

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Lowellville Project

Resident of Lowellville

O. H. 723

LAWRENCE MEEHAN

Interviewed

by

Tom Kirker

on

August 8, 1985

LAWRENCE MEEHAN

Lawrence "Red" Meehan was born November 1, 1909 in Lowellville, Ohio. Red's father owned the Meehan Boiler Company and settled in Lowellville near the turn of the century. Unfortunately, the business went under in the 1920's. During World War II Red was a private in the 703rd Engineers. After the war he returned to Lowellville whereupon he saw his son, Lawrence, born in 1942, for the first time. He and his wife, Mary Elizabeth, had been married only one year before America entered the war. In 1947 Red went to work for Youngstown Sheet & Tube. He retired in 1976.

He and Mary Elizabeth have four sons: Lawrence, age 42; William, age 38; James, age 37; and Paul, age 25. Red enjoys his retirement by hunting and raising pheasants for the Lowellville Gun Club. He is a charter member of Lowellville Rod and Gun Club, which was organized in the early 1930's. He is also president of the Lowellville Senior Citizens. He and Mary are members of Holy Rosary Church. They live at 776 E. Wood Street, Lowellville, Ohio.

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INTERVIEWEE: LAWRENCE "RED" MEEHAN

INTERVIEWER: Tom Kirker

SUBJECT: Lowellville's buildings, people, business, the  
Depression, World War II

DATE: August 8, 1985

K: This is an interview with Lawrence Meehan for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the history of Lowellville, Ohio. It is August 8, 1985. It is roughly 4:30 p.m. We are at Mr. Meehan's residence, at 776 East Wood Street, Lowellville, Ohio. The interview is being done by Tom Kirker.

What year were you born?

M: I was born on November 1, 1909.

K: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

M: Yes, I have one brother who lives in Seattle, Washington and four sisters living here in Lowellville.

K: What business did he go into?

M: He is in the insurance business. He lived in Youngstown for awhile and then went to Cleveland and then went on to transfer to Seattle, Washington.

K: What business was your father in?

M: He was in the boiler shop, Meehan Boiler Construction Company.

K: Did he do boiler work for the mills?

M: Yes, we did a lot of work for the different mills. In fact, we built the stacks at the Henry Ford Company in Detroit.

K: What year was that? Can you recall?

M: I don't remember what year that was myself. I have heard dad talk about it. They had what they called a road gang that worked out of the shop. They went to Detroit to put up those stacks. I think they put stacks up here in the valley too for Sharon Steel and Republic.

K: And they were headquartered here in Lowellville.

M: Yes, at that time the steel companies didn't have their own boiler makers. We did a lot of that work for them. As years went by they got their own boiler shops, and that kind of slowed up our business. I think we probably went out of business in the late 1930's. We started downhill. I think it must have been around 1905 when they started the business.

K: How did Ford and companies like that know about this boiler company in Lowellville?

M: I don't know. We had built stacks. That is what the boiler shop did. I don't remember any of the boilers that they made, but it was called boiler construction. I don't remember any of the boilers. I have often wondered if there was one still around in operations. You had to get into the stack business then. The steel mills were coming into the valley and everything was stack work. It was mostly stack work.

K: When did they go into stack building?

M: I think it could have been in 1915-1917. Stacks are made from flat steel sheets. Rivet holes are marked, punched out and the sheet is rolled. It took several sheets for a stack sixty or eighty feet high.

K: Where did they assemble them?

M: They were shipped by rail to the job. Our road gang would assemble them. I imagine they were a certain size and then they put them together up there. They made them a certain size here. I can remember the old crane. They called it the stiff-legged crane. That was run by a motor and electric. It just swung from one side to the other and it had a pulley on it. It wasn't like the cranes they have today; it was stationary out in the yard. They would back the car underneath and load it up that way.

K: Where was this business located?

M: Right down where the Falcon Foundry is located right now. That is East Water Street way down at the end of the street there.

K: Where did you live at the time? Where did your parents live?

