

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Resident Experience

O. H. 702

FLORENCE MADISON

Interviewed

by

Joseph Drobney

on

October 16, 1985

FLORENCE MADISON

Florence Madison, the daughter of James and Alice Hilson, was born on August 11, 1916 in Greenville, Alabama. Mrs. Madison's family moved to Youngstown when she was a child. She was educated in the Youngstown city school system, and graduated from Rayen High School in 1935. Mrs. Madison attended Youngstown State University, on a part-time basis, from 1968 to 1978.

Florence Madison and her husband, Ralph, raised four children. Throughout her life, Mrs. Madison has been actively involved with several organizations and groups: P.T.A., Sunday School teacher, North High School Band Boosters, and the N.A.A.C.P. Florence Madison is currently employed by the Youngstown city school system. She and her husband were residents of the Westlake Terrace Housing Project during the first decade of its existence.

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INTERVIEWEE: FLORENCE MADISON

INTERVIEWER: Joseph Drobney

SUBJECT: lives of blacks, rural conditions, segregation,
life in Youngstown

DATE: October 16, 1985

D: This is an interview with Florence Madison for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Joe Drobney, on October 16, 1985, at 2634 Stocker Avenue, in Youngstown, at approximately 5:30 in the afternoon.

Mrs. Madison, just to get started, do you think you could tell me a little bit about your early life, for example, when you were born, where you lived originally, a little bit about your family as you were growing up?

M: I was born in the deep south in Greenville, Alabama. I was eight years old when my parents brought me to Youngstown. I began school in kindergarten at the age of eight at Jefferson School. Since I had a lot of older brothers and sisters, I had learned quite a bit and was able to skip a few grades. I completed the twelve years in ten and a half years.

D: So you began your public education at the age of eight in kindergarten up here in Youngstown?

M: Yes, at eight and I graduated from the Rayen High School at the age of eighteen.

D: You mentioned Greenville, Alabama. Were both parents alive? What did your parents do?

M: My father was a farmer in the south before he came to Youngstown and worked in Republic Steel Mill. Education was rather hard to get. It wasn't easy to obtain a good education in the south, and they wanted to do something

for us, for the children. There were no public schools in the south such as we know them here. Public schools there were for white (Caucasian) children. Black children were sent to a little one room school with few books provided. Teachers were dedicated black women who were paid only what the parents could afford. Children who were of an age to help in the fields were often kept home, and, so missed out on the few months the school was in session. There had been ten of us, but only the five younger ones--I was one of the youngest ones--were able to go to school because the older two girls were married. The older boys went into the mills with my dad at the same time to help support the family.

D: You were one of ten children.

M: One of ten. I was number nine.

D: One of the youngest, almost the baby.

M: Yes.

D: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

M: I had five brothers and four sisters.

D: Was this like a full-time family occupation until you moved to Youngstown, all the kids helping out on the farm?

M: Yes, my older brothers and older sisters helped. The boys helped with the farm. My father came here first because his brother had come here first. His younger brother had a moving company when he came here. Then my father came here. Then two of my brothers came with my father to work in the mill. That way they got the money to send for the rest of the family.

D: So your father came up here first, then you and your brothers and sisters and mother . . .

M: We came later. Two brothers came next after my father. They came to work in the mill also.

D: Two of your brothers?

M: Yes, two of my brothers. My father came first. Our father's brother came originally. He had a moving company. So my father came, but he went to work in the mill. Then two of my brothers--my brother, Frank, and my brother, Ben--came to work in the mill to help to earn the money. At that time the wages were very little. It was just a few cents an hour.

- D: It seems to me, Mrs. Madison, that in order to attract you and your family--this is a major move from a farm from Alabama up here to Youngstown--your father's brother must have in letters or something said that things really could get much better in Youngstown. What were some of the major attractions that caused your father to make the move up here?
- M: Really, he wanted us to have a good schooling. It was said that the mills were offering jobs for people, for men. This was shortly after the First World War. This was about 1918.
- D: About 1918 or 1919?
- M: Yes, or 1919, something like that when my father was here.
- D: When your father moved?
- M: Yes.
- D: You stated that he wanted to get better schooling for his children.
- M: For his children, yes. We came here in October of 1924.
- D: Of 1924, and you say that one of your major attractions was that your father felt that you could get a much better public schooling here in Youngstown.
- M: Yes, my uncle had told him that--my uncle who had been here serveral years ahead of him.
- D: Beside your family did you know of other black rural families in the general Alabama area who also were talking about coming up north, coming up to Youngstown?
- M: I was only eight, living on the farm. You don't know what's happening. You only hear what the grown-ups say because you didn't get a chance to play with other kids.
- D: Do you remember well the trip up? How long did it take you?
- M: I remember, but when you are going on a long trip like that, kids sleep a lot. First, I don't know what the city was in the south, but we stayed all night with some cousins. They lived in town. I remember the fireplace. The house attracted me. It was so nice. I think they had paved streets. When you are living on a farm, you don't know what paved streets are like, paved streets and sidewalks and that. We had to change trains in Cincinnati.
- D: Oh, you came by train?

M: Yes. How do you think we got here?

D: I thought maybe you brought a truck up or a car.

M: No, no, we came on the train.

D: How did all of the family belongings get up here?

M: We had a car, and we had horses, and we had chickens, and geese and ducks and guinea hens. My mother sold most of the stuff like that. There was my oldest brother, George, and then there were five others of us and then my mother. We were all on a train.

D: Your father, then, had already picked out a home.

M: Yes. It was a little house over on Fleming Street at the corner of Fleming and Oakland.

D: Fleming and Oakland, and that was your first home here in Youngstown.

M: Yes.

D: What do you remember most about your first impressions? Here is a little black girl from the rural south who arrives in Youngstown. What were your first impressions? Do you remember the thing that struck you immediately?

M: It was on October 24th, at night. We rode the streetcar. We were supposed to get off at Fleming Street.

D: You rode the streetcar from the train station?

M: Pennsylvania Station. It was on Spring Common. There used to be a water trough outside. The horses would drink from the water trough outside. When you came out of the station, you had to walk up some steps to get up to the sidewalk because the station was down below street level. You had to walk up some steps. There was a water trough out there for the horses to be watered.

We caught the streetcar. Whoever was supposed to pull the chord pulled it too late, and we got off . . . We were supposed to get off on Fleming, but we didn't get off until Jefferson Street. St. Ann's Church was there at the corner of W. Federal and Jefferson Streets. It was a cold night. I remember how cold I was. My mother had one of those bulky sweaters for me. Before we left the south she had ordered--mail ordered--clothing because we had been told that it was cold up here. The coat for me didn't arrive. So in Cincinnati they bought this sweater for me. I was cold. I shivered all the way up Jefferson to the corner of Oakland and across

Oakland back to our house there at the corner of Fleming.

D: Had you ever seen snow before you came up to Youngstown?

M: No.

D: That was a surprise.

M: Yes.

D: How about all the smoke and the smokestacks and the mills? Did you kind of notice that right off?

M: No, I didn't pay any attention. Kids don't pay too much attention to something like that. What I didn't like . . . Down south there was so much land you had to play in. We were living in a little house there on the corner of Fleming and Oakland Streets with very little land. My mother had a little garden in the back yard, and there were only the sidewalks to play on. We felt cramped after having lived in acres and then had to come down to just a little lot.

D: Now that area that you lived in there on Fleming Street, was that mainly black, or were there other ethnic groups?

M: There were others. We played with a girl, Stella Sokolowaki, who lived across the street on the corner. Our number was thirty-four, and her number was forty-four. Across the street from them was McNicholas'. Mr. McNicholas was later the chief of police in Youngstown. His brother was the one who had the McNicholas Moving Company. They lived up on Worthington Street, the other brother.

D: You are saying the whole neighborhood wasn't steelworkers. There were different groups of people.

M: Yes. There were some Hungarians. It was a mixed neighborhood.

D: Speaking of your father you mentioned he got the job at Republic. Did he ever indicate to you or did it seem to you it was a tremendous change from being a farmer in the south to having to work in a mill day in and day out?

M: No, in those days they had to work so hard. I don't think they even had time to think. A lot of times I didn't even see my father. He would go to work in the morning before we got up for school. When we came home in the evening, if he had arrived back home, he was in bed. They worked fourteen or more hours a day. It was hard work with very little pay. It was supposed to be better than down in the south. Actually, I can't see how it was that much better.

D: You are saying that your father sometimes worked more like

ten or twelve hours a day possibly?

M: Yes, he did. The hours were very long. This was before the unions.

D: We were probably talking about late 1920's, early 1930's.

M: The Depression started in 1929. He wasn't working then. There was no work.

D: You had mentioned briefly that you were in school all day and then sometimes you wouldn't see him until late at night. What were the schools--I know you graduated from the Rayen--you went previously to . . . Jefferson for grade school and then junior high?

M: Jefferson. We had Miss McNabb, first woman principal in Youngstown. Her name was Margaret McNabb.

D: This was in Jefferson Elementary.

M: Yes, Jefferson. She was firm, but she was kind. The school was quiet, and Miss McNabb had very good control. In those days, I guess, all schools were because when you went to school there was no nonsense. You went to school to learn. A lot of kids didn't get a chance to even finish grade school. My brother, Raymond, was the first one in our family. He was the oldest of the five younger ones. He graduated from Jefferson. It was a proud moment of our family because . . .

D: This is like a sixth or seventh grade graduation?

M: Eighth grade.

D: He was the first one to reach eighth grade?

M: Eighth grade, yes. At that time Jefferson went all the way to the eighth grade.

D: What was the next step up from Jefferson?

M: For my brother?

D: For the family in general including yourself.

M: Then he graduated from Rayen. The same brother graduated from the Rayen High School.

D: So Jefferson went through the eighth grade?

M: Yes, and then you went to Rayen.

D: Then you went to Rayen.

M: That was before Hayes was built. Now, I went to Hayes because in the meantime Hayes was built.

D: You went to Hayes?

M: Yes, from Jefferson to Hayes, to Rayen. Then I graduated from Rayen. I was the second one in the family to graduate.

D: What do you remember about your education? Did you like school?

M: I loved it. It was a challenge to me. I just loved learning.

D: As you were growing up, let's see if you can try to compare Youngstown now to what Youngstown was like in the 1920's and 1930's. Tell me a little bit about what you remember about downtown, the amounts of people, the buildings, everything.

M: Downtown there were bright lights in the evening; in the daytime you could scarcely walk on the sidewalk because there were so many people. It was really a bustling downtown at that time. The stores' windows were always decorated beautifully. Even as I was growing up when I lived in the project later, we considered it . . . You didn't have money for shows or something so you went window shopping.

D: Did you ever go to the movie houses?

M: Yes, some, but my mother wouldn't let me go much.

D: When you normally went downtown, first of all, did you walk or take the trolley?

M: We usually walked because it wasn't that far. Everybody walked. People from further out in Brier Hill walked to town. You would see the women and they would have two shopping bags and they would come trudging along back home with two shopping bags. Usually it was the women. I guess it was about four or five miles. We were on Fleming which was only about halfway, but then there were others who had to go past St. Ann's and on down West Federal into Brier Hill. People from all the way down there would come with their shopping bags.

D: Did you ever take the trolley downtown?

M: Not too much, no.

D: I just wondered about what a trolley ride cost?

M: I think it was around 8¢ or 10¢. Even when we went to church, we had to walk. There were too many of us. My mother couldn't pay.

D: Couldn't afford to pay for a trolley?

M: Yes, for four or five kids and my mother. That would cost too much until later on. That was later on after Mr. Vaughn became councilman. Mr. William S. Vaughn was a black councilman, third ward.

D: About when was this, about what year?

M: This was in the 1930's, late 1920's probably. It was either the late 1920's or early 1930's. He was able to get the Sunday passes so one grown-up and two kids could ride. He was able to get the passes enacted in council. I think the passes were about \$1 for a week. Then a Sunday pass was only 25¢.

D: Going back to your father working there in the Republic mill did he ever talk about or give any indication of what it was like in the mill, like the conditions or the type of work? Did he ever talk about that?

M: I don't think he did. I don't remember him ever talking about it. After they started having the strikes, it was only then you learned how difficult the work must have been. I don't even know what department he worked in down there; I don't know that.

D: You also mentioned that you and your sister had a job as a newspaper girl.

M: Yes, for the Youngstown Telegram, the other newspaper published here.

D: Tell me about that. Where did you pick the papers up? How did you get around?

M: There was a Mrs. Loftus; she was Irish. She had a store around on West Federal a block away from us. The Italiano's had a gas station next door on the corner of Fleming.

D: This was a name of a family.

M: Yes, Italiano.

D: That was their name?

M: Yes, they are still in town. We played with the Italiano kids. Mrs. Loftus had a store, and we had to go there to get the papers. Then my youngest sister, Cora, would take papers down on Lilac Street which was down South Worthington Street, and she would take some in the near neighborhood. But I had to deliver papers up Fleming, across Coral, up Jefferson, back down Worthington partly to Lexington, across

Lexington, and on Clyde and around Rowland and up Wirt and across Parmalee and up Foster. It took all evening to make the deliveries. In those days, wherever you got a customer you could have that customer. Now the routes are . . .

D: In certain areas.

M: Yes. In those days I went all the way up to Crandall Street. I went to Fairgreen, Fairmont, Crandall, and then back down, cutting through the back way through Jefferson schoolyard and then back down Jefferson and then home.

D: This was on a bicycle or walking?

M: Walking every day.

D: And you were about how old?

M: Thirteen, fourteen, something like that. It was safer in those days.

D: That's what I was going to ask you. Nowadays, a mother wouldn't allow that.

M: Yes, you didn't have the problem then that you have now. If you went to town, you could leave your door unlocked. You could go to town and come back. Nobody ever bothered anybody's possessions in those days. Every child had to behave because if your neighbors saw you do anything, they would report it to your mother.

D: Would you say that was a general rule in the blocks you lived around that everybody kind of looked out for everybody's kids?

M: Yes, that's the way it was in those days.

D: How much did you and your sister make on your paper route? Do you recall?

M: For a week it was 18¢. The Telegram did not have a Sunday edition. The paper was 3¢ a day, so for six days it was 18¢ for each customer. I don't know if we earned a penny or a penny and a half. I don't think we got the whole penny and a half because that would be half of the cost. It couldn't have been too much. I can't recall what it was, but it helped me with my arithmetic.

D: Working there on the paper route if you were about thirteen or fourteen, we are probably talking about 1930, 1931, sometime like that. This leads me into the Depression. Do you remember when your father got laid off from the mill and some of the

ways the Depression really affected your family?

M: You can't pinpoint the date. For us it was easier than for some because we had all those brothers. Whenever our brothers earned anything . . . My mother was one of those matriarchs. Anytime anybody earned any money, they had to put it in her hand. Other people envied us because we had more people bringing in. It was small amounts but it added up.

D: The larger the family, the more the money could come in.

M: Yes.

D: What were some of those other types of jobs some of the brothers and family members worked at?

M: For a time two or three of my brothers went down to West Virginia working in the mines. They would come back every two weeks dirty. I told you at first that two of my brothers had been working in the mill with my dad. Then later they went--you would go anywhere where you heard about work--to the mines for awhile. I don't know if there had been a cave-in or what, but after awhile they quit that, I think, voluntarily because the work was dirty and hard.

D: This was after they had gotten laid off from the mill?

M: From the mill, yes.

D: And the Depression began. Where did they stay down there? How did they get down there? Tell me a little bit about that.

M: I don't know. When you are a kid, they go and they come. You don't know. One brother had a car, but I'm not sure if he had a car at that time. My brother, Ben, had the car.

D: You say you began school at about the age of eight and you graduated at eighteen. So we could put that at about 1934.

M: June of 1935.

D: When you graduated in June of 1935, was the family still on Fleming?

M: No, we weren't. My brother, Raymond, died in 1933 in December. In January, my oldest brother had bought two houses over on Hayman Street where the parking lot is now for the St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

D: Yes, your oldest brother who had worked in the mill with your father?

M: Yes.

D: Did he save up his money to do this?

M: Yes, I think so. He played in a band. He saved his money. Anyhow, he bought the two houses. He was living in the front house. We moved into the rear house.

D: This was on Hayman Street?

M: Hayman. That was in January of 1934.

D: Your one brother had already died. Was it now your parents and about nine people who all lived in two houses?

M: Oh, no. My two sisters who were married remained in the south for a while. Then later they came with their husbands. At one time it was crowded there. My oldest sister became a widow. She had to move in with us. She had three boys. That was when we still lived on Fleming. Later the second sister who lived in a little house behind us rented a house on West Federal where the C.C.C. is. This C.C.C. was a company named for Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. It hauled heavy goods, but I don't know what kind they were. There was a house there, so the two sisters moved into that house. We were living on Hayman Street from 1934. I graduated in 1935. I got married in 1938.

D: So you lived there until you got married in 1938?

M: Yes.

D: During this time from 1934 to 1938, of course, again this is during the Depression. You told me about the fact that your brothers went down to work in a coal mine. You mentioned the fact that you and your sister had been papergirls. What were other ways that you managed to get along, like grocery money?

M: My brother, Jasper, worked at the bakery. From time to time my brother Ben worked there; my brother, Jay, worked there; my brother, Ray, worked there.

D: Which bakery was that? Do you remember, by the way?

M: House of Hathaway we used to call it. I think it was on 1900 Hubbard Road. It closed a few years ago.

D: So you had all of these branches all working at the bakery.

M: Yes. In those days they would put day old bread or rolls or something like that in barrels, and you could buy a barrel for \$1. You had all sorts of food in there. You had sweet

- rolls, bread, everything. Sometimes they would sell it to farmers for their hogs. We could get barrels full. Kids loved coming to our house--neighborhood kids who we played with. When I say food, I mean baked goods, pies, everything like that.
- D: The fact of having a family member working at a bakery during the Depression was really a heck of an advantage.
- M: That helped. My mother always had a garden.
- D: Tell me about that. I understand that a lot of people during the 1930's had gardens, even very small ones.
- M: Yes, well, she had a small one in our back yard. Then out on West Federal there were some people who had a lot that extended back. They probably rented. Not many people owned in those days. It extended back to the railroad tracks. For a time my mother used to go around there and have a garden around there too. My sisters would have gardens. In those days neighbors helped each other. If they had something extra, they would share it with you. If you had something extra, you would share with them.
- D: How about some of those government programs like the WPA (Works Progress Administration)? Did you ever know anybody who got involved in that or the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) or some of those types of programs?
- M: My husband went to the CCC, but that was before I got married. None of my brothers did. They were managing as it was.
- D: They all had their own private ways of somehow getting along.
- M: Yes, making a living.
- D: During this entire time, did it seem like your father had been laid off and then was laid off for years, or was he maybe getting called back and then laid off? How did that seem?
- M: I don't recall him being called back. I don't. Before people used to complain because the curtains would get so dirty from the mill soot. Then the curtains stayed clean; the river got clear. They were saying pretty soon that there would be fish back in the river because the mills weren't putting out any effluvia.
- D: When you moved up to Hayman Street which is up by where St. Elizabeth is . . .
- M: St. Elizabeth was much smaller then.

D: Was that also kind of a mixed ethnic area?

M: Yes, but usually when one black moves in the neighborhood, the whites start putting up signs and they moved out. So it didn't stay mixed for very long. Of course, there are still a few whites who are still in that neighborhood. I think that last white who was on Hayman Street died about two years ago. Some white people would refuse to run because they weren't afraid.

D: Did it seem when you moved in that area that they were all unemployed steelworkers? We are not talking about doctors and lawyers, are we?

M: No, they probably were.

D: In other words, economically, they were not different from you.

M: No, the incomes were about the same. Yes, I think so. Mr. Collums who lived across the street from us on Hayman had a little grocery store around on Griffith Street. It was just a little store that was attached to the front of a house. I think he had been in the mill originally. I can't recall any other jobs that people were . . . Sometimes some of the women would do day work. My two older sisters did house cleaning for other people. Sometimes they would bring home things, like if there was food left over from a meal or something. If the housewives didn't want to keep it, she would give that to them. Those were other methods of stretching your money.

D: Basically, you lived with your family until 1938 when you became married.

M: Yes.

D: It is 1938, Mrs. Madison. That is when you and your husband married. Where did you live then? Where did you move?

M: When we got married, I was living on Hayman Street. Back in those days housing was hard to come by and income was small. My husband was earning \$10 a week for cleaning a billiard hall.

D: A billiard hall, a pool hall?

M: Yes, downtown. He was earning \$10 a week; I was earning \$5 a week.

D: What were you doing at that time in 1938?

M: My uncle who had that moving company, I kept the office

for him. It was on Federal Street. The land (space) is vacant now.

D: What was the title of it?

M: Spring Common Transfer and Storage Company.

D: That was your uncle's business?

M: Yes.

D: You worked in the office for him?

M: Yes, answering the phone. There wasn't that much typing. Sometimes they would have a lot of work. Then again it was very little.

D: You said that you and your husband were still living up there on Hayman.

M: No, when I got married, housing was scarce. In those days if you got married, you rented a room in somebody's house. They rented you a bedroom, and then you had the use of the kitchen. That was pretty much the accepted thing.

D: Oh, that was a common practice?

M: Yes, because there were no houses; there were no apartments.

D: So you are saying housing in general was short. Where was the room that you folks rented?

M: On Harlem. The man was Mr. Johnston.

D: Was it a big house?

M: Not that big, two bedrooms. It was just him and his wife. They had one bedroom, and we had one bedroom.

D: It seems to me at this time when you moved up to Harlem Street, especially when you lived on Hayman, you were just really up from that general Westlake Crossing area.

M: Yes.

D: This was before they started to put the project in.

M: Right.

D: What do you remember about Westlake Crossing area? I understand there are some really older, dilapidated . . .

M: There were on the lower part. For a while there had been an open air market something like the Pyatt Street Market from the Covington Street corner around to Foster Street. You had to go down Covington and turn to the left before you went across the Crossing. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evening you could go and buy produce that the farmers brought in. There are open stalls with covered roofs that are rented and people got here on those days to buy fresh vegetables, fruit, et cetera. And, that is how it was on Rayen Avenue between Covington and Foster Streets. Of course, there were some older houses along Rayen Avenue there. Pyatt Street Market still exists.

D: How about down around Wirt and Griffith? How about the housing there? Do you know?

M: I remember that. There was another street called Morrison. It was done away with when the project was built. The houses were all small. The nice thing about it was that the people tried to keep . . . Some of them were owners of their land. They painted whenever they could. They usually had just a little patch of grass because the lots were really small. It was just a little patch of grass. The women always had flowers. It was a clean little neighborhood.

Up Griffith now across from what is now Madison back down on the left side, the side where the project is, there used to be what they called row houses and sometimes they called them shotgun houses because you could shoot right through them. One room is right behind the other.

D: These were along which street?

M: Griffith. They were torn down for the project.

D: That was where the row houses were.

M: Yes, they were there on that block. I only lived on Harlem from August, when we got married, until October.

D: August to October of 1938?

M: That same year, yes.

D: One question about that general Westlake Crossing area before the projects, the row houses area, that down there, the Griffith Street, Wirt Street area, ethnically was it mixed, or was it all one ethnic group?

M: It was mixed for a while. On Covington there is the St. Peter and Paul Church at the corner of Covington and Arlington. There was the church school. Originally, the area had all been white, I think, but it was mixed white and black. The

church across the street from St. Peter and Paul on Arlington was Tabernacle Baptist Church. At that time I was attending that church. There was a white store in the middle of the block between Arlington and Scott Street on Covington. It existed until just a few years ago until some Arabs got it. I guess then some blacks fire it. It was pretty much mixed for a long time.

D: You mentioned in October of 1938 that you and your husband moved from Harlem Street.

M: Yes, there was a three [room] little apartment, concrete block house. It was on Griffith across the street from these row houses. At present it is now a part of Covington School's property. The house is no longer there, but we lived in the middle one. There were three, little apartments. It had a living room, a tiny, little bedroom, a tinier kitchen, and a little, tiny half bath. We lived in the middle one. That little row apartment house had no window in the middle apartment. There was a skylight, which is a ceiling window. The room was very small and whenever it rained the bed was wet from the leaking skylight. The room had no closet, only a few hooks for hanging clothes. There was no way to stop the bed from getting wet, although we did set out pots and pans. The rent was \$14.00 a month for the middle apartment and \$15.00 for each outside one.

D: This was on . . .

M: Griffith right across from what is now the project, but at that time the row houses were there. We were there from October until June of 1939. They had started tearing down the houses, the houses here on Griffith.

D: Tell me about that. When did this word get around that something big was going to happen, that there was going to be this project?

M: You heard it by word of mouth. A lot of times people couldn't afford newspapers. By word of mouth somebody would tell you. I guess it was probably in the paper. We heard it. My husband wasn't working. He worked for a little while. He got laid off down there.

D: At the billiard place?

M: Yes. Then my brother got him on out at Hathaway Bakery for a little while. He only worked there for a short while. He had to belong to the union in order to stay on, and he was black. They wouldn't take him in.

D: Did you get the feeling that this was common that if you were black it was tough to break into the union?

M: It was accepted practice back in those days.

D: Which union was that again?

M: It was the baker's union. Yes, it was Hathaway Bakery. He couldn't get into the union so he couldn't keep the job. We stayed there until June of 1939. His mother and father took us into their house for a while.

D: Which was . . .

M: On Earle Avenue.

D: By June of 1939, of course, the construction was really going strong?

M: Right.

D: What do you remember about the construction in that whole time?

M: The leveling . . . The houses were here, and then the houses were gone. The only thing that was remaining was on West Federal. It was the black YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association). They called it the West Federal Street YMCA. Then on Madison was the Working Men's Overall Supply Company. Those two things stayed. The buildings were put around them.

D: What became of those people? How did they relocate them? Did you ever hear anything about that?

M: I think everybody was on their own. You had to find a house for yourself. I never heard of anybody doing any . . .

D: When you moved in June of 1939, was it a voluntary move or were you forced to move?

M: No, we moved because my husband had no job. That was across the street that houses were being torn down.

D: Near where Covington School is now was where you were living?

M: Yes. Covington School was there then, but that little bit of property had not been sold. The owners hung on to that little bit of property. That didn't belong to Covington. There was a house on a corner. It was about a six or seven room house. Then there was a little flat just below the corner. That was the flat we lived in on Griffith Street from October of 1938 to June of 1939.

D: You say that Covington School was there in 1938 or 1939?

M: Oh, yes. Formerly, there had been an old Covington School. It had been torn down and a new Covington School was erected on the same lot.

D: About what year? Before the project went in?

M: Yes, I think just before the project. I think it was about 1938, 1939, 1940, something like that.

D: They finished the project in 1940?

M: 1940.

D: People started moving in 1940?

M: In about May.

D: You are saying there was an old school there.

M: There had been.

D: And they rebuilt a new school.

M: Yes, on the same . . . The kids had to go to different grade schools. Of course, I didn't have any kids in school then, but neighborhood kids had to go to Jefferson and Butler School and some went to Elm School while the new Covington was being erected.

D: While that construction was going on literally right across the street from you, they always had the dignitaries. One time Mrs. Roosevelt came. Did you ever see any important people?

M: No, they were probably down around Federal Street instead of coming up there. This was an extreme end because there is nothing by the project. I only saw the houses being torn down when they started excavating for the basements. Then we moved away. We were gone a year.

D: That move then was from about June of 1939 until you moved into the project?

M: At the end of June in 1940.

D: What was the procedure you and your husband went through to get to move into the project?

M: First, you had to be working.

D: You had to be working?

- M: Yes, and he had got called back to the mill . Sometimes you would get called to the mill maybe for one day, two days, a week, a month, or something like that. At last he got called back and he was able to make a full pay. After making his first full pay, then he was able to consider himself employed again.
- D: Had you two gone on your own to some office to apply? How did that work?
- M: He had to go. There was an office down there on West Federal on the corner of West Federal and Wirt Streets. He had gone. I guess that is where he went to apply. He had to take our marriage license. You had to have a receipt to show that you were working, a pay stub or something like that to show that you were employed.
- D: So he had to take a marriage license and a pay stub.
- M: Yes.
- D: Were you under the general impression from people after you moved in that this was common, that most everybody had to show some means of employment to move in?
- M: Yes, that was the only way you could get in then. You had to be working.
- D: How about this business about the marriage license?
- M: At first we were living in the back row. In a building to the west of us, there was one couple who were a bit older than we were. We were quite young then. We were in our early twenties. With this couple the man brought his marriage license and his girlfriend. He had taken his license to show, but then he moved his girlfriend in with him.
- D: Instead of his wife?
- M: Yes. Of course, but somebody knew them and it was reported to the office and they had to go.
- D: Before people had moved in, about January of 1940, I think they made up a couple of the apartments really nice and then had the general public go in and look at them. Do you ever recall anything like that?
- M: No. We were on the south side on Earle Avenue. That was much further to walk than it was to walk when you are near the project.
- D: At that time you have moved over to the south side?

M: Yes.

D: This would be temporarily?

M: Yes, we lived there with his mother for a year, from June of 1939 until June of 1940. I didn't get a chance to see the apartment. My sister had moved in apartment 44. She moved in there in about May, so I got a chance to see her apartment. Then we moved in toward the end of June of 1940.

D: It was your husband and your young baby?

M: Yes, just the three of us.

D: You mentioned then, of course, that you had gone to your sister's. What were your first impressions when you used to visit your sister at the project?

M: The project was nice in those days. It doesn't have the name that it has now. Everybody was so proud. The apartments were clean; they got new furniture, new curtains. It was just like what you might think. It was like some of the apartments out in Austintown. It was the equivalent of that in those days. Everything was brand new; everybody was glad enough to have a place. It was hard to find . . . If a house became vacant, there were ten or a dozen people trying to get that one house. They were glad of the opportunity to get a new place to stay.

D: You keep mentioning how tough housing was to get during the Depression. Do you think it was a little tougher if you were black to get housing during the Depression?

M: You couldn't get a house unless there was a vacant one, one for sale or one for rent. If there was one for rent, too many people were trying to get that one house. As for buying a house there was this thing that real estate men opened up a street only so far, and you couldn't go beyond that street. There were a few blacks who lived on Parmelee at that time near Foster Street, near St. Augustine's Church. Then Dr. Watkins, a dentist, lived next door to St. Augustine's Church and there were some people whose name was Williams. Mrs. Martha B. Warner, the black policewoman, lived up on Parmelee, in the 700 block. There was a mail carrier, Blair, in the 600 block. Those were considered professions in those days. There was a mail carrier catty-corner from Mrs. Martha B. Warner the policewoman. It was hard for blacks to get houses. There were a limited number of rentals and even more limited number of those there were available for purchase. They could only be obtained if the real estate agents would open up a block; then you could buy, other than that, no. The block on Parmelee from St. Elizabeth's

over to Foster Street there were maybe one or two blacks near Foster. I'm just saying "maybe" because that really only opened up in the mid to late 1940's.

D: When you moved into Westlake in 1940, did you notice immediately that the entire lower side of the projects was black?

M: We accepted it.

D: Did you see how that worked?

M: We noticed. The children called it the "white project" which was above Madison and the "colored project" which was below Madison. We noticed it, but the "powers that be" had established that. What could you do? We were glad enough to get an apartment. Who could question?

D: When you moved in, it seemed to you the general requirements were that the family had to have an income.

M: Right.

D: It seems to me that if you had a young baby, it was probably your husband, since he got called back, who was working now again in the mills.

M: In U. S. Steel.

D: In U. S. Steel. He had got called back to U. S. Steel. You also had to show a marriage license.

M: Yes.

D: Do you recall when you moved in 1940 what your initial rent was? Do you remember that?

M: I think it was about \$18.75 a month.

D: A month?

M: Yes, a month. Your rent was supposed to be based upon about one-fourth of your income.

D: One-fourth of your income.

M: You can imagine what the income must have been. If it was less than \$20 for the rent, then for the month the earnings must have been around \$80.

D: Eighty dollars a month?

M: Yes.

D: Oh, you mean one-fourth of your monthly earnings.

M: Yes, one-fourth of your monthly earnings. That was what your rent was based upon, one-fourth of your monthly earnings.

D: When you moved in, you had to bring in all your own furniture?

M: Yes.

D: Did you have furniture or did you have to go out and buy some?

M: We had three rooms. We had a couch and a chair and I think we had a sewing machine. My uncle, who was with the moving company, first gave me a kitchen table when we moved into that little apartment up on West Federal Court. We has some chairs. So we had all that to bring in. Then we had a bed and a dresser and a baby bed and a few chairs, I guess.

D: On the actual day you moved in do you remember how you got your things to the apartment? Were you thrilled?

M: Oh, yes, I was thrilled because I wanted a place of my own.

D: That is how you looked at it as a place of your own?

M: Yes, a place of our own. We lived with his mother for a year; we had lived in this other apartment for about eight or nine months. Then we had lived on Harlem Street when we first got married for about two months from the end of August to about the middle of October . . . Yes, you always want a place that you can call your own where you can go to bed when you want to, get up when you want to, or whatever.

D: Your uncle having a moving company, did he give you a hand, or how did that work?

M: I don't recall. I should remember, but I don't. That has been nearly fifty years ago.

D: You moved in then in 1940. You were there for about thirteen years until about 1953.

M: We lived in the back row first for four years.

D: That was what apartment?

M: The building was 850 and the apartment was 130. It was 850 West Federal Court and apartment 130. Then when my second child was born in January, then in April we were given a larger apartment with two bedrooms.

D: Did you have to go out and apply on your own?

M: Yes, to the office again.

D: How about the rent? Did it change?

M: The rent would change every time there was a strike and you earned a little bit more. The rent went up every time the mill had a strike. In the beginning the one bedroom apartments were \$18.50, two bedroom apartments were \$20.75 and three bedrooms were \$22.25. Then later immediately following each strike in the mill, as soon as the family's earnings increased there was an abrupt increase in cost of housing. Sometimes it seemed unjust because all during the strike one had to manage on very little. After the strike, food went up, sometimes even before it was settled. You felt as though you were trapped and many people decided they wanted no part of life under those conditions. As soon as possible they bought their own home and left that place. We stayed there as long as we did simply because my husband was contented and had no desire to leave.

D: So they always knew when you were making more money.

M: Oh, yes, they always knew. Every year you had to go to the office and show them what your yearly income had been.

D: What happened to somebody if they had lost their job? What was the situation?

M: When they had that real long strike over 110 or 111 days . . .

D: 1947?

M: Whatever that year was. It probably was.

D: This was before Westlake?

M: No, this was in Westlake.

D: That would have been in the 1940's. I think in the late 1940's there was a strike.

M: Yes. You had to pay your rent whether you were working or not. Fortunately, I was always the one who liked to put something in the bank. I had enough so each month we were able to pay our rent. Some couples would have to leave. They were some of the young couples. When we first moved in, they were mostly young couples with maybe one child. A few had two. They were always small kids. Some people didn't have any kids, of course. There were a few middle-aged people who were in their forties, but most of us were in our early twenties. Some were even in their late teens

- D: How about older people? Did you notice older people? Were they put in a certain section in the project?
- M: No, it was just as you applied and a vacancy came. They weren't separated. Those who had kids were mixed in with those who didn't have kids.
- D: You said that initially you had a very good impression of the projects and that they were clean and everybody kept them up. Were you told from the office . . . Were inspectors ever sent around or were you kind of pressured from the office to keep them clean?
- M: They told you when to put your screens in; they told you when to take your screens out. They didn't tell you to wash your windows, but if you got too messy, they sort of sent you a letter I think. Mr. Strait was . . .
- D: Paul Strait?
- M: Yes, sometimes he would go walking through the project just observing. He was really friendly. He would stop and talk to you.
- D: When you were living in the project, you met Paul Strait on occasions.
- M: Yes.
- D: He conducted his own inspections.
- M: Yes, he just walked. Here is one thing he did. They had door screens, and the small kids would push the screens and make them bag. Well, I didn't like mine bagged. At the Cavanaugh Hardware store downtown, I had seen like a grill that you screw on the inside of the wooden doors. You would put the grill on the inside, so I bought that. Mr. Strait stopped one day and asked me where I had gotten it. I guess he wanted to see if they could have that for the others. The screens would be bagged and sometimes they would be pushed entirely out of the doors.
- D: How about things like cutting the grass? Who cut it, for example, was it maintenance?
- M: Not then. Then you were assigned certain weeks through the Summer to cut it. If you didn't cut it, then you had to pay to have it cut. You could either have somebody, a child or somebody, cut it for you, or you could pay the office and they would have the maintenance man do the cutting.
- D: Kind of like indirectly you were responsible for your own.

- M: For your own grass, for your own cutting.
- D: You say that the office did let you know when you weren't keeping everything up to par?
- M: Right, yes.
- D: You mentioned, of course, that you had two children who really grew up with Westlake.
- M: Yes, but I had more than that before I was through.
- D: At one point there were four children living in one unit down there with you and your husband.
- M: Yes, but at that time I had the two bedrooms upstairs and the living room and kitchen downstairs. I was on the front row then, 900 West Federal, apartment 29. I was given that apartment after the girl was born. She was the second child.
- D: How about the life for your children? What did they do? Did they go over to the YMCA there down on Federal? What were the activities they did?
- M: The YMCA was available. My kids usually just played out in the yard or in the playground. My son got a paper route and bought himself a bike. Then he and his cousin would go wandering all over town on their bikes. The oldest, Ray, went to Hayes. That was before we moved out here.
- D: He went to Hayes. How about Covington? What were the grades there?
- M: They went to Covington then. The oldest son went to Covington, and the daughter went to Covington. Miss Eberhart had taught Dr. Armstrong. She taught several generations; she taught my daughter Marcia and Hugh Frost. When I lived on Griffith, Hugh Frost lived right across the street from the project, and William Huff.
- Dr. Armstrong was a principal at Covington School. He is Dr. Herbert Armstrong and his degree is in Education. Hugh Frost has been on the staff at YSU. He also has run unsuccessfully for mayor of Youngstown. Also, he, for a number of years was director of the McGuffey Centre. William Huff, I can't remember what he did in public office, but he no longer lives in Youngstown. He and his family moved south for better employment opportunities.
- D: Hugh Frost did not live in the project, just near it?

M: No, he lived across the street from it.

D: On Griffith?

M: Yes.

D: Covington School is back. That is part of their property.

M: Yes, but where he was living it was still not their property. First it was the house there on the corner of Madison. Next, there was this little flat house that we lived in. It was a little row house with three, little flats. Hugh Frost's family's house was below there next door to it. Then there was another place that had a store front and then housing behind. The Huff's lived there.

D: How about things like convenience of business? Were there a lot of little stores? How was it when you had to go shopping? Were there markets right there after they put the project in?

M: Labate store used to be on the corner of Wirt before the freeway was put there. We would walk up there. Then there was Susie's store across on Federal Street.

D: That was the name of the store?

M: She was Italian I think. Her name was Susie and Labate was Italian, too, up on the corner of Wirt and Federal across the street catty-cornered from where the office is. The freeway is there now.

D: How about the laundry? Where did you do the wash?

M: They had laundry rooms. You provided your own washer. You kept your washer down there. They had little stalls in a heated room for drying your clothes.

D: You took your own washer?

M: Yes.

D: You took it down to this big room?

M: We didn't have . . . They were . . .

D: They had the rollers?

M: Yes, that is the kind of washer. Everybody had that kind of washer.

D: You took it to one, big room?

- M: It stayed there. Not every building had . . . About four buildings were serviced by one laundry room. Every building didn't have a basement. On the corner of West Federal there was a laundry room there. I used that laundry room when I lived on the back row on West Federal Court. Then when I moved to the front row on West Federal Street, the building directly behind us had a laundry room. You would go down the steps and into the laundry room. They had stationary tubs. After you washed there was a separate room that had stalls with partitions between them. You had to provide your own lock and lock your clothes in that stall. They had specified times for you to wash, and you were supposed to be out when your time ended. Your clothes were supposed to get dry. Sometimes the laundry wouldn't be working. The heat wouldn't be working, and the clothes wouldn't be dry. The next person wants to come in and hang their clothes up. Sometimes there were little problems. Some people could be nasty if you didn't take your clothes down when it was time for them to hang theirs up. If your clothes weren't dry, all you had to do was take them home and lay them on chairs or lay them on the radiator or something like that to dry them.
- D: It seems in that thirteen year period that you lived there that there were a lot of rules and regulations that people had to abide by.
- M: Yes.
- D: Would you say, though, that when things needed to get done, was the front office usually cooperative in making repairs?
- M: Yes, they were, usually. For instance, if the laundry wasn't working, they would usually do it in a day or two. One thing about the laundry room though . . . You know how kids can get sick at night when you have small kids. Then you have to wait until your turn to wash. If you have dirty clothes, you can't wash them until it is your turn. Of course, when you have kids, you were sometimes given two days like Tuesday or Thursday or like Tuesday and Friday to wash. The kids usually would get sick over the weekend, so you have to wait until Tuesday to wash.
- D: You lived there until 1953. Then you moved?
- M: To my mother's house. In the meantime we had bought this lot here, but we weren't able to build yet. We moved to my mother's house, back on the south side again, on Chicago Avenue that time.
- D: So in 1953 you had already bought this lot on Stocker Avenue?
- M: Yes.

- D: You moved to your mother's and then moved out here to Stocker Avenue?
- M: Yes, we lived at her house from June of 1953 until March of 1954.
- D: Do you remember the rent you were paying? You said you paid about \$18 a month beginning. When you left Westlake in 1953, do you remember what it was?
- M: It was near around \$70 I think.
- D: Was it the same rules with one-fourth of the monthly income?
- M: I think that still applied.
- D: During the thirteen years that you lived in Westlake could you think of any major developments or improvements? Was Westlake a better place to live when you left in 1953 than it was in 1940 or vice versa? Did they make any major additions, new facilities, things like that?
- M: No. I do recall that as the freeway was going through there were row houses there on Madison that had to be moved. They thought at first they would have to raze them completely, but they were able to get a company that could split them. They moved each half over to Otis Street.
- D: You were living in Westlake at the time those houses were moved?
- M: Yes.
- D: About how long did the whole process of moving them take?
- M: A friend of mine lived across the street from there. She would probably know better. She lived on Madison across from those houses.
- D: You remember, though, the expressway being built up there.
- M: Yes.
- D: Was Madison Avenue originally just a two lane road?
- M: Two lanes and maybe one for passing just as it is from the present Madison from Covington Street over to North Avenue. That same width was how wide it was, and there were houses on each side, of course.
- D: You don't happen to know what the people did in the meantime while they were waiting for their houses to be moved?

- M: I don't know. What they usually do is move you into another apartment with somebody else. That is probably what they did.
- D: Do you recall about what year this was occurring, the year the Madison freeway went in?
- M: I know our church was on the corner of Madison and Covington. We had to move that. That church had to be torn down. A new church, Price Memorial was built on Dryden Avenue. We were out here when the freeway was going up. We were already out here.
- D: It was after 1953.
- M: Yes, it had to be. It had to be in the 1960's, I think.
- D: When the freeway was going up?
- M: Yes, I think so, unless it was late 1950's.
- D: I think it was in the 1960's when the freeway went up.
- M: Yes, because we were here. I was going to the Price Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church at that time. (The name Price was in memory of a former bishop of that denomination). It later was moved out here to 920 Dryden Avenue . . . The church building was not moved. It was purchased by the state and that was a partial payment toward a new building at 920 Dryden Avenue. I was on the building fund committee then.
- D: That is how you remembered the freeway and the fact that the project houses had to be divided because you would go into church and see this.
- M: Yes.
- D: Is there really anything that you want to add about overall memories of the thirteen years at Westlake? To you, was it generally a positive experience? Were you glad you lived there? You mentioned it was your first home, really, your first individual home.
- M: Yes, for that period. That was the longest I had lived anywhere. I was glad enough to have a place to stay. You get tired of feeling like a Gypsy. You are here a little bit, there a little bit, and there a little bit. The conditions in projects can become pretty crowded. Before we left there I was eager to get out. People are too close together. It got so the kids would quarrel and fight. The parents would jump in; the police would be called. Some parents would have weapons and things like that. I wanted to get out of that place before . . .

- D: You are saying that you could notice, maybe, even in 1952, 1953, kind of the environment was changing?
- M: They tried, but it got to be too much for them because so many girls . . . Sometimes women would move in. They would have their husband maybe to begin with. Then they would break up and the boyfriends would move in. For a time there the project insisted on checking your apartment at least once a year.
- D: They would come in for an inspection?
- M: Yes, and they would look in your closets. If you are single, you are not supposed to have men's clothes hanging in your closet. Some of the women got angry, and they got really nasty about somebody inspecting their closet.
- D: Even in the thirteen years you lived there you could . . .
- M: Notice the change. Yes, and you weren't happy with the change because you are brought up to think that you should live a certain way, that you have a certain prescribed . . .
- D: Standard of living.
- M: Yes.
- D: As a general rule you would say you were very glad to move in, but by 1953 you were equally glad . . .
- M: Even more glad to move out.
- D: Thank you very much for your conversation, Mrs. Madison.

END OF INTERVIEW