on October 19, 1985, at 1400 Springdale Avenue, Apartment 424, in Youngstown, at approximately 10:00 in the morning.

Mr. Eakins, just to get started can you tell me a little bit about your early life, for example, when and where you were born, something about your parents, how many brothers and sisters you had?

E: I had two sisters and one brother, all of which are deceased. I'm the only one of the immediate family living.

D: Where and when were you born?

E: I was born in Windber, Pennsylvania. It is just above Johnstown.

D: Before World War I?

E: No, I was born January 16, 1915.

D: About how long did you live in Johnstown?

E: Until I was about four and a half years old.

D: Then you moved to . . .

E: Youngstown, Ohio.

- D: Were both your parents living at an early age?
- E: No, my father was deceased. I don't remember him, but my mother was living. She worked for the post office in Youngstown, Ohio.
- D: Although you were quite young, do you remember your main reason for leaving Johnstown to come to Youngstown?
- E: I came to Youngstown with my mother; she moved here.
- D: Do you know her main reason, for work, or did you have relatives here?
- E: She came here to work. She had good work here with people that she knew like the Renners. She did housework before she went to work in the post office.
- D: When you first moved to Youngstown in 1921, do you remember where you lived, what street?
- E: We moved here February 19, 1921 and lived on Woodland Avenue. That was on East Woodland.
- D: East Woodland. Do you remember about how long you lived there on East Woodland?
- E: Approximately about two years.
- D: Until about 1923.
- E: Somewhere around there.
- D: Now at this time we are basically talking about your mother and her three children.
- E: That was my mother, my brother, and I and my stepfather.
- D: And your stepfather. Did she marry again when she got to Youngstown?
- E: Yes, she married again.
- D: Before or after she got to Youngstown?
- E: After she came to Youngstown.
- D: After you lived on East Woodland do you remember where you moved in 1923?
- E: From there we moved up onto West Woodland. I don't know just how long we were there, but it wasn't too long, maybe six months. Then we moved to New Court

off Oak Hill.

D: New Court off Oak Hill here in Youngstown.

E: In Youngstown.

D: During this whole time can you remember some of the schools that you attended during the 1920's in Youngstown?

E: Oh, yes, the first school I attended was Market Street School. The next school I attended was Grant. From there when we moved from New Court, we went to Oak Park. From there I went to Madison School.

D: Madison, down here on McGuffey?

E: On McGuffey.

D: Madison at that time, was it a junior high?

E: It was called Madison. It went up to the eighth grade. From there my stepfather bought a home on Keyhole Street.

D: Is that on the far east side of Youngstown?

E: That is off McGuffey Road. It was called Scienceville in those days.

D: You probably would have been about fourteen or fifteen maybe.

E: I was about thirteen or fourteen years of age.

D: Do you remember, for example, some of these neighborhoods you lived in like when you lived on Woodland, what type of neighborhood was it? Was it mainly working class or was it different types of people who lived there?

E: It was mixed with working class and elderly people.

D: How about as far as ethnic backgrounds kind of like Italians and Poles?

E: You had all nationalities there because there were people who worked at Golden Age; they were on Woodland Avenue at that time.

D: Golden Age Bottlers?

E: Pop company.

D: Was that a pretty big employer for that general area?

- E: Yes, they employed quite a few people.
- D: How about when you moved up to Oak Park?
- E: On Oak Park I went to Madison School.
- D: Did you live in a house up there?
- E: Yes, we rented a home down there in Oak Park.
- D: Your mother rented a home.
- E: Yes, my mother and stepfather.
- D: Up at Oak Park how would you characterize that neighborhood? Was it mixed, working class?
- E: It was mixed, working class people, people working in the mills and different places.
- D: How about ethnically? Was it Poles, Italians, different types?
- E: You had everything in there, Polish, Italian, Dutch, Irish, everything.
- D: At that time before you moved out to the Sharon Line did it seem to you or did you know from friends or just hear about Youngstown being divided into certain ethnic areas? We are talking about going into 1928, 1929. You mentioned on Woodland and Oak Park that you lived in areas where there were Italians and Poles. Do you remember if there was a Slovak section of town, or a Polish section of town?
- E: It was more or less on the east side. You had quite a few Italians. On the south side it was mostly all working class people. It was the same thing on the east side.
- D: Was there any specific area of town in the 1920's that might have been the black area, for example?
- E: Yes, we had what we called the Monkey's Nest in those years. That was out on West Rayen Avenue and down West Federal.
- D: Out West Federal and West Rayen. You would say that was the largest concentration as far as the black area.
- E: More or less that was their neighborhood and out to the Sharon line right above Stop Twenty-Five through there.

- D: With the Sharon Line you are also talking about the far east side.
- E: Yes, that side off Jacobs Road and out that way.
- D: That was also a black area as well.
- E: Yes, years ago, they were out through there. They weren't overly crowded. They were a nice class of people.
- D: When you moved out, you mentioned that you moved out to that Sharon line area in about 1928, 1929.
- E: Right around in there, yes.
- D: Was that at the time . . . Again what are some of the streets out there, Jacobs Road?
- E: Yes, Jacobs Road which was where Watson Airport used to be. You had Keyhole and Guss and you had Scienceville School. Then you had the high school.
- D: Which was which one?
- E: Scienceville High, which later on in years was turned into North High. That building is no longer there; none of them are.
- D: At the time when you moved out to what was called the Sharon line area, was it really part of the city, or was it kind of out in the country?
- E: At that time it wasn't classified as Youngstown. It was a suburb of Youngstown like Boardman or something like this.
- D: You mentioned during this whole time in the 1920's and including the time when you moved out there to the Sharon line, your mother was employed by the post office.
- E: Yes, she went to work at the post office. She was with the post office for eighteen years, almost nineteen years.
- D: Which post office was this? Was it a branch or the main line?
- E: The main post office, not the one that is here now nor the one before that, but the one before that yet.
- D: Tell me exactly where this was.
- E: That was in 1937. That is where the annex now over by the Market Street bridge . . .