M: At that time I lived on Third Street. One time we lived further up in the country up here at the old McIntee place as we call it now. That is where my mother had lived up there. We lived up there for awhile and then we moved to Third Street. I think I was about three or four years old when we came down from Bedford Hill there. We moved down to Third Street. We have been there ever since.

K: Were both of your parents from Lowellville?

M: Yes, they were from Lowellville. Dad was originally from New Castle. He met my mother. She was a McIntee from around here. The McIntee's were here. That was how he got over here. Several of the Meehan's came over here who started the plant. My dad was one of them. He had a couple of cousins and his brother and his dad. That was how the plant got started here. I imagine that is about the time when he came over too. I don't know what year that was. It was probably in the early 1900's. Most of them lived on East Water Street at the time. They all lived together there. When everybody seemed to come to Lowellville, they all would double up with somebody. The Irish were all living down on East Water Street.

K: How many people worked for your dad?

M: They didn't work for him, but he was in with the company. His older brother and his dad were still there at the time. Some of his cousins were in on it. I imagine at one time they probably had forty, fifty, sixty men. I really couldn't say for sure. They must have had about ten guys in the gang too, the road gang. I imagine at that time they probably picked up a lot of men where they worked too. Maybe the foreman and some of the draftsmen or the key men would go along with them out to the job. They probably had a lot of labor too. I wouldn't know how many they really hired.

Of course, what I do remember is when they were going out of business in the last few years that I really knew them; I worked down there one summer. It was just one job after another and then a spell off and then another job would come in. It was very small. At one time they had a pretty nice group of men working for them, mostly people from Lowellville.

K: What did your father do after the business went out?

- M: Of course, he couldn't retire then. There wasn't anything such as retirement then. He worked on the WPA (Works Progress Administration) for awhile. The only other job I think he really had would be custodian down at the city hall for quite a few years. I think Mayor Quinn was the mayor at that time. He was down there for a few years. I had an older sister who worked on the railroad, and she worked on the railroad for a long time. It was close to fifty years I guess over at the old Bentley Station. That was when Bentley had the hill run and hauled the limestone and stone out of the quarry. She never got married until later on in life, and she more or less kept us through the Depression days at that time.
- K: Did she always live in Lowellville?
- M: Yes, she always lived with us, yes, right at home. I think she was late in her sixties when she got married. She hung around a long time with us. I had four sisters and three brothers. At one time or another they all worked in the boiler shop. John worked there and Joe worked down there. I worked there. I think I only worked part of one summer while I was old enough to work.
- K: You are the youngest son?
- M: No, I have a brother Jim. He is younger. That is the one in Seattle. He never worked in the boiler shop. At about that time it was phasing out. There wasn't much to do.
- K: What kind of work did you get into?
- M: During the Depression of the 1930's I worked in a grocery store here in town, Chuey's Store. About 1935 the Ohio Edison Power Plant which had been shut down for several years started up again. Our shop had made and put up two stacks for them my dad told me. I can remember them building the power house somewhere in 1917-1918. I started to work at Ohio Edison Plant in 1935. I was there twelve years, got my Stationary Engineer's license, and in 1947 I went to Sheet & Tube. I retired in 1976 and am taking it easy.
- K: You had mentioned the Depression. What was life like in Lowellville during the Depression?
- M: One thing I remember was that everything was really cheap. Things were very reasonable. It was 10¢ for a loaf of bread. I remember a loaf of bread was three for 25¢ and things like that, 10¢ a loaf and hamburger was really cheap. We had plenty of vegetables in the community. At that time we had several nice farms around the country and handy here.

They would bring things into the stores. More or less, it just seemed like we kept ourselves, vegetables and potatoes. We had a potato farmer up on the other hill and a beef farmer or two on this side and farmers raising chickens and bringing eggs in, bringing chickens in. We didn't seem to have too much trouble. We had quite a few grocery stores in town. Every one had credit in those days. The farmers would all come into town on Saturday night and get together. They would stand around on the street corner and talk.

K: Were there a lot of hobos, a lot of bums about town?

M: Not too many, no, not that lived in town. We might have had a couple, two or three, of the town drunks or something like that. Hobos always went through town; I know they always came down the valley. I can still remember my mother taking them in and giving them something to eat. They would sit out on the porch and she would bring them something to eat. They would go on their way again. You wouldn't see them again for a long time. Maybe they would come back and maybe they wouldn't. They always went through town like that, but I don't remember too many of them. We used to see some of them riding the freight trains going through town. You don't see that anymore either.

K: When you were younger, did you ride on the trains, the streetcar?

M: No, we rode the streetcar back and forth. We had streetcars here in Lowellville. They ran to New Castle, Pennsylvania and Youngstown, Ohio. I don't remember the time, but they said that at one time there were twenty-one bars and taverns, saloons, in Lowellville. They used to come over from New Castle on the streetcar. New Castle was dry at that time. They would load up and take it back. We used to go to Youngstown and occasionally see a show or something like that. We had a local show here in town too. We used to go uptown once in a while to see a stage show. That was a great thing to see a stage show.

We rode the streetcars quite a while. Then the buses came in. We had a bus run into Youngstown pretty regularly. All at once they went out too. Of course, everything slowed down. The mills closed down. I remember waiting for a bus up there in Campbell when I worked in the mill. We used to get the bus there to come to Lowellville late at night. This was years ago. There were lots of buses going to Youngstown, every fifteen minutes. Of course, toward the end there you didn't see any more buses running like that. Of course, the mills were all slowing down. You don't have any use for those buses any more.

K: When you were younger, can you remember any of the buildings that were there?

M: Yes, I can remember the churches up here on Wood Street that burnt down. I don't know what year they burnt. It was right before the war, I think, the First World War or during the First World War when they burnt down. There was an old livery stable. I don't remember too much about that, but it also burnt down then. There were two churches there at Wood Street and Third Street and Second Street. It cleaned the block out pretty good. There was Kroeck's Hardware store down on Front Street then. It was right in there where that ice cream store is now downtown there. I remember the old drugstore. It burnt down later on, Burke's Drugstore. Then there was what they called the Old Hotel there.

Bill Johnly used to have fruit and vegetables and stuff in there. He was a wholesale house for Lowellville more or less. He furnished supplies to the grocery store here in town. We had several, big grocery stores.

John Freck was here. He had a pretty good size store. It is still standing down there. It was kind of a dry goods store, knick knacks, everything. I think he went out to auctions too. That was the kind of store that it was.

The old post office was there. Of course, it is still there. It is a laundry room now. Vernon's store is still standing down there on the corner. Lomac's store, the brick building, was a grocery store and hardware at one time. They have a little shop in there now. I guess they fix welding equipment in there. The old Cunningham store is still standing there too. The bank is still on the corner, the same as it was. It has been remodeled a few times.

Del Frano's building over the river was a beer garden. It was a brick building that finally burnt up. They turned it into an Italian Club. They took that over years ago. They had a fire over there. It practically ruined the building. All of those other brick buildings over there have been there for a long time. I don't know why they are all brick either. That was way back in time with brick buildings. They must have been all saloons, I guess, at one time.

K: Do you remember what the drugstore looked like inside?

M: Yes, I remember the drugstore. They had the iron chairs in there and the iron tables and a counter in there where you sat and had sodas and things like that. Another thing



about that drugstore there was that we used to buy our schoolbooks there too. Somehow or other had connections with the school board. I never did know what the procedure was there. We always bought our schoolbooks there.

K: At the drugstore.

M: One side of the drugstore were all kinds of books that came in. They had room for them. They would pack them in there. We would have to go to school and get a list of what we needed. Then we would go down there and buy a geography book or an arithmetic book or whatever.

K: This was when you went to Lowellville High School?

M: That was when I went to Lowellville, yes. They don't do that anymore either. I don't know where they get their books. I guess they furnish them all now.

K: Yes, they are all furnished.

M: That used to be the big thing. You would get your list and go down there and buy your books.

K: Do you remember any of the people who you went to high school with?

M: Yes, I remember quite a few of them. There were nine who graduated in our class. We graduated in 1929. There are only three of us living now: Myself, and Carrie Krall and Katherine Reed. Carrie Krall lives up on the other hill there. She is still living up there. We don't see each other very often. We had a big reunion here five years ago. We saw quite a few of them then. They are all scattered around. A lot of them aren't in Lowellville anymore. They have moved on.

K: Left Lowellville?

M: Yes, they left Lowellville. There are quite a few of them through Girard. Some of them are in Dayton. Some of them ended up in Youngstown. Quite a few of them went to Youngstown and Struthers.

K: When you were younger, what were some of the activities that you did until you were about eighteen?

M: We used to play quite a bit of ball. At that time we made our own ball field. We used to go up over the hill there and clean out a field and make our own ball field. We would carry our equipment all up there and play ball. We didn't have a ball field then. Later on we did play

a little basketball in some of the small buildings around town. In the back of the drugstore we had a hoop up and we played a lot of basketball down there in the back of the drugstore.

K: Did you sled ride?

M: Yes, we used to sled ride at what they called Cemetery Hill, Bedford Hill. It was really good sled riding in those days. You didn't have the traffic that you have today. It was nice. We used to have a place over in the field up here too. It is all built up now. There used to be cows in the field. Right above these houses here as you go back on your right side, there were cow pastures up through there. We used to sled ride in there. They don't do much sled riding anymore, only in parks or someplace like that.

K: Did you go swimming?

M: Yes, we used to go swimming. Some of the boys used to swim in the river. It was pretty dirty. You could always tell who swam in the river because they would be all grayish color. Occasionally somebody would drown there too. We used to walk to Coffee Run to swim. That was up about two and a half miles. We would walk out to Coffee Run. Today they still call the creek Coffee Run. Along the road there was a bridge and there was a pretty good hole there. Up the creek a little ways there was what they called the Sheep Hole. I guess someone must have had sheep at one time in this area. I guess that is why they called it the Sheep Hole. We used to walk out there to go swimming.

We used to do a lot of walking too. We would walk to Edinburg, Pennsylvania or we would walk to New Bedford, Pennsylvania just for something to do on the weekend. Then we spent a lot of time in the quarries here. We would swim in the quarries too, of course, but it was a little risky there because it was kind of deep. They were deep holes, but there were some that weren't bad. We swam there. Especially when the quarry slowed down a little bit, we used to spend quite a bit of time wandering around through the quarry.

K: When did you first start working? How old were you when you had your first job?

M: Right after I got out of high school I worked in the grocery store. I think we got about \$1 a day then. I was in the grocery store off and on for quite a while. I ended up working with another store, a little bigger store. That was Chuey's store. That was during the

Depression days. I worked a couple of days a week, three days a week. It got so that they were kind of busy. I ended up working pretty good. The mills started back to work again. I remember the fellows in the mills were only working one day then. They would work one day. I would work a couple of days in the grocery store and I would make about as much as they did. They worked one day, but it did seem like they were working a little bit during the Depression and some of the bad times over at Sharon Steel at that time and when Mary Furnace was here. Of course, at that time the boiler shop was down then. Ohio Edison powerhouse was down. After the Depression they started up again. That was when I went down to the powerhouse and started working.

K: Down at the Ohio Edison powerhouse?

M: Ohio Edison, yes. I think I got about 65¢ an hour or something. That was big money then. They slowed down a little bit. Some just got laid off. We went down to Toronto to work. There were quite a few of us who were laid off temporarily. We went down to the Toronto plant of Ohio Edison to work one summer. We helped put a boiler in down there. That was the big plant then. Then the Toronto plant was going down. I came back then to the Lowellville plant. They were picking up a little load then, doing a little business. That was when we got the boiler in down there. Then I got my license and I went to Sheet & Tube. Just about that time Ohio Edison was building that new plant up in Girard or Warren. Of course, that did shut us down all together.

K: Shut you down?

M: I was out of there by then. I was up at Sheet & Tube, so I stayed there.

K: During the war were there a lot of trains going through town during the Second World War?

M: Yes, there were quite a few trains in town even before that. They used to haul a lot of coal out of Pittsburgh. We had three railroad stations here in town. Of course, that was between the First and Second World Wars. There were very few passenger trains though that stopped here, very few. When I was in the service, they were still running the Capitol train. I think it went from Cleveland to Washington. I did get a ride on it from here.

K: You mentioned you were in the service. When you came back, was there a celebration in Lowellville? Did they welcome all of the veterans home?

M: Not too much. I don't think there was too much of a celebration as I recall outside of your own little, individual gatherings. When some of the ones who were in prisons came back, they did have a nice celebration.

K: Was there a Casey boy?

M: No.

Vietnam Prisoners, I think, were the ones who were celebrated. We had one or two boys who were there. He is still living. I think he is living in New Castle now. They had a little celebration for him when he came back. He was a prisoner.

K: What was it like when you came home from the war?

M: It wasn't too bad. It was really hard to get a house. You couldn't get a house. That was one of the big things. I was married. I was only married a short time. My boy was born when I was over in North Africa. He was about three years old when I came home. The big thing was that there were no houses. There wasn't a house for sale. It was very hard to find anything.

In fact, when I took this place I thought I would only be here for a short time. When I went back to work the fellow who worked down there lived here. He said that he was going to go to Milton Dam. I told him that I wanted to move into his house. He said that he would give it to me and that he was going to be going pretty soon. I was so happy that I got the house after he and his wife were out at Milton Dam. It seemed like after that there were quite a few houses starting to open up. Before that time there were absolutely no houses anywhere. You just couldn't buy a house. You had to wait and see if somebody was going to move.

My kids liked it here. They liked the hillside. I didn't think I would stay here very long. They started growing up here and they loved the hill and the country. They would go from up here to the quarry. They would go up there and fish and play around. So we never did get out of here. We are still here.

K: How long have you lived in this house?

M: I think we moved here in 1947 right after the war.

K: So almost forty years.

- M: Yes, forty years. I planted a lot of pine trees on the hillside. It was nothing but just all grass and weeds up on the hill there. I got about twelve acres there. I put pine trees up there, and they are growing pretty good.
- K: How did you meet your wife? You said you married her in the 1940's.
- M: When I worked at the powerhouse I used to run around with some of the fellows who worked there who were about my age who lived in New Castle, Pennsylvania. They knew some nurses down there. We used to go down there. Of course, my wife was a nurse. We went out with some girls, and I met my wife down there at one of the dances. That was the way it worked out. She hasn't done much nursing since we got married. That was where I met her, down at New Castle, through some of the boys who worked at the powerhouse.
- K: How many children do you have?
- M: I have four boys. Larry is the oldest one. Bill is still living at home. Jim is married; he lives in Lowellville, and Paul lives in Lowellville. We are all right around here close by.
- K: What kind of business did they get into?
- M: Larry got into the wholesale business. He has established his own business, Eastern Ohio Sales. He employs my youngest son, Paul. James is with the Vindicator right now.
- K: Did they all graduate from Lowellville High School?
- M: They all graduated from Lowellville.
- K: Earlier you mentioned you were Irish. Do you remember if there were any Irish customs here in Lowellville?
- M: No, not really. We pretty well scattered around what was here. We didn't celebrate anything outside of just church doings and things like that. Of course, at one time there were quite a few Irish here in town until the quarries came in and the mills came in and the railroads got bigger. the Italians dominated Lowellville then. We had quite a few of the Irish families in Lowellville: Burke's, Quinn's, McGinnis', Murphy's, Ruddy's, Maloney's, Joyce's, Driscoll's, and McCarthy's, but they are all scattered now. Most of them are all gone.
- K: Did they all have their own neighborhood then?

M: No, not really, no. We were pretty much here and then the Italian population started coming in. They kind of stayed more together. They were mostly on the south side and in the west end of town. There were quite a few of them here in this end of town, east end. Most of them came from the Erskine Quarry when that shut down.

The Irish and Scotch were pretty much centralized. Some of the Scotch were the Johnson's, Stewart's, Dutton's, Thiel's, and Schrum's. They more or less all lived in the center of town from Fourth Street up toward West Lowellville to the far bend there. Now it is pretty well mixed up all over.

K: Does Lowellville have any community festivals or celebrations?

M: Nothing but July 16th, that big one for the Italian festival. That is really the only thing. They have had like Lowellville Day. They tried to get people back for Lowellville Day. It didn't amount to too much.

K: Do you remember any big disasters or fires or a bank robbery, anything like that that ever occurred?

M: The one I was telling you about, the block fire, I remember that one pretty well. I can just remember seeing it. I lived right up on Third Street then, right up the hill a little ways. It was just about a half of a block away from it. I remember that fire, yes.

Then we used to have a few explosions off and on. They used to say it was a Black Hand someplace. It was dominated from the quarries. The Black Hand at that time was a big thing in a way. I never understood it too much. It was something, I suppose, like your racketeers today. They would blow a house up once in a while, blow a front porch off or something like that.

K: Did you have a rag man or an ice cream man or an iceman in town?

M: We had icemen. I remember the iceman coming around. In fact, there used to be an ice plant right up the street here by those apartments. I have gone down there for ice, yes. They used to make it in big, 200-pound pieces and lift it up with a crane and a pulley and cut it in half and half again. They would cut you off fifty pounds or twenty-five.

I do remember some rag men being in town hauling rags, yes. There used to be a few Gypsies go through town occasionally, but not lately.

K: Do you remember what your first car was?

M: I think it was a Ford. It wasn't really mine. It was a family car. It was a Ford.

K: Did they get it down here at Kroeck's?

M: No, at one time they had a Ford dealer down here, Roy Gordon. He ended up in Campbell. My brother sold cars for him for awhile. That is what John did for awhile. That garage was right near Melillo's building down there where the old streetcar used to be. The streetcar station used to be there. They sold cars there. Kroeck sold cars too. I didn't have a car until pretty late in life. My sister was at home. She had a car. I used her's quite a bit. I think she had a Dodge for the first car she had. I never did buy a new car.

K: Who sold Dodge?

M: She got that from McIntee Motors, yes. McIntee was a relative of our's, Tom McIntee.

K: Is there anything that you want to add that I haven't covered?

M: I did mention all of the stores we had in town, including the hardware store and Mary Furnace and those places, the boiler shop, the railroad stations, also the streetcar station. We used to get a lot of stuff in by streetcars too. They used to ship it in and unload it back there. I think that covers it pretty well.

K: The metal that you dad got for the boiler plant, was the metal for the boilers and stacks made locally or did they ship that in? Do you remember that?

M: I don't know where they did get that metal. It may have come from Republic Steel if they made plates like that for their stacks. I don't know. Of course, they could have shipped it in from Pittsburgh too. I wouldn't be surprised if it was coming in from Pittsburgh. I imagine they could have made it here. The time that I remember Sharon Steel it was mostly bars. Republic and Sheet & Tube at that time probably made sheet steel, I think. Sharon Steel over here was mostly bars as I recall.

I really don't know where they got that metal from. I know it used to be in big sheets. They would have to roll it. I remember them rolling it, so evidently it could have been shipped in coming in by railroad cars in big, wide

sheets. They had a contraption there, the roller. They could roll it and punch holes in it. It was punched when it was flat. They had a contraption there that would roll it. Then they also had a contraption there that made angles too, what small stuff we could angle. I remember those machines and the punch machines that punched the holes for the rivets. Everything was riveted then. We used to heat the rivets with coke to get them red-hot and throw them up to the fellows working on the stack. Those stacks were all made in sections. How they got them up there, I don't know. I was never on the job. I suppose they made a lot of it on the ground and stood them right up somehow or other.

K: I would like to thank you for the interview.

M: It is alright. I appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW