

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Great Depression Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 680

FRANCIS MCGOWAN

Interviewed

by

Daniel Flood

on

November 18, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: FRANCIS MCGOWAN

INTERVIEWER: Daniel Flood

SUBJECT: Little Steel Strike, Allied Council, co-op school, Aetna Standard, historical events, Sheet & Tube, auto assembly plant

DATE: November 18, 1975

F: This is an interview with Mr. Francis McGowan for the Youngstown State University Depression Project, by Dan Flood, at 445 W. Boston Avenue, Mr. McGowan's home, on November 18, 1975, at 8:25 p.m.

Before we begin the interview, let me point out to you that Mr. McGowan has led a very active life having been involved in many different fields of engineering. Right now he is currently involved in contract engineering and he is also an appointed civil service commissioner for the city of Youngstown. Today we are asking Mr. McGowan to recall specific instances that he experienced, whether they be good or bad, as he grew up during the Great Depression of the 1930's.

Mr. McGowan, why don't we begin by allowing you to give us some very specific background information such as when and where you were born, the names of your family members, the occupation your father was in at the time of your birth.

M: I was born in 1906 on the east side of Youngstown. My family were mill workers; father held an upper-grade sheet mill job. Three years later my sister was born. This turned out to be our total family. I am, at the moment, at this time, the only one remaining in the family; the others have passed on in the middle 1940's.

I attended the public schools in Youngstown, the old Rayen School, and graduated in 1925 from the new Rayen School. Ours was one of the first February classes that held a graduation exercise. I did not get away to school

until the Fall. In the meantime, I looked for work, but didn't have much success. However, I managed to keep fairly busy doing odd work, such as auto mechanics, some painting, some electrical wiring, and miscellaneous work of that nature. In the Fall of 1925 I started the University of Detroit in the engineering school taking aeronautical engineering courses. I remained there for three years. Since it was a co-op school, I had the opportunity to work in a number of different places during that time. In the early part of the co-op session I would be on a work period for two weeks and school for two weeks. Work periods would take me to the various auto plants where I worked on the assembly line and similar work. After a year of this I managed to get into my own field, which was aeronautics and obtain some work in a small aircraft plant of which there were a number around Detroit. These plants were poorly financed, and for the most part operated on a shoestring. The wages were slightly under that for the auto plants, which were being advanced by the Ford revolution of paying \$6 a day minimum.

F: In talking about these co-op schools you said you worked at a number of different auto plants in that Detroit, Michigan area during the years 1925-1928. Can you describe some of the activities during a common, typical, ordinary day that you had there?

M: The work consisted of doing a small bit of work as a car passed you on an assembly line. These cars were moving at the rate of approximately one a minute, which made it very difficult to keep up. From time to time something would happen to stop the line and give you an opportunity to get caught up, which means get back into the position where you belong. These lines are somewhat different from the lines I see on television newsreels and so forth because we did not have the type and number of power tools. More hand work was done in those days and perhaps today the lines are actually running a little faster.

F: I'm wondering . . . You're saying one a minute. That's moving pretty fast really. Not as fast as today, but let's say as far as 1960. What exactly was your job?

M: I recall the very first job I had was putting a rubber strip above the two rear windows in a two-door car. This meant fitting a jig and drilling potted holes and inserting the wood screws in the metal bracket that held the rubber strip that the window would eventually rest against. This had to be done first on one side of the car and then on the other. I'd slip out the door and get around between the cars. As I moved between them you can flip a little height attack tape that concealed the tacks that held the

top in place along the back end of the car. This brought me back to the opposite side of the car and I entered the door on the oncoming car and started this operation all over again.

F: How many hours a day did you work this?

M: Beginning the normal work day the work was nine hours a day and there were two of these shifts in that twenty-four hour period.

F: Was this five or six days a week?

M: This was six and occasionally seven. There was no overtime for anything over forty hours. A forty hour week was unheard of.

F: As far as conditions at the time, did you have break periods?

M: No, no break periods. The only break period you ever got is if there was a breakdown. This, sometimes, was man-made because someone slipped a bolt in the chain and at the next gear the chain would break and there would be some down time. There were no scheduled breaks.

F: After leaving the automotive field as far as working with the co-op schools, you returned to Youngstown around 1928?

M: I returned to Youngstown intending to take the few weeks vacation I had coming to me. While here I had the opportunity of going to work with the Standard Engineering Company, which had just located in Youngstown a few months previous.

F: Where was it located in Youngstown?

M: It was located in the Home Savings & Loan Building and the job was described to me as being of a temporary nature. Initially I thought of taking this and starting to school at the second semester. However, the work continued beyond that point, but not far beyond it. I left there and started immediately in Youngstown Pressed Steel in Warren, Ohio in their maintenance engineering department.

F: As far as the standard you said it was a temporary job. I think you mentioned before about the stock. You noticed the stock started falling.

M: No, that was when I was in Warren. Although that was a temporary job, additional work came in and I went from job to job until they did run out eventually, which was early in 1929. Shortly after I started to work at Youngstown Pressed Steel I noticed their stock, along with many others, was

starting to fall. Some layoffs took place then, however I was on some work which required my presence more or less until completion. I was able to stay there until after the actual stock market crash in the Fall of the year. I finished up in the end of December. This left me out of work at a very bad time because I had very little experience and considered myself very fortunate when I found some work in Sharon, Pennsylvania.

F: How old were you at the time?

M: I would be about 22. The work in Sharon was strictly temporary and consisted of preparing a proposal for an oil refinery to be installed in Barcelona, Spain. It was very interesting and there was the possibility that if they obtained the contract for construction of this refinery that I would have the opportunity to go to Spain. However, about the time that the bid was submitted the revolution in Spain began to take place. The refinery was one of the things that suffered first, so there was no future there.

F: As far as your work with the oil refinery during that time, what type of work were you doing?

M: For the most part my work there was converting the English into metric and the language on the drawings into Spanish. Although there was an interpreter he merely roughed out the translations. They had to be put on the drawings in a little better form. Following this, I would say that we were in to the hard part of the Depression. There were many people out of work and practically no one was employing, taking on new employees. It was at this time that in the company of a friend we attempted to start a business, being that we could satisfy the need and make a few dollars. People who had cars were trying to keep them running. Very few cars were being purchased. As cars broke down many were not repaired or put into service again. As a result, at many residences you would see a car that was inoperative just standing there. A friend and I scouted the neighborhood and found that there were quite a few of them. We were able to get an empty building on a traveled street at no rent since the owner had the advantage of lower insurance rates if it was occupied. We went around and collected, either as gifts or purchased, parts of cars such as tires, batteries, or anything else that the owner wanted to dispose of, sometimes an entire car. We would move this back to our place of business, take it apart, and proceed to put it for sale. We found that our biggest problem was trying to get people to stop to find out what we had. We found out that by buying oil at a low price and selling it at practically no profit we were able to get people to stop. In this way we could interest them in other things that we had. We had very little trouble in selling used car parts, rebuilt batteries, rebuilt

generators, started motors, et cetera. Tires sometimes needed repairs that you were able to make, but there was a ready market for that. This continued for a period of several years.

F: How much do you think you made during that time?

M: I have no idea, except that instead of being continuously broke, we always had something in our pocket. We could always go home for lunch and stop and buy a loaf of bread on the way, or whatever else was needed. There was never a question of how much he took out of the business or how much I took out of the business. If he needed to buy something on the way home, he would mention, "I'm taking this or that," and I did the same. There was never a problem.

F: You were both single at the time, right?

M: Both of us were single. We both felt that we had some responsibility to our family because there was . . . In my family, my sister was working, and my father was not. Fortunately, we owned our own home. Although my sister worked in an office job, her wages were modest. It took everything that she could earn to keep food on the table and pay our utility bills. The idea of buying anything new or replacing anything in the house was never given a thought. Everyone expected that these times would end and all we were trying to do was to come out of it without being over our heads in debt. I felt that whatever I could do to help out in addition to what my sister brought in I should do. It might be of interest here to explain how we could make a dollar or two on an old storage battery.

We would make the rounds of people dealing in batteries, such as Sears Roebuck, Western Auto, and others of that type. We would buy these batteries for as low as we could get them, 50¢, 75¢, depending on the size. Our experience with batteries showed that for the most part they had failed due to a short in one cell, keeping in mind that these were three-celled batteries in those days. We would bring those in to our shop, take them apart, find the bad one, either discard it, or if it only needed new separators put new separators in it, and also in the other two cells, put it back together, charge it, and we could sell it for \$3, \$4, or \$5. This we did over and over again. When we needed equipment such as a battery charger we were able to get these from various sources. We found a garage that had a battery charger that had a tube burned out. You couldn't use it. He wasn't about to buy a new tube. He loaned us the charger. We found someone else that had a tube but burned out the transformer. We put them both together and we had a battery charger.

At that time a number of people were building simple trailers. In these trailers they would haul their own coal or anything else that needed hauling. These were made up of old car axles and old car wheels. There was a ready market for any of those that could be used for that purpose and we were there to supply them. There was a lot of work but it was interesting and it was much better than just sitting waiting for the Depression to end.

F: Let's go back with your partner. If you could mention his name it might be of interest to a lot of people around here.

M: My partner on this--he was actually the man who initiated it--was Dave O'Neill. His responsibilities were similar to mine. His father had died a number of years previously. His mother and several children were still at home.

F: You had this occupation of restoring batteries and a number of other different automotive items. Where were you located at the time?

M: We were located right at the east end of the Oak Street Bridge, on the north side of the street. You might say that we were in an excellent position to observe traffic in what was known then as railroad lump coal. This was coal taken from the top of the coal cars as they passed on the P&LE (Pittsburgh & Lake Erie) to the New York Central tracks right in the neighborhood. Any number of the people living nearby would mount these cars since they were moving at a slow rate, and they would pile up the prime pieces of coal. About a mile out these piles would be pushed off the car. This was close to the crossroad where they could get a small trailer or a small truck to the location and load it up with this coal. Most of this coal was sold in sacks by the sackful from 10¢ to 25¢. It was prime coal.

F: As far as the sacks themselves, what they actually did was just mount the railroad car, grab the coal, and swipe it?

M: Yes.

F: They just put it in sacks and then they would turn back and possibly sell it to other people?

M: That's right.

F: Some people used to come around and give coal to people, is this correct?

M: The Allied Council would supply people in desperate need of coal whether they had small children, illness, or no money. They were a predecessor to . . . They were a relief organization and from time to time they would come and they would check.

They wanted to be certain that your needs were real. One of the people that used to do this interviewing was an acquaintance and used to pick up the bus right in front of our place of business. Frequently we would talk with him and he would tell us some of the things that he ran across. Actually, some of these were quite funny. In our immediate neighborhood this visitor from the Allied Council had been sent out to see if there was a real need for coal. It was necessary for him to go into this home, down into the basement, and make certain that the coal bin was either empty or near empty. She did and found this to be the case. However, there was a second coal bin that was almost full. She had been around before and she recognized it for what it was, railroad lump. When asking the people how come they were asking for coal when they had several tons of this coal they quickly pointed out that that was part of the business; that wasn't for their own use.

F: This was just to be used to sell to other people?

M: That is all it was for. There was quite a trade going on and we were in the ideal spot to watch it.

F: Were people more concerned with other people? Did they have the time to sit and talk because of the fact that nobody had jobs?

M: I think people were more helpful. A number of people would be walking to the library, to town, and to other places, to their work. Many times in passing our place of business they would stop in and mention a car that was broken down and there might be something there for us. There were many thoughtful people like this. I might add, too, that we tried to do our part more than once. We refinished a battery for someone only to find them back in two days that the battery wasn't working. We never gave them an argument; the battery came out and another battery went in. There was no problem at all. Sometimes it was better that it was that way because we made a better friend.

F: As far as the traffic, being in the good location that you were in, what was the traffic like? How many cars do you think traveled by there in a day?

M: Traffic at that time was nothing like it is today. Fortunately there was a traffic light there at Oak Street and Hines. People were compelled to stop; however, they were on the wrong side of the street. We did do a little bit of repair work there. Actually, we didn't turn down anything that we could make a dollar on. For many years afterwards I would run into O'Neill at varioud places and he never failed to mention that we should have stayed there.

F: When did you terminate that job?

M: We were there approximately from the summer of 1930 until probably 1933. I obtained a job with the city with the engineering crew. It was a federally funded job.

F: Would this be right after F.D.R.?

M: No, that would be when he first came in. I worked on Meander Dam on the property surveys around the reservoir. At that time I worked with a professional engineer who was one of the earliest engineers working in Youngstown, Ed Hazeltine. He was the first city engineer. He graduated from Ohio State University in their first engineering class. He was well-known.

F: How did you end up getting this job with the city? Why did you leave the one job to go to the other?

M: There was more money there. Even when I was working there I was coming back and putting in a few hours. It was just one of those things, an opportunity to make a few dollars. It was all right with O'Neill and it was all right with me.

F: What do you mean by property surveys?

M: Permanent monuments had never been set for the property that had been purchased for the reservoir. In other words, it was an irregular line around the lake that was established in reference to the water level, the highest water level that they would encounter. It was necessary that concrete monuments were set in the ground at each corner of the lake. You had to make a survey to locate those points where these permanent markers went in. The marker consisted of a column of concrete with brass discs embedded in the top. On this brass disc were two marks: one pointing to the marker in one direction, and the other pointing to the marker in the other direction.

F: Was this a general thing they usually did?

M: This was a common practice, yes.

F: Your job was to help out this man, Ed Hazeltine?

M: I worked for Ed Hazeltine as a rod man, an instrument man, an so forth.

F: This was on-the-job training then, you really didn't have the experience beforehand?

M: No. I had taken surveillance as a course in school. I was qualified to do the work.

- F: Then you continued on with the city engineering department for how long?
- M: Until the funds ran out, which was only a matter of a few months. We were trying to determine the best location for an airport. We surveyed every piece of property around Youngstown that anybody thought they would make an airport out of, with the exception of the Vienna property. We never did survey that; I don't know how they arrived at that out there because we didn't survey it. Some of the places we surveyed you couldn't raise Rocky Mountain goats on. All told, we surveyed about six areas all around Youngstown for an airfield.
- F: What was the reason for an airfield in Youngstown at the time? Was Youngstown that important?
- M: The only thing we had in Youngstown that resembled an airfield was Lansdowne. We did have that, but the runways were quite small and the chance of getting commercial airlines to come in here were very slim.
- F: Did you figure if you had an airport established that this would bring in more commerce to this area?
- M: That was the general idea, but it hasn't worked that well yet. There's some question yet as to whether we should have an airfield.
- F: This went on for a couple of months. Then what happened?
- M: In about 1934 I managed to get on at Youngstown Sheet & Tube in the metallurgical and research department, transferring from there to the engineering department in 1936.
- F: Was Youngstown Sheet & Tube bringing on new help? They started to pick up business around 1934?
- M: They were starting to pick up and while there were still a number of people unemployed my background happened to fit in. Very few new employees were being offered work.
- F: When you started in there what was the pay like?
- M: When I started there I started at 55¢ an hour, which looked real good.
- F: There wasn't that much work available, right?
- M: Yes. Actually, surprisingly enough it didn't take much money. Keep in mind that we're buying pork chops for 19¢ to 21¢ a pound.

- F: Working with the steel company, did they have a lot of contracts?
- M: The work at Sheet & Tube was stable; I had no problem. In the time I was there, the only time I lost during 1933-1941 was during the steel strike of 1937 and one week when we were on half time. It ended before it was my turn to lose a week again.
- F: Do you remember the steel strike of 1937?
- M: Very well.
- F: Would you elaborate on that a bit?
- M: During the steel strike of 1937 . . . Shortly after going to Sheet & Tube I got married; that was in 1936. My first daughter was born in 1937 during the steel strike. A week after my daughter's birth I received a phone call suggesting that I go to Ellwood City where I would find work in an area that I had had some experience in, metric conversion.
- F: As far as the steel strike, what was that all about? What were the reasons for the strike? Who called it?
- M: This was an attempt to organize CIO and to get recognition to unions. It was known as the Little Steel Strike because only Sheet & Tube, Republic, and Bethlehem Steel were involved. U. S. Steel was not involved in that strike. Therefore, it was called the Little Steel Strike and at the end of that strike the steel companies did recognize the CIO as the bargaining agent for the mill workers. I was not directly involved in the strike because of the work I was doing, but my department was closed down during that strike.
- F: What were the opinions of the people in the town, just mixed? Did the people really want the union?
- M: The people I worked with, for the most part, were in favor of seeing the CIO become a bargaining agent for the mill. We had not seen too much of the CIO and we were not aware of any of their shortcomings. For this reason if no other I would say the majority of the people, both in the office and in the plant, whether they admitted it or not, actually were in favor of the CIO.
- F: Was it that you were being pressured by the people, as far as the employer I'm saying? You felt that you didn't have a voice at all?
- M: No, we had no representation; everyone was on their own.
- F: They hire and fire and they please?

- M: Yes. A lot of people felt that they were capable of speaking for themselves. In reality, when it came to the showdown they weren't.
- F: You had to back it up with something powerful.
- M: You needed something. At the time there was nothing better that came along than the CIO, and that was it.
- F: How long did the strike last?
- M: Approximately a month; it may have been a little longer than that. I had gone away to Ellwood City in about the second week of the strike. I remained there to complete the work that I had started for several weeks after the strike actually ended. All told I was out of the way from Sheet & Tube for approximately six to seven weeks.
- F: You were involved with so many different jobs throughout the Depression period. The way that you received these jobs or leads on these jobs was primarily through friends that gave you tips as to where the job was?
- M: Sometimes it was friends; sometimes it was just observation. That's about it. There are various ways you can run in to this information. I would say that it's information that you pick up that you wouldn't pick up if you were sitting on your front porch. You had to get out and move around. In moving around you ran across this information.
- F: If you pick up the Vindicator and look at the job opportunities you would see a number of columns. Did they run anything like that at that time?
- M: They were very short columns. What you found there were offers to sell. There were always sales jobs open, but they were not salary jobs or anything like that. You found out that they were commission jobs. There were very few ads in the paper. It was not necessary; frankly anybody that employed people had lists or people that were looking for employment. There was no need to advertise. There were probably as many ads in the paper of people looking for work, but not companies looking for people.
- F: You received this lead to go to Ellwood City and you worked there for just a short time.
- M: I received that particular lead through a telephone call from my squad boss at Sheet & Tube. He told me that this work was over there and that there were going to be several others from the office over there. When I arrived in Ellwood City I found that there were four or five other Sheet & Tube employees already there.

F: You say your squad boss, would he be in management?

M: No, he would be one step above me.

F: He was out of work himself?

M: Yes. He knew about this and he knew that my wife was expecting. He realized that I could use a job. I went over there and it was on the property as Aetna Standard again. I was always coming back to Aetna Standard in some way. I was always coming back for this metric. Every time I needed something it was metric. It was metric in Sharon; it was metric in Ellwood City.

F: Even today, I think the jobs of the future, especially for a teacher right now, would be this conversion to metric.

M: There has been some changeover in this country. Ford has gone so far as to build two engines that are strictly all metric. Why they don't do more of them I don't know. It will be costly. It will cost money to convert the machine tools to metric. When you take a drawing like I took on the first contract and convert that to metric for manufacturing in a metric country, such as Spain, then you practically do the sheet all over because you start using their standards, their plate thicknesses, their structural sections, their tube sizes, and their different types of fasteners, bolts and nuts that have different sizes, lengths, and threads. They are entirely different. This becomes a complicated mess and it's costly.

F: Where did you receive your training in metric?

M: I just picked it up.

F: You just picked it up on your own?

M: My first metric introduction was in physics class. Keep in mind that when I worked with Aetna that we had foreign associates in all the major foreign countries: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Japan. Practically all but England used the metric system. Some of their people understood English better than I did metric so we would talk English. If they happened to be somebody who understood metric we talked metric. It just seems funny to me that every time I really need something or feel I could use something it always comes back to metric. Three times now this has happened. It happened in 1930, 1937, and now in 1975.

F: Do they still need that conversion to metric?

M: Yes. When they have this work to do they have to call me back to work.

F: Today?

M: 1975, yes.

F: When you were working with Aetna was it strictly conversion?

M: No. It would just be coincidental when I was working or talking with a foreign customer. In trying to get a conception of size or something like that he would say meters and I would make a quick conversion for him. I would say half the people we talked to could do that as well as I could. If we were talking weights they would say kilos and you would make a conversion. My work there was in English.

F: How was it that after the Little Steel Strike you went to work there for a short period of time?

M: After the Little Steel Strike I went back to Sheet & Tube. I didn't come back right away because I had a couple of weeks. I was over there; I had started the job, and it was metric conversion. I waited until I finished it. When the strike was over I called Sheet & Tube and I told them that I was over there. Most of the ones there had been let go, but there was some additional work that he kept for about three of us. I was one of the three that he kept. I called my squad boss and told him what my problem was. He said, "How long do you think you'll be?" I said, "A week or ten days to two weeks." He said, "You can't walk out on a guy that gave you a job. We'll have to go along without you, go ahead." I said, "I don't want to come back and find my place gone." He said, "Don't worry."

F: So you came right back to Sheet & Tube?

M: Yes. I stayed there until 1943. In the Fall of 1943 I had had several calls from Aetna Standard and they wanted me to come up there and do coordinate work on anti aircraft. I tried to explain to them that if it was bigger than a .22 rifle then I didn't know anything about it. This man said, "Let us be the judge. We've done our checking. We think we want you up here." I said, "It isn't quite that easy. You're not allowed to leave a job." He said, "You can." I said, "No." He said, "Take my word for it. It will be arranged." I wasn't sure I wanted to make the change so he said, "At least you can come up and talk to me." I said, "It's like this, I work by the hour. If I come up and talk to you it will cost me money." He said, "What time do you start work?" I said, "Eight o'clock in the morning." He said, "Would you want to get up and start one hour earlier one day and come up here at 7:00? I'll get you out in thirty minutes." I went down there at seven o'clock one morning. I went in, looked at the guy, and it was the same guy that

hired me when I was there before. He just then discovered who I was. He said, "Pardon me," and he went out of the room. When he came back there was a man with him and it was the vice-president. If he would have said this is him that would have been better, but instead of that he introduced me to the guy. The guy said, "I hope you two can get together." That's the last I ever spoke to the man. Why he felt he had to bring him in to introduce me I never did find out. We talked and I figured he'll want me to study for the paper; I'll never get a chance like this in my life again. I just sat and laughed. He said, "You're not serious." I said, "I've never been more serious in my life. By the way our half hour is almost up." (Laughter) The man went out of the room, and there was only one other guy in the building, the vice-president. He goes and he talks to the guy and he comes back in five minutes and he says, "Okay." I said, "Who can I reach down there." He told me to go see the director of engineering down there. I asked him who promoted this. He said, "I want you to believe me; I personally had nothing to do with this." Two weeks later the draft board called me and said they were inducting me because I had left the job I had been exempted for. I never knew I was exempted. I never applied for exemption.

F: Sheet & Tube got the exemption for you then.

M: They did and never told me. As soon as the draft board found out that I left Sheet & Tube they immediately sent me over to see them. I looked at it and started laughing.

F: Did you see a pickup then in the late 1930's as far as business due to the war movement? Did you notice that yourself?

M: The pickup started in the middle 1930's, about 1935 or 1936 as I remember it. Sheet & Tube went on a construction program about that time. They had started a little earlier than that with the hard strip metal, and then the continuous picking lines, and then they went into the coal mill, and that was a big program. They dismantled a lot of old equipment down there, hand sheet mills, pepper mills, and things of that type. They were under construction down there for the next couple of years because as soon as they got that coal mill well under way that started a seamless mill. They put in a new seamless mill. They were quite busy.

F: This anti-aircraft, when did that really start up? I don't know if you were really aware of it being that you were working for Sheet & Tube at the time. Did you see a notice of it?

M: No, it was not published. It was very hush-hush. As a

matter of fact, we were well along in the design of this gun before we found out that the missile was radio-controlled. We never knew that while we were working with the gun. All we knew was the weight of the shell and the shape and the size. We didn't know what was in it, but it was radio-controlled.

F: At the time, when you were working on this, I'm sure the world news itself, Hitler and the Japan invasions, did you figure that the United States was going to be involved?

M: I didn't go to Aetna until 1943. In 1941 World War II started for us.

F: I know that you didn't go to Aetna until 1943, but were you aware of this antiaircraft gun and things like this?

M: No.

F: Only the people who were working for that?

M: Absolutely.

F: Was it hush-hush?

M: Very much so. That was not the only ordinate jobs going through Aetna at the time; there were many more going through there at the time. There was practically no steel mill equipment going on at the time. That was their line of endeavor at that time. They were practically all armament.

F: As far as the world news at the time, from 1935 on, do you remember the involvement of Europe, the involvement of the Far East? Did you feel that the United States was . . .

M: I don't think that I felt the United States was going to become involved because like many others I was of the opinion that we had been dragged into the First World War, where we perhaps had no business. I didn't think we would be pulled into a Second World War. However, when Pearl Harbor came along I don't think there were too many people to doubt that.

F: What I would like to do now is go back and recap some of those moments during the 1930's and get a few opinions on what you thought on these different topics. First of all, Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

M: Keeping in mind that he came along after presidents that were inclined to do nothing; he came along after Hoover and Coolidge, and when he hit office things started to move. It was true that he did close the banks. However, he probably saved many, many

banks by doing what he did. I don't think there was any question that he had the people back him. He probably could have gotten away with anything he wanted.

- F: In 1936, the packing of the Supreme Court, this might have been his downfall.
- M: This was something that the people were looking at rather hard. They didn't exactly go for that. That was probably the first move that he made that was looked at by many people as being a bad move.
- F: As far as the number of drifters, your work being down on Oak Street, did you see a number of drifters on the trains, hobos?
- M: We saw drifters, yes. We didn't see a great deal. I would say there were a good number of people on the highways though that were hitchhiking here and there. Keep in mind that we're talking about a period in which it wasn't difficult to hitchhike. During my time in Detroit, I hitchhiked between Detroit and Youngstown and I could beat the train. It was no problem at all and you could do it day or night. Very few people had any fear in picking you up. I can say honestly that I had very little fear being in a car with anybody. There were no problems. It was several years later that things started to backfire.
- F: As far as movies at the time, I think you had mentioned before that you had worked for MGM. We had talked about "Gone With The Wind." Do you remember any of the big movies at that time? What was your form of entertainment in Youngstown?
- M: Radio was the biggest form of entertainment because it was the least expensive. In 1941 or 1942 I started to work as a checker for MGM. That meant that I had to visit many of the theaters in the general area, in 30 or 40 miles of Youngstown. When they were showing some of their bigger, better shows these were sold to the company on a percentage basis. The number of people entering the theater determined the cost of the film. From time to time MGM, would send their own people to actually clock the people going into the theater. Judy Garland pictures were popular pictures at the time.
- F: Disney films?
- M: No. Disney wasn't making pictures as such. I think there were some Disney cartoons, but I don't think there were full-length Disney pictures at that time. "Gone With The Wind" had come out a little earlier and was shown in limited performances in larger cities. By this time it was starting to make the rounds and it was one of the better pictures. I had occasion to check it a few times.

F: Can you recall "War of the Worlds" which Orson Welles narrated?

M: I recall the occasion. I didn't happen to hear the broadcast, but I do remember the occasion very well. He supposedly announced an invasion from Mars and it was so realistic that people that had not been following the program believed it. A lot of people got excited over the thing. He was criticized rather severely for it.

F: Did they follow up with this in the papers?

M: No. By the time the papers got it it was printed in its entirety that it was part of a program and that people had taken it out of text. They got all excited about it. The way he presented it it did sound awfully realistic, but I didn't happen to be one that heard the original broadcast.

F: As far as soup lines or bread lines in town here, do you remember anything in the Youngstown area?

M: I don't recall any soup lines, although I wouldn't say that there weren't a few places like Christ Mission or Salvation Army that didn't have something like that. I suspect they did. However, there was available federally offered flour that people could get. They did have to have a permit or paper. I don't know whether it would be the Allied Council or not. These papers were floating around and if anybody wanted the flour it really wasn't difficult to get. It wasn't the finest textured flour, but you could make bread out of it.

F: How about the Civil Conservation Corps?

M: I don't know that any of them were working around here, but a number of people from this area were involved in it. Some of them they hauled as far as California. A lot of them went down into the hills of Kentucky and Tennessee and other western states.

F: Thank you very much Mr. McGowan because you certainly have given us a wealth of practical information on how it was to have lived during that unforgettable period which our nation labels as the Great Depression. Thank you again.

END OF INTERVIEW