

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Leetonia, Ohio

Residence Experience

O. H. 849

ANDY DUKO

Interviewed

by

Theodore Carchedi

on

May 20, 1986

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: ANDY DUKO
INTERVIEWER: Theodore Carchedi
SUBJECT: Residence Experience
DATE: May 20, 1986

C: This is an interview with Andy Duko for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Ted Carchedi, at Leetonia, Ohio, on May 20, 1986, at 3:07 p.m. This is a history of Leetonia, Ohio.

Andy, can you tell me when you were born and when you came to this country? I understand that you were born in Czechoslovakia. Can you tell me about that?

D: Oh yes, we came here in 1903. I was about three years old.

C: You were born in what year?

D: 1898.

C: 1898?

D: Yes.

C: Okay. Alright, you were born in 1898 and you came here when you were five years old then?

D: About four years old.

C: Okay, you were about four years old.

D: We landed in New Castle.

C: New Castle, Pennsylvania.

D: Yes. Then we went to Lowellville.

C: Lowellville?

D: Yes.

C: My hometown.

D: Then we went to Struthers and from Struthers we came to Leetonia.

C: Why did you come from that area to Leetonia? What prompted you and your family to come here?

D: My dad served in the general Army for six years. He couldn't take the racket. He was always fighting.

C: He was always fighting?

D: So he deserted and he came over here and then he sent for us. After we came to Leetonia, he started work at the west end, Grafton. Do you know where the west end is?

C: The west end of Leetonia?

D: Yes, Grafton.

C: Yes.

D: On both sides of the street, was the nicest part of Leetonia, all beautiful homes. Way at the other end was the McKeefrey farm. He owned the blast furnace and he owned nearly all the land back there on the west end. He had one of the beautiful farms in the state of Ohio. It was big. He used to have cows, 150 jersey cows. He had the most beautiful horses you ever saw. He had the most pigs, he had sheep, he had goats, everything, on that big farm. In 1910, I think they built a mansion. You ought to go out and see that.

C: I've seen a picture of it.

D: Did you?

C: Yes.

D: They built that mansion. They called him W.B. McKeefrey. I ain't going to tell you the worst part of it because it would be in the records.

C: You don't want to tell me that?

D: No. I could tell you. . .

C: I might already know what you are referring to.

D: Yes. Well, there are a lot of things I want to say, but it would be on record. It is a good thing, Ted, that I'm telling you about the farm. It was beautiful. I'm telling you. You never saw anything like it. It's one of the nicest farms in the state of Ohio.

C: Did he employ a lot of people?

D: He had the blast furnace and he had coal company down in West Virginia. He had about 300 people working in the blast furnace. I worked there for a while. He would never go down and. . .

C: I understand that he didn't pay a lot of his employees.

D: I'm sorry. I won't tell you.

C: You don't want to tell me? Okay. That is alright. I guess he could be considered a millionaire. He was a millionaire?

D: He was. He was a millionaire. Like I told you, he owned the west end of Leetonia. He owned a big, beautiful dry goods store, a grocery store, a butcher shop right there on the corner. It is still there.

C: Did your father work for McKeefrey then?

D: Oh yes.

C: Where, at the furnaces?

D: Yes, at the furnace. Well, he quit. . . I don't know how to tell you.

C: You don't know how to tell me?

D: No. He quit the furnace then, see, and my dad went down to this other furnace. It used to be. . .

C: Cherry Valley.

D: Yes, Cherry Valley. I worked down there; I used to run it.

C: So Cherry Valley was like a competitor with McKeefrey's then?

D: That's right, yes. Cherry Valley was known for the best Bessemer iron in the state of Ohio.

C: The best Bessemer, the best in the process, right?

D: Yes. They were known all over.

C: What did your father do at the. . .

D: Just a laborer.

C: He was a laborer.

D: Yes.

C: What did you do over at the furnaces?

D: I worked what you would call a stove tender.

C: A what?

D: Stove tender.

C: A stove tender?

D: I controlled the gas that would go into the furnace. When the foreman would be on vacation, I would take his place. That is how I came to run the furnace. I would run 300 men. And the coal company, they only, I think, would run 100 men. That is how I used to run the furnace there, two weeks, while he was on vacation.

C: What was Leetonia like in the early 1900's? I mean, what type of community was it? Can you tell me a little bit?

D: There used to be a steel mill here. Used to be a pottery here.

C: What other businesses?

D: Used to be a boiler shop--yes, a big boiler works here at one time.

C: Where was that located at?

D: Right down here.

C: Would you describe that for me?

D: Well, the boiler shop used to make boilers.

C: Yes, but where was it specifically?

D: Right down here by the railroad tracks where the tool works is now.

C: Where the tool company is now?

D: Yes.

C: Okay.

D: That is the tool building; that used to be Woodward's.

C: Woodward's?

D: Yes. They owned it. They lived in town. They ran it for a long time. There used to be a rolling mill, a steel mill, and a pottery. The pottery is down there; do you know where the IGA store is? All that land used to be a steelworks, pottery. There used to be a little stable there. That's where we used to keep the horses to carry all the dead people to the cemetery.

C: Who owned the pottery?

D: I really don't know. I don't know who owned the steel mill either. The Pennsylvania railroad was a main line from Fort Wayne, Indiana. There used to be an Erie line going through here. There used to be a Pennsylvania railroad station and there used to be an Erie railroad station.

C: How about some of the . . . You mentioned the McKee-freys, but were there some other prominent families that owned businesses, too?

D: Oh yes, Cavanaugh's.

C: Cavanaugh's?

D: Yes.

C: What did they won?

D: Dry goods.

C: Dry goods?

D: And Ballentines.

C: Ballentines?

D: Yes, he used to be a mayor, too. He used to have a grocery store, a dry goods store, Ballentines, down in the main part of the town.

C: Down on Main Street?

D: Yes. Johnson had the brewery, Harry Slater. There used to be a . . . Charlie used to have a nice butcher shop. They had a reputation of making the best bologna in the state of Ohio.

C: The best bologna?

D: Yes, sir.

C: Is that right?

D: Yes, sir.

C: They had a slaughterhouse?

D: Yes, yes on the south side.

C: Oh yes.

D: And it was bologna. I'll tell you.

C: They had good meats there then?

D: Oh they were clean. They did all their slaughtering. They used to make the bologna right there.

C: They did all their work from scratch?

D: Yes.

C: All their products were their products. How long were they around till? Do you know?

D: Oh, I don't know.

C: 1920's? Did they go till the. . . Farther than that?

D: Yes, they did because I got married in 1924 and I used to go with my sister to Transfer, Pennsylvania and before we would go. . . We used to drive. Before we would go I would go down there and he would give me four or five inches of bologna, for nothing.

C: Is that right? That would hold you for your trip then, right?

D: No, I used to go out there and give it to the neighbors. They wanted to buy it off of me and I said, "I can't sell it to you, but I'll give it to you."

C: That was nice. Were there any other families that you can recall that owned businesses that were kind of prominent in the community?

D: Well, there was Slater. He was a butcher. He used to play in the band. He used to play the piccolo. He still got it. He was so clean. Boy, when he cut a piece of meat, boy, you could almost eat it. It was so clean. He had a white shirt, a nice collar and every-

thing else, and his apron would be just sparkling. When he cut a piece off they ate it--Harold Slater. He used to have a big barrel with big dill pickles. When I was a kid, I would go in there. We kids years ago were poor, we didn't have enough to eat. I'm telling you. Oh, I could tell you our side, but it is going to be on record. We would go in there and Harold would always give us a pickle. I remember.

C: Did he give it to you for nothing?

D: For nothing, yes, because he knew we were poor and we didn't have enough to eat. I can't tell you all the things. I can't tell you.

C: There are a lot of things that you can't tell me. Why? Would you be implicating someone?

D: No. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be right. I could tell you portions, but I don't want it on the record.

C: Okay. Alright. We won't talk about it then.

D: You'll have to come down sometime and you and I will talk a little closer.

C: Alright.

D: And I'll tell you things that will open your eyes up. But I won't put it on there.

C: You won't put it on record?

D: No. No.

C: Okay. Alright, that's okay. During this time, during the early 1900's, Leetonia is a pretty bustling community.

D: It was. Oh, yes. The Forth of July, all the holidays, we had a hell of a big time.

C: Were there a lot of people in town?

D: No. Not too many. No. There were not too many people, but they were all like your own neighbors. Everybody knew each other. You never. . . Today, boy, you would put two locks on each door. Years ago you would leave the door open.

C: It was more close-knit then?

D: Yes. I could tell you a lot of bad things happened here, now.

C: Well, I've heard stories about the Black Hand in town.

D: Right.

C: During the early years. I've heard a lot of stories about that. Maybe you could tell me more if you would like to. I was given names about people in the organization, some of the killings and assassinations that went on. Maybe if you want to tell me a little bit more you can.

D: Well, I won't tell you their names, but I saw two killings.

C: You saw two of them.

D: When we were kids. yes.

C: What happened?

D: The Black Hand.

C: Why did they kill these people?

D: Why, they were blackmailing each other. They would come out and collect the money, they wouldn't give it to them.

C: What did they do, shoot them?

D: Yes. They killed them in front of us. Went to what they called Clover Hill. That is way out at the west end. There is a big house there. We were kids, only about thirteen years old or something like that. We were always out in the country hunting rabbits and. . . We would never go to town. We hunted frogs and we would go fishing and everything else. We were coming this way, right below the Clover Hill's house and we saw a guy running out of that house and two guys after him with a rifle. He only got down a little ways; then they started shooting at him and he fell in the ditch. The other guy who was driving was down there and they. . .

C: Shot' him.

D: Some more. I can see that.

C: You were a young boy at the time.

D: Yes.

C: How did you feel when you saw that?

D: We thought it was awful. Went down on the west end on Washington Street. We didn't see the woman shoot him, but when they brought the guy out of the house, the woman shot her husband right between the eyes. All he had was black spots.

C: The woman shot her husband?

D: Yes.

C: Do you know what the circumstances were?

D: No. We were just kids. The funny part that we can't forget about is, we heard the shooting. We were down on the corner; we used to work there right on the square there. We started running up there. So we went up there and one guy who was in the house, they had him in the car. He pulled by the road and he said, we kids got around you know, he said, "Get away boys, get away, give the man some fresh air." And he was dead as a doornail. (Laughter)

C: That must have been quite an experience for you.

D: It was. We didn't see the woman shoot him, but when they brought him out he already had a black spot right between the eyes where she shot him.

C: I'm sure you heard of a lot of other stories like that, too.

D: That in front of the church.

C: Yes. I heard that one. Could you tell me that story again?

D: Well, I wasn't there.

C: What you heard.

D: We were downtown, you see, and we heard this shooting. There were two guys shooting at another man, right there by the church and Mrs. Crawford was walking there. They didn't hit the guy, but they hit Mrs. Crawford, hit her in the leg, shot her on her leg.

C: What was her name?

D: Crawford.

C: Crawford.

D: (Laughter)

C: It was an accident that they shot her?

D: Oh, yes.

C: Because they were trying to get this other guy?

D: Yes, yes.

C: What was that guy's name? Do you remember?

D: I wouldn't tell you the name anyhow if I did know it. I'm not mentioning any names.

C: Okay.

D: My name is on there.

C: Okay.

D: I'll just tell you what I saw. I tell you, it was action stuff.

C: Okay, fine. Well, it must have been a wild town then.

D: The deadline, the church. Grafton was a different part of the town. The guys from the west couldn't go over to the south side. The guys from the south side couldn't go over to the west end. That was a deadline.

C: So it was like everybody had their own turf then?

D: Right.

C: Where exactly was Grafton?

D: From the Catholic church clear out.

C: From St. Patrick's south?

D: Yes.

C: Okay. That was the. . .

D: West.

C: West. That was considered Grafton.

D: Yes, yes. That was the nicest part of Leetonia. There were beautiful homes on each side. When he started. . . See, he started a steel mill and he went bankrupt.

C: Who is that?

D: McKeefrey.

C: Okay.

D: He broke the bank. Eventually he started tearing all these houses down. He tore them down or he moved them to make the steel mill. Now this is a fact because I worked there. They started putting the steel mill up and it only got part of the ways and it went down. I remember I worked for people from Pittsburgh; they were tearing all these steel structures up, you know, the buildings. They were tearing it down and a guy gave me a job. That is all I know. I worked for him. He tore all those houses down, moved them. He ruined it. There used to be four saloons right on that corner--four saloons.

C: Just in that area of town.

D: Just in that, that square. You ought to go there now and look around there.

C: I've been in that area.

D: Were you? Well, right in that square--four saloons.

C: Overall, Leetonia itself had a lot of saloons, too. I'll tell you that much.

D: Oh, yes. There are four or five downtown.

C: That is really something.

D: There used to be a Ferguson, Daggond's, Gallagher's, Weedmyer's, they all had saloons.

C: How come there were so many in such a small town?

D: I don't know. (Laughter)

C: Well, there were a lot of different groups, maybe, that just liked to drink.

D: Well everybody. . . We never saw any drunks. We only had one policeman--one cop on daytime, nobody at night. There was no fuss about it.

C: There weren't any problems?

D: No.

C: When you talked about Grafton, more or less, having their own separate area even though it was still part of the town, was that because there were different, say, nationalities that lived in Grafton?

D: Right. They were Slovak and Italian.

C: Slovaks and Italians lived in Grafton?

D: Yes and the south side was all Protestant, very few Catholics over there.

C: Where was the north side then?

D: The north side is right here. Most of it was Catholic. All around the world it's mostly Catholic today.

C: Was there a lot of tension between the different nationalities?

D: No.

C: No?

D: Of course, we kids never paid any attention to it. They went to a Catholic school. The guys used to go to a public school. They had a public school on the south side. They had a big public school right here on the hill. Right below it was. . .

C: That was the old high school?

D: Yes. Then in the 1940's, I think, about the 1930's or 1940's they built a high school.

C: 1937. I think it was 1937. Did you go to St. Patrick's School?

D: Oh yes. We had nuns there. Oh, they were beautiful women.

C: What was it like going to school at St. Patrick's the Catholic school?

D: We all loved the nuns.

C: You liked them a lot?

D: You bet you. There was one nun, I'll never forget it, she said, "Andy, when you leave here remember one thing, keep the Ten Commandments and you'll never get in trouble." I did. I had six kids. . .

C: That's good.

D: I worked for the service. I only jumped a friend once over there, in France, because I remember. . . When I used to go out with the women, I would remember the nun.

C: Is that right? That always stuck in your mind then.

D: Yes, and it still is today. I kept faith in my wife, never fooled around one time. I had plenty of times, plenty of chances.

C: That's, that's very unusual today.

D: That's for sure.

C: People being loyal to their spouse.

D: I always kept my faith as best I could.

I raised three boys, three girls. Do you want me to tell you what happened with them?

C: Sure.

D: Well, I played baseball for about sixteen years. When they once started playing, going to high school, I told them I said, "Go out for baseball." I said, "You're a good ball player," because I know I went through it. I used to have good jobs because I played baseball, but I wasn't big enough to go to the big leagues. I had a chance to go to South Carolina, but I didn't want to leave the girls.

C: Is that right? Baseball was a big sport in Leetonia years ago.

D: You said a mouthful. Yes, sir.

C: Tell me about the baseball leagues a little bit, the early years.

D: Well, I'll tell you about the boys first.

C: What are all your sons' names?

D: Edward, Lawrence, and George.

C: And your daughters?

D: Betty, Helen, and Mary Catherine.

C: Okay. Andy, let's talk about the baseball in town. It was a very popular sport in Leetonia in the early part of the century and. . .

D: Oh. Down there in the bottom that used to be a ball field. That's where we used to have all our doings. That's where we used to have the fireworks, used to have the greasy pig.

C: The greasy pig. What was that?

D: Well, it's like the Forth of July.

C: Oh, they grease a pig and you try to catch it.

D: Yes. You had the greasy. . .

C: That was down, where you are talking about where they had the baseball, is behind the auto parts store now in the downtown area.

D: Yes.

C: Across from the IGA.

D: Down that way. Down that way. Down at the west.

C: Okay. The west from there.

D: That's where we had it, boy, I'm telling you. Right here before we started building this house, this used to be the ball field.

C: Where this house is right now?

D: Yes. I used to play here.

C: You mean, that was a ball field, too.

D: Oh, yes. That all was an open field. We played the Homestead Grays here. Did you ever here about the Homestead Grays?

C: The Homestead Grays?

D: Colored team.

C: No, I didn't know that.

D: Oh, you ought to see those guys play baseball.

C: The Homestead Grays they were called?

D: Yes.

C: Tell me about that.

D: Joe Page, Joe Page pitched there.

C: Joe Page?

D: Yes.

C: Is he related to Satchel Page?

D: That's it, Satchel Page.

C: Satchel Page, is that. . . Satchel Page pitched here?

D: Yes.

C: Is that right?

D: I bat against him.

C: And how did you do?

D: I got two hits off of him.

C: You got two hits off of Satchel Page?

D: Oh yes. I used to play left field. Those guys started batting there and I used to go clear up there on the road.

C: Is that right?

D: As soon as they started swinging, I knew they could hit like that. As soon as they started swinging, I would run back there and be right there when it came. I got thirteen chances. Those guys were mad because I wouldn't come in. You know what they started to do? Started batting left handed; hitting the ball the other way.

C: Is that right?

D: That is the God-truth.

C: Did the Homestead Grays beat the boys from Leetonia?

D: Oh yes, nine to four.

C: What year was that, Andy? Do you remember? It was before World War I obviously.

D: Oh yes, yes, yes. I think it was around 1917 or 1918. No it was before that because I left Leetonia to go up over to Pennsylvania, West Middlesex. My brother was a chief chemist with the blast furnace over there; he was chief chemist and he was just starting the furnace up and they needed somebody working the chemist, so he came over and got me and I started working over there.

C: So it must have been before 1917 that you played that team, right?

D: Yes. We had a baseball team over there, I'm telling you.

C: Over where?

D: West Middlesex.

C: Oh. You had a team over there, too.

D: I had five brothers. There were five brothers on the team.

C: Dukos.

D: No, no. They were Dingers. The name was Dingers.

C: Dingers.

D: Five. And they, oh they taught me how to play baseball.

C: Did they?

D: So I brought those boys over one Sunday to play Leetonia.

C: Is that right?

D: And they had a hell of a good team.

C: Yes. Is that right? Now this was a men's league though. This was an adult league; it was men's.

D: Oh yes, yes.

C: Was there more than one team in Leetonia or was there. . .

D: No. Just one.

C: There was just one team.

D: Just Leetonia. I used to come home on a Sunday, you know. There used to be streetcars from there--from West Middlesex to Sharon, from Sharon to Youngstown, from Youngstown to Leetonia. I came over and wanted to play with Leetonia and they thought I wasn't good enough. So that's when I brought the team over and knocked that off. (Laughter)

C: You got them back.

D: The worst part of it; they had a pitcher there, a fellow by the name of Tony Lockman and he was a good one.

C: What was his name?

D: Lockman.

C: Lockman?

D: Yes.

C: From Leetonia?

D: Yes.

C: Okay.

D: I got three hits off of him. Boy, was he mad. I said, "The next time I come out to play with Leetonia let me play with them."

C: That's something. So how many years did you play base ball then?

D: About six years more.

C: You played six more.

D: Oh yes. I played professional football.

C: You played professional football?

D: Oh yes, yes. I played against guys 220 pounds, 250 pounds.

C: What team did you play for?

D: A little town over in Washingtonville.

C: They had like a professional football team.

D: Oh yes.

C: What was the name of that team?

D: Just Washingtonville.

C: It was Washingtonville?

D: They are all dead but me.

C: They are all gone now.

D: Every one of them, they're all gone but me.

C: Can you remember some of them? Tell me those names.

D: Stouffer, Flast, Stimmerman, Dishman.

C: That's going back a ways now.

D: That's for sure.

C: That's good. That's alright. Okay. So you had to work in West Middlesex, you said, then for a while. Then the war started.

D: Yes.

C: And then what happened?

D: Well, after the war was over I went back there for a while.

C: How much time did you spend in the Army?

D: I think around eighteen and a half months.

C: Then you came back after the war, to Leetonia? Did you come back directly to Leetonia?

D: No. I stayed there for a while and then I came over to Leetonia.

C: Okay.

D: The furnace went out. But this furnace was going. The boss I used to work for was there.

C: Over. . .

D: West Middlesex.

C: West Middlesex.

D: He got to liking me. He used to take me everywhere he had a big national automobile and he would let me drive it. So when my friend came out he came over here and he got these people down there to get me a job. That's when I went to work for Cherry Valley.

C: What year was that then did you start down at Cherry Valley?

D: Around, I would imagine 1924, unless it was before then, maybe about 1921, 1922.

C: So when the Depression came around, what effects did that have on the town and your family and you?

D: Mine