D: By the Market Street bridge.

E: Yes, but the one that is there now, that was another one there before that.

D: That used to be the main post office in Youngstown?

E: Yes, that was your main post office.

D: How about branches? Were there still branches all over town in the 1920's and 1930's?

E: This I don't know too much about, but I believe there was. Scienceville had their own post office. It was just a little post office. You had your mail route. The mail was delivered to your mailboxes along the road.

D: How about your stepfather? What did he do?

E: He was a foreman down at Republic Iron & Steel.

D: Republic Steel. Did that job continue through the 1930's into the Depression?

E: Yes, he was working, not steady, but he was working. Things started to slow up; then he and my mother separated.

D: During the time when your stepfather and your mother were together and he was foreman, did he ever talk much about the plant, the mill, in other words the conditions in the mill, his salary, the hours, things like that? Do you remember it much?

E: I overheard his conversations with other men who worked with him. At that time the mills were starting to slow down. He was a foreman over the ore bridge. I would hear him talk about it, about the stockpiles and different things. I never paid too much attention because I was never a mill man. I always like to work out in the open like on trucks.

D: Do you recall about what his salary was?

E: No, I don't. In fact, I never asked any questions about these things.

D: Of course, at that time the mills weren't unionized. This was the late 1920's, early 1930's.

E: I don't know too much about that either because I never got into it. I don't know if they were unionized. In fact, I never heard too much about union shop until I

went to work for United Engineering. That was when I had to go to join the union.

D: Taking you back to the time you were on the Sharon line, by now we are into the late 1920's, early 1930's, is that where you completed your education?

E: No, we moved from out there after the separation to Sunshine which is called Madison now.

D: Which part of Madison would that be?

E: The corner of Sunshine and Madison. That is 1804. That is one block this side of Lansdowne.

D: We are still out mainly on the east side of town.

E: All east side there. From there I went to East High School.

D: Is that where you graduated from?

E: No, I didn't graduate. I quit.

D: How far did you go?

E: I went through the eighth grade.

D: Your school career ended at eighth grade.

E: I quit school and went to work.

D: When you quit school and began work, by this time had the Depression and bad economic times begun to set in?

E: Yes, things were getting pretty tight then.

D: Tell me about that. Was that the main reason you quit school to go to work?

E: Yes, I quit school to help out and help my mother and different things like this. We had to make the best that we could.

D: How did the family get along? Did your mother continue to work?

E: Oh, yes, she still worked. I took different jobs like cutting grass, whatever I could pick up, plus selling newspapers.

D: Which paper?

- E: I sold all of them, Youngstown Telegram . . .
- D: The Vindicator?
- E: Vindicator. There was a restaurant on a corner where I sold the Sunday papers there.
- D: You had a spot right downtown.
- E: Right downtown.
- D: Tell me a little bit about this. Was this seven days a week when you hustled papers?
- E: Oh, yes, seven days a week.
- D: Did you have to go down and pick them up?
- E: You picked your papers up on Commerce Street. You went to your corner and sold your papers.
- D: I know where the Vindicator building is. Where was the old Telegram building at?
- E: The Telegram building was up on the hill across from St. Columba's Church.
- D: Up on the north side.
- E: Yes, the northwest side.
- D: You mentioned you picked the papers up at Commerce. Was that for the Vindicator?
- E: That was when I was with the Vindicator; we picked them up there.
- D: How about the Telegram?
- E: They had been dropped . . . Then they both went together. We had the Youngstown Vindicator, and then we had the Telegram. The Telegram had the purple sheet and the Vindicator had the orange sheet.
- D: I don't understand. What do you mean purple and orange?
- E: That was your color for your paper.
- D: Of course, by this time you were sixteen or seventeen.
- E: I was probably around sixteen years of age.
- D: Would you say at this time that a lot of the people who

ended up as paper boys and girls were mainly doing it to help out the family because they had to?

E: People were doing just about anything they could get to do. Things were starting to get pretty tight.

D: You mentioned that you sold papers downtown. First of all, tell me how you would compare downtown Youngstown today to what it was during the 1920's and 1930's. Then maybe you could go into a little bit to tell me specifically some of the big stores and the big theaters and the big places that people used to go when Youngstown was thriving.

E: Back in those days you could go as far as Spring Common and everything was moving. People were spending, but they didn't go out of their means. You had big stores downtown. You had Strouss and McKelvey's. You had hardwares down there, Wilkins-Leonard. You had theaters; you had your State Theater; you had the Keith Albee Theater; you had all of these theaters downtown. You had the Park Theater, and if you didn't have the big money, you could always go to the Strand for a nickel or a dime.

D: I have heard that before. Was the Strand where they had the live performances?

E: No, that was the Park Theater. They used to have stage theaters there.

D: How about the old burlesque stop?

E: That was the old Princess Theater.

D: Where was that at?

E: I think it was on Phillips Street. It was down by the Ohio Edison.

D: It seems like Youngstown was a city of theaters downtown.

E: You had quite a few theaters downtown plus the theaters out on Market Street. Before they widened the street you had theaters going out that way.

D: What did it cost to go to the movies in the late 1920's, early 1930's?

E: Like I said you could go to the Strand Theater for 10¢ or 20¢, or you could go to the Park.

D: Why was the Strand a cheap theater?

E: It was a medium theater. It wasn't a high-class theater.

D: Did they have ushers at the Strand?

E: Yes, in those days they had ushers. Then you had your better theaters. All the way up Federal Street it was a thriving business of one kind or another. People were moving on the streets. It wasn't a ghost town.

D: How did you get downtown? Did you ride the cable car, or how did that work?

E: We rode the streetcars. We had streetcars running in those days. We had the Sharon Line streetcar. You had Market; you had Idora coming into the square. All of these streetcars came into town. Youngstown Southern used to come in, and that was up by the Voyager Hotel.

D: Was that a railroad or was that a streetcar?

E: That was a streetcar in those days plus the use of a railroad?

D: Where was it coming in from, the Youngstown Southern?

E: It came in from the south. I forget just where all that went. I never rode it myself, but I know it came in there.

D: You mentioned that it came into the square. Where was this big area where all of the streetcars let people off at downtown?

E: That would be on the square. The Youngstown Southern didn't go to the square. That just came up Front Street. The Sharon Line car came in by Ohio Edison and the Vindy Hotel. That was where their shop was. The Sharon Line is from the Sharon Local and the Sharon Express.

D: How about some of the big hotels at the time in Youngstown?

E: Your big hotels were Pick-Ohio, Tod House, Youngstown Hotel. Those were your three biggest hotels at that time. There were other small hotels. Then they started closing out the hotels, and they went to the motels. The first one was down across from the college.

D: On Lincoln Avenue?

E: No, up on Wick. I forget the name of it, but the building is still there.

D: You are saying at the time they built that building on Wick, at that time that was one of the first real motels?

E: That was your first motel; then came the Wick Motel.

- D: Originally, the hotels down in Youngstown did a pretty good business, and they were where everybody stayed.
- E: People coming into the city went to them. Those were your big hotels, your Tod House, or if they had big conventions or anything, they all went to these hotels like the Pick-Ohio or the Tod House.
- D: At one time during the 1920's and 1930's Youngstown was a convention town.
- E: Oh, yes, you had big people coming in.
- D: For example, do you remember any?
- E: No, I don't offhand.
- D: Like business or politicians?
- E: Politicians and everything came here.
- D: In order to be a big city with a lot of people coming in Youngstown must have been a rail center as well. What about the old train station?
- E: The first passenger train to leave the city was the New York Central. It was on Himrod and Wilson Avenue.
- D: Himrod and Wilson.
- E: Yes.
- D: That was an independent station there.
- E: That was the New York Central station. Then you had your Pennsylvania. That was on West Federal and Mahoning. That was where the Pennsylvania Railroad was. Then they moved from there up to where the Greyhound is today, and they closed that down and the Greyhound took that over there. Then you had your Erie which was on Commerce Street. That was your Erie terminal.
- D: That is three different terminals right there.
- E: Then you had your B & O (Baltimore & Ohio). That was on Mahoning Avenue. That is the one they are trying to make into a park now.
- D: Were all four of these passenger?
- E: They were all passenger. All of your passengers came in here, Pennsylvania, Erie, New York Central. Today you don't have any passenger.

D: You mentioned then about Youngstown in the 1920's and 1930's. You also mentioned moving out to the Sharon Line. Eventually you would make it through the eighth grade and go to work first as a paper boy. How about some of the other jobs, especially during the Depression time, 1933, 1934, 1935, through there that you worked?

E: In 1937 I went to work at Vahey-Marsh-Woods Company. They sold Ford cars plus we had the service department there.

D: They were an automobile dealer?

E: Oh, yes, dealer plus the big garage. Then they had gas stations. One was in Fosterville and one on Oak Hill. This was the main bulk plant downtown.

D: By 1937 were you still living with your mother?

E: Oh, yes.

D: You were living where?

E: At that time we were living on Utilis and Indianola. That was on the south side.

D: In other words you made your way around the city pretty well there.

E: Oh, yes, I moved around quite a bit.

D: By this time in 1937 what can you actually remember as far as the Depression in Youngstown? Can you actually remember food lines, people standing in line looking for a job to be posted, things like that?

E: They had the soup line; they had different things like this. The first bank closed that was on Roche and Federal.

D: Which bank was that?

E: I don't remember the name of it, but that was the first bank to close in Youngstown.

D: Can you kind of remember that?

E: I have a slight recollection.

D: Was that big news like a panic sign?

E: Yes, people had money in there that they lost.

D: How about the soup line, for example, who mainly sponsored

- it? Was that church groups or the city government or the federal government?
- E: I don't know whether the city took care of this or who took care of it.
- D: Did there seem to be a lot of them?
- E: Yes, people were going to these soup lines. Then they had what they called Shanty Town.
- D: Which was where?
- E: That was down by the river. There were people staying in these makeshift homes so that they had a place to stay.
- D: Give me some street around there.
- E: You couldn't call them streets. It was down by the Mahoning River and all down through there. That would be the lower part of Youngstown down towards Poland Avenue, down through there.
- D: At this Shanty Town were these people who had lived in Youngstown or were these people who were kind of drifting through?
- E: Just about everything. People just had to make it about the best they could. We never got that far. Mother always made sure that we always had a roof over our head one way or another.
- D: Did you know of people who might have lost their homes, for example?
- E: There were a lot of people who lost their homes. I just couldn't tell you offhand who they were.
- D: Did you consider yourself fortunate, or did you have kind of an inside when you did get the job in 1937 at the automobile company?
- E: There were people who knew and knew of my record of work. They more or less took care of me.
- D: Other than the newspaper job what were some other little odd jobs you got prior to 1937, for example?
- E: I worked around other places like service stations and different things like this, for Spur Distributing Company, Firestone . . . different places to pick up work.
- D: Mainly working on cars?

E: Working on cars and different things.

D: Did that really help, especially during the Depression, that you had that kind of a skill?

E: Oh, yes, everything you made I would take it home. It was up to my mother if she would let us have 25¢ or \$1 to go to the dances or whatever we wanted to do.

D: To go to the dances . . . Where were the dances at?

E: Oh, you had a lot of dance halls in Youngstown.

D: Give us some examples.

E: You had Nu-Elms Ballroom which was a big ballroom. It sat where Youngstown College is today.

D: Nu-Elms Ballroom. The university is there today.

E: The university is sitting there today.

D: Was this every night or mainly on the weekends?

E: You had it so many nights a week, Saturday, Sunday, and different nights. Some of the high schools had their dances there, or you could go to Idora Park's dances. If you wanted to go to a square dance, you could go out to the Old Barn or over to Hubbard. People would go anywhere.

D: At this time in Youngstown, of course, during the 1920's and 1930's Chicago was kind of identified as a mob city or a gangster town. How about Youngstown itself? Do you remember much about . . .

E: They called it mob city. There were bombings here and that kind of stuff, but they more or less kept to themselves. They didn't bother outside of the racketeers themselves like Cadillac Charlie and that bunch. They had a bombing on Market Street and different things like that. They weren't out to hurt the public; they were out for themselves, the one they wanted to get.

D: I don't suppose you remember much about when prohibition was in existence in Youngstown.

E: Oh, yes, I remember prohibition.

D: Do you remember some of the speak-easies at all? Was Youngstown a speak-easy town?

E: You could always buy your bootleg whiskey. You could get

- it over at the Sharon Line and different places like over at the Monkey's Nest or down in Campbell, which was east Youngstown, or Brier Hill or anyplace like that. You could always get your bootleg whiskey.
- D: Did you go to a private individual or was there a certain place like a speak-easy?
- E: They had places where if you were known, you could get in.
- D: How about in Youngstown? Do you remember now where any speak-easies were located like some buildings that might have been for them?
- E: No, most of them are all torn down. They are all cleared out. The east end is all cleared out down there. All of those old buildings and shacks are all torn out. Just about everything is gone.
- D: Getting back up to 1937, about how long did you work for Vahey-Marsh-Woods Company?
- E: I was with them for about three years.
- D: At this time was it quite an advantage to be a mechanic in the Youngstown area during the Depression? If you were a mechanic, did you have a better chance of getting a job then?
- E: Oh, yes, you had more of a chance to get into any service station or anyplace like that. For example, through my work at the service station I went to work for Summers.
- D: This was much later like in the 1940's?
- E: This was later on in years when I went to work for Summers. I opened a station up on Belmont and Alameda for Summers. After I quit there I went to work for myself. Later on in years, in 1947, my work got slow here and my brother was living in Boston, Massachusetts. I thought I would go up there and go to work; so I went up there. I found out that work wasn't too good there; he wasn't working.
- D: After 1940 with the next few jobs you got, were they also related to cars?
- E: Yes, in 1940 I was with Firestone at Market and Woodland. That is where Gold Cross is today, the ambulance company.
- D: By this time in 1940 did it seem like things were getting better as far as the economy in Youngstown? Were people getting called back? Did it seem like the mills were

starting up?

E: They were starting to have the war. United was hiring in there for different departments making different parts of cannons and different things. I went to work for United down there. I was cutting breech blocks for 105's and 75 millimeters.

D: What was the full name of United?

E: United Engineering & Foundry by the Market Street Bridge.

D: When did you go to work for them?

E: I just don't remember now what year that was.

D: 1944, 1945?

E: Somewhere around in there.

D: By the beginning of World War II, which was 1941, you were living on East Evergreen.

E: No, in that year I was on Myrtle Avenue.

D: Were you married yet?

E: I was married then, yes.

D: What year did you get married?

E: I don't remember.

D: 1939?

E: Around 1938 or 1939. She passed away in 1944, the same year as my mother.

D: By the beginning of the war you were in fact married. Did you have any children then?

E: No children.

D: First of all, do you remember through the late 1920's and on through the 1930's that Westlake area? I believe it was called Westlake Crossing, the Morrison Hill area, down around Wirt, West Federal Street, Griffith Street. Do you remember what it looked like, something about it before they began construction there?

E: Yes, there was more or less nothing there to amount to anything. They used to have circuses up through there. Years ago that used to hold circuses up in there.

- D: In that general Griffith Street area?
- E: In that general area through there, yes.
- D: Were there open fields there?
- E: There were open fields. Up as far as Worthington there the project didn't go that far then.
- D: This is the original . . .
- E: There was nothing in there. There were only homes.
- D: What type of housing was it?
- E: It was a dying condition. They were pretty old homes in those days. They were ready to come down, most of them.
- D: Would you characterize them as slums?
- E: Yes, you could call it that. There were some nice homes, but the biggest part of them were ready to come down.
- D: Was that area kind of like an extension of the Monkey's Nest area? Was that mainly a black area up to Madison Avenue?
- E: No, they were more or less over in that territory they called the Monkey's Nest on the other side of Federal Street. Most of those places down there had their beer gardens and all; they kept to themselves.
- D: You mentioned that was the cirucs area.
- E: Yes, up to the right up there. They used to pull the circuses in there.
- D: Along Madison Avenue there?
- E: Yes, up into the right there. That is where they held it. They put the tents up and stuff.
- D: Did you ever remember the circus coming to town during the 1930's? Did you used to go over?
- E: Yes, I remember very well. They used to come in on West Avenue there by the old waterworks. That is where they unloaded the circus. Then they went across West Avenue Bridge; they had their parades up and down Federal Street.
- D: This was really kind of a big drawing.

- E: This was a big circus. It was the Ringling Brothers. They had their elephants and wagons and all.
- D: When the circus came to town in Youngstown in the 1930's, was this like once a year that they came at the same time every year?
- E: They had different ones come in. They had Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey, different ones. They were much bigger than what they are today. The last one I remember coming into Youngstown was on Meridian Road.
- D: Out on Meridian, was this into the 1940's, 1950's?
- E: I couldn't tell you just what year that was. But that was the last one I remember coming in. Then they used to have them come in on old route 422. That was over going towards New Castle there; down by the ball field there they used to have circuses in there too.
- D: Even during the 1930's when they still had the circuses down there near the Westlake Crossing and Madison Avenue area . . .
- E: I was really young in those days; I was just a child. I remember them being up in there.
- D: I wondered if it was still fairly cheap family entertainment. In other words, could everybody go?
- E: I wouldn't know. We kids would go up there and do little odd jobs to get tickets to get in.
- D: Oh, you worked.
- E: We did little things like help putting up the tents and different things like that. That way we would get our tickets to get into the circus.
- D: Do you remember the circus people at all?
- E: We didn't know them personally. The bunches we would pick out were the only ones we knew, and we only knew them while they were in town.
- D: Basically, from what you can remember before they built the project in that Westlake area, this was the area where they used to have the circuses. You might characterize some of the homes as being in pretty poor shape.
- E: Yes, they were in poor shape, but in those days there

were some fairly nice homes up in there too.

- D: This is 1938, 1939. Do you remember when they began construction down there? Was it a big event in Youngstown? Was it in the paper a lot?
- E: Yes, it was quite a thing. It was a big project. Like I told you before when they put that expressway through there and they split those buildings that made a big change there again too.
- D: As far as originally being a big project did you happen to know or hear of some people maybe who ended up working on those projects either as common labor . . .
- E: No, I don't, not really. After I moved from there I just didn't go back around there too much or anything. Only after I started driving cab I would have trips up in there and different things.
- D: At the same time--we are talking about 1938, 1939--it always seemed like you had a job one way or another during the Depression. Did you know anybody who ever got a job with the WPA (Works Progress Administration) or if you ever had to get a job?
- E: Yes, my brother worked on the WPA. At that time he was getting \$60 a month.
- D: Did they give it to him directly, or did they send some to your mother? How did that work?
- E: He got it directly. Then when he got married, he and his wife got the \$60 a month.
- D: Do you remember what he did for the WPA, some of the things he did?
- E: Dug ditches and worked on the roads or whatever they put him to.
- D: Mainly around Youngstown?
- E: Sometimes it was around Youngstown and sometimes it was on the outskirts of Youngstown. It was wherever they took them I guess. I don't know too much about it because I never worked on it.
- D: Did you ever during this time see a lot of teams of men who were working for the WPA around the city doing things?

- E: Yes, they put in a street up there where I used to live on Indianola and Utilis. They put stone in there and fixed that street up. I watched them do that job.
- D: How about things like parks or down at Mill Creek? Did they do anything like that?
- E: I don't know. I think that park was run by the park itself. I'm not sure how that was done, but I think that was under the park administration. Whoever took care of the park took care of the roads.
- D: Mr. Eakins, where exactly were you living and how exactly did you first find out about openings down at the Westlake project?
- E: My wife was working at Youngstown Lamp Works on Hughes Street, and I was working at Firestone. That was when we decided we were going to get married. We started looking for a home. We found this place on Evergreen, and we moved there until we could find something better, which was the project.
- D: The place you lived on Evergreen . . .
- E: That was in a rooming house.
- D: A rooming house?
- E: Yes, they were furnished apartments that they rented out.
- D: Were there a lot of these rooming houses of people who rented rooms to young couples around at that time?
- E: Yes, there were quite a few.
- D: Would you say in that time around the late 1930's, early 1940's that it was difficult to find what you called good, low-cost housing even if you had a good job?
- E: Yes, at that time Evergreen Avenue was a fairly decent street to live on, and the rent was medium where the two of us working could afford it.
- D: The room you lived in . . .
- E: It was a little furnished apartment.
- D: Was it in an apartment house or in a private home?
- E: It was in a private home, but she had it arranged as apartments. Then we put in our application for the Westlake project. I went to work and bought all the

furniture. We moved straight into there.

D: How did you first hear about the possibility of moving into the Westlake project? By now we are talking about 1942.

E: My wife was talking to some of the girls who worked with her. She found out about it, and then we went over and we signed up for the project.

D: Where did you go?

E: On Madison and West Federal Street was where the main office was.

D: Down at the main office on Federal?

E: At that time that was the main office.

D: Do you remember about the questions they asked you, the requirements?

E: No, I really couldn't tell you. They checked your credit record; I know that, and different things like that.

D: How about your marital status? Did you have to be married? Did you have to show a marriage license?

E: Oh, yes, you had to show a marriage license absolutely.

D: From what you could understand was that pretty much the general rule of everybody who moved in there in the early 1940's, that you had to have a marriage license?

E: Absolutely.

D: How about as far as income? You mentioned they checked your credit rating. Did you have to have a job?

E: Oh, yes, you had to have a job to pay your rent. I don't remember now just how that was done whether they went according to your income as to your rent or how it was done. At that time I let my wife handle most of the business part. She took care of the bills and different things.

D: When you went down and signed up at the office, did you get a look at some of the apartments?

E: They showed us our's. I was well-satisfied.

D: Were you on a long waiting list? How long did the whole

process take? Do you remember if it took months?

E: No, it wasn't too awful long. I think it was within two weeks if I remember right.

D: About two weeks after you first got in touch with the YMHA (Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority) you had your apartment.

E: Yes, we had seen it. It was all fixed up for us. Your stove, your refrigerator, everything was furnished. It was very neat and clean.

D: But you had to bring in your own furniture.

E: We had our own furniture in that place.

D: When you first moved in there, did they make it clear to you about rules and regulations as far as taking care of the place and things like that?

E: You had to take care of anything you broke; you paid. You had to cut your grass.

D: You had to cut your own grass?

E: You cut the grass; when it was your time to cut the grass, you cut the grass. I didn't cut it; a young boy cut it for me and I paid him. The maintenance man came around. If there was anything to be done, they did the maintenance work. We didn't do that.

D: During that period when you lived in the Westlake project both you and your wife had an income?

E: We both had incomes, yes.

D: And you didn't have any children?

E: No children.

D: How about the whole general area there on Wirt Street, that block of apartments where you lived? How about the rest of the people around you? Were they all young married couples with no children?

E: As far as I know I never paid too much attention because I was hardly ever home. When I was home, I would be sleeping or I would be at my mother's place or something like that. I hardly was ever home. As far as our neighbors were concerned we never did bother with our neighbors much.

D: You don't recall a lot of little kids running around your area?

E: No.

D: During the time that you lived at Westlake, of course, we had the war going on. How about war brides? Were there a lot of single women who were in apartments that perhaps their husbands were off? Do you remember anything about that?

E: No, I don't know of anything like this. It could have been as far as I know. I don't know. Like I told you, I never bothered with the neighbors to find out too much.

D: From what you can remember you definitely had to be married and you had to prove the fact that you had an income.

E: That is right.

D: At this time in the late 1930's, early 1940's, did you know of people or was there some type of system of government relief or government welfare, a system kind of like what they have today?

E: I don't know because I never fell back on any of those things and I never followed up on any of them as I was never in the service.

D: During the Depression like with those people down in Shanty Town, what was relief? Was that sponsored by the city?

E: That was city. The city took care of that. They tore that all out. The police went in and tore that all out on all of them. Then they scattered. I think that was all done through city; I'm not sure.

D: Definitely down at Westlake you had to have an income?

E: You had to have an income and show a job. Then they would check your record of where you lived before and different things like this. Your furniture had to come up to standards.

D: What do you mean by standards?

E: You couldn't have junkie furniture taking it in there?

D: Would they inspect it?

E: They would look your stuff over to see if you were alright to see if you were clean about yourself and different things like that. They didn't let everybody in there who was going to mess up their building.

- D: Do you mean they sent people around to check things out?
- E: I wasn't home, but my wife said they came around and saw the apartment and were well-satisfied. I don't know. I was at work when it happened.
- D: How about, as far as the office itself, the YMHA people? Did it seem like they got things done for you when things were needed to get done?
- E: Yes, we had no problem. They were always considerate. You stopped at the office and paid your rent. If you wanted anything, you would stop there and order it. They would have a man come around.
- D: About how long all together did you end up living at the Westlake project?
- E: I really can't tell you that.
- D: A year and a half maybe?
- E: Maybe a year and a half, two years.
- D: Mr. Eakins, do you remember when you moved out, where did you move and why exactly did you leave the project?
- E: My mother passed away on Myrtle. She had this big place there, an eighteen room house. My wife and I moved into the building. My mother had this rented out in apartments, so we kept it that way.
- D: When you moved out, I heard some people tell me things that you originally paid a deposit. Then they gave it back to you.
- E: Yes, you had to leave it at the same condition that you got it in, nothing broke and make sure your walls and your floors and your things were clean. Then your refund was there for you.
- D: You had to totally clean the place up.
- E: Absolutely. Leave it the way you found it.
- D: Do you recall during the time when you did live there, about 1942, 1943, a lot of vacancies around, a lot of vacant apartments?
- E: No, I really don't. I never paid that much attention. According to the parking lot there they must have been pretty well filled up because the parking lot always

had a lot of cars parked there.

D: You lived up there on Wirt Street. That is up north of Madison Avenue.

E: Yes, just before you got up to where the ball park is.

D: Were there little businesses and stores in that area right in around the Westlake project? Did your wife have to go a long way to shop? What was it like?

E: You had stores on Covington. The Canale store was just up above us there. There were little businesses around there. She usually didn't have to go too far.

D: For the short time you lived at Westlake you lived north of Madison Avenue. Was it a generally known fact that everyone who lived north of Madison Avenue, that it was kind of the white area of the project as opposed to south of Madison Avenue?

E: Yes, they separated them there. The ones below Madison were for coloreds and above were for the whites. That's the way it was.

D: When you went to get your apartment in the first place, did you ever get an indication that this was an official YMHA policy or just the policy of the person who happened to be sitting there at the desk passing out the apartments?

E: It was in your contract on this was how it was done. You signed a contract. When you made your deposit, you had your contract when you were moved in. It told you the rules of what was to be done like taking care of the grass and as for all of the work that you had to do on the outside.

D: You never saw anything specifically in writing that said that the white sections of the project . . .

E: No, no.

D: You didn't see that.

E: No.

D: It was just kind of generally accepted or known?

E: It wasn't in the contract whatsoever that I know of.

D: After you had moved out of the project for any length of time, did you have friends there? Did you ever go back to visit?

E: No, I never went back over there. I had no reason to.

D: You mentioned in 1944 you began working for United Engineering. This was after you moved out of Westlake?

E: After I moved out of Westlake.

D: You mentioned that had something to do with war industry.

E: Oh, yes, that was strictly government work.

D: What did you make?

E: We were cutting breechblocks for the cannons. That was in my department. Then they would shift me from one machine to another or someplace like this wherever they needed me.

D: Did the government or FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) ever send inspectors to United Engineering to check out any of the employees or the way the work was being done?

E: You had your government inspectors like over on the cannon side, but that was on the other side of the railroad. They were over in there more than they were in our department. We didn't finish . . . My department wasn't a finished product. All of this stuff had to be assembled. From where it went after our department I don't know.

D: While you were working at United Engineering, was it all male? Did a lot of women get jobs there during the war?

E: No, not where I was at. There were no women who worked there that I knew of unless it was in the office or in the cafeteria.

D: During the war years, and of course some of the war years you lived at Westlake, did you notice around Youngstown if there were more women trolley car drivers?

E: Yes, there were women who took over a lot of men's jobs.

D: For example?

E: Truck driving, working on the railroad, working at the Atlas Powder, working in your restaurants, and different things like that, driving trolleys, driving taxicabs. They were doing all kinds of work.

D: How about Youngstown during the war? Do you remember a shortage? I know you had to have a ration card. Were you yourself ever short on gas or what were the restrictions

on food and things like that?

E: We were allowed so many stamps that you had to have for your gas. I would have so many stamps to drive my car back and forth to the Atlas Powder. They would give me so many stamps like you had a five gallon stamp, and you had a three gallon stamp.

D: Did they ever check up to make sure that you . . .

E: Oh, yes, they checked on your mileage and everything.

D: Do you mean they looked right in the car at the mileage?

E: You did your record of your mileage when you first started with your stamps. Then you had this allotment of so many stamps that you were allowed. In other words, you couldn't waste your gas.

D: How about when your wife went shopping for food? Were there any particular foods that were short during the war or any other type of items like rubber, tires, anything else?

E: You had a shortage of tires; you had a shortage of cigarettes and different things like that. There were numerous things that they were short of and that they couldn't get, like tires. They had reclaimed tires and recaps and different things like that.

D: How about clothing?

E: Clothing, I didn't notice too much. Where I worked at, the different place, I generally had to wear a uniform like at Firestone. We had a uniform to wear.

D: You again mentioned that Atlas Powder. Did you work there before the end of the war?

E: Yes, I was there before the end of the war.

D: Where was the Atlas Powder?

E: Ravenna.

D: You mentioned your wife worked there.

E: Yes, she worked up there.

D: Were a lot of women working there?

E: Oh, yes, quite a few. They weren't in where I was at. They were in different departments.

- D: When you worked there, that was about a forty-five minute drive to Ravenna.
- E: It all depended upon your weather.
- D: What was the attraction to drive over there? Was the pay really good or how did that work?
- E: Fair. I had three men who rode with me. My wife drove, and she had ladies who rode with her.
- D: You were a two car family.
- E: Yes, otherwise we wouldn't have stayed. After I quit there I went to work and bought a truck.
- D: When you quit at the Atlas Powder, by now the war was over.
- E: Yes, it was over.
- D: In the entire time--you mentioned that eventually you would drive cab in Youngstown--you did mention that you had friends down at Westlake. Did you have occasion to drive back down through that area or be in that general area?
- E: When I had passengers in my cab.
- D: During what decade or time period were you driving the cab, 1950's, 1960's?
- E: I have been retired since I was sixty-two. I am seventy-one now. That was eight years ago when you figure it back.
- D: How long had you been driving cabs?
- E: For about eleven years.
- D: Eleven years, so that would be through the 1960's. By the time you began driving cab and you might have been down in that area as far as taking fares and taking people . . .
- E: That was the only reason.
- D: By that time which was the 1960's would you say that the whole Westlake area, both north and south of Madison, was a great deal different than when you had lived there?
- E: Quite a bit. There were a lot of changes. A lot of businesses closed up too, stores and different things like that.

- D: How about the Madison expressway? That was built in 1966. Can you remember all the construction that went along with that?
- E: I remember quite a bit about it. What part did you want to know?
- D: Mainly were there a lot of businesses and homes around Westlake that were along Madison Avenue that somehow got displaced or had to close down or got shoved out of the way because of that Madison Avenue expressway being put through?
- E: Not really, there wasn't too much that had to be changed. You had the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) which was for the colored. They didn't have to bother that. I think there is a mission there now. I'm not sure, at least there was. Then there were a few stores along there, beer gardens and different things. When they widened West Federal, all the stores moved over onto the next street.
- D: Assuming that you did get around Youngtown a lot since you did drive a cab, can you remember any area of town whether it be the Westlake area or across town or anyplace else that became a much more different area after the Madison Avenue expressway was built than before? In other words, before maybe there were homes and businesses and afterward the rent value fell and a lot of people started moving out.
- E: It was one of your nicest parts of the city like around Wick Park and the area there in general. For example, you had the Renner's mansion here. Bob Renner and his mother and grandfather and all of them lived in through there. That was a beautiful place there. They were all doctors and attorneys and different things through there and like Elm Street there. Elm Street used to go straight through. You had your high class neighborhood there. You had your own ballroom; you had your own beer garden and all of this going down through there, your drugstores, and all.
- D: Where the college is now?
- E: Yes, all of that, Bryson Street and all of that down through there. In fact, all of the north side like on Fifth Avenue was all business places, beer gardens, and stores and different things. Up by Madison Avenue there were a lot of big mansions and homes up there too. All the way through, you could take it clear to Wick Avenue. There were some big homes all the way through there.

- D: This was all before the college kind of expanded out of Jones Hall.
- E: The college expanded. It kept coming this way.
- D: Elm Street in the 1920's and 1930's and then up before they closed it off at the college was really kind of a thriving strip with businesses.
- E: It was. In those days you had the Ford Motor Company up there; you had the cabinetmaking company there; you had numerous things all the way down.
- D: The same with Fifth Avenue.
- E: Fifth Avenue was the same way before they even put the bridge in on Fifth Avenue. It was the same thing with Wick Avenue before they ever expanded through there. When I was young years back before that expanded over Wick Avenue, I used to park cars there. We had a parking lot on one side and a parking lot on the other.
- D: When did they first start to expand the college that cut off Elm? Do you remember that?
- E: I really don't know. I recall the college wasn't near like it is today, which I think it is a beautiful thing for Youngstown. I think this is the most wonderful thing they have done for Youngstown by having the college.
- D: The university. For the short period of time you had lived in Westlake it was a totally different place than even say twenty years later when you were driving a cab and taking people.
- E: Much different.
- D: In other words, in that twenty year period it had really changed a great deal. This was even before the Madison expressway was put through.
- E: Yes, it was changing then.
- D: During the time you lived in Westlake I imagine it wasn't considered a high crime area.
- E: No, it was not a high crime area. A lot of times my wife and I would walk to go to a show in town instead of taking a car. There wasn't anything like this going on. Westlake Crossing was the only place you had to be a little careful going down into town going across Rayen Avenue.

- D: Generally, though, that year or two you spent at Westlake was it a nice place to live?
- E: It was very nice. Years later when I drove for City Ash, I noticed a big difference up in there.
- D: Later when you worked for City Ash, the YMHA began to expand into other projects?
- E: Yes, they only had the two projects then. They had this one, Kimmel Brook Project and the one on Westlake.
- D: About what years were you working for City Ash?
- E: I really couldn't tell you. It has been so long ago I forget.
- D: Was this before you were a cab driver?
- E: Yes.
- D: It could have been in the 1950's?
- E: Somewhere around there.
- D: You were down in that Westlake area then during the 1950's even if it was just for . . .
- E: That was for work privileges only. Half the time I didn't see anybody because I would go in there at night and get those boxes.
- D: Of ash?
- E: Yes, those big Dempsey boxes.
- D: While was the ash coming from, the furnace?
- E: Tin cans and stuff and the trash they threw away. They took it out and threw it into those boxes. When I did the projects, I pulled a four wheel trailer with me. I would load them up.
- D: During that period then when you were hauling ash, you said you were there a lot during the night. It was before you drove cab?
- E: Oh, yes.
- D: At that time had there been a drastic change?

- E: You couldn't tell too much because you didn't see anybody.
- D: You didn't notice like if the lawns were still being kept up or if there was garbage and things in the street?
- E: No, I didn't notice any of that. I wouldn't have paid any attention anyhow. I was at work, and I was there getting my job done.
- D: Is there anything you can think of off the top of your head that you would like to make as a final comment about the short time you did spend at Westlake?
- E: I was very much satisfied myself. My wife was too.
- D: You both thought it was a great place to live?
- E: Absolutely. I would have stayed there then, only my mother passed away. We took over the apartments. We overtook her place and moved to East Myrtle.
- D: Thank you very much, Mr. Eakins. I really appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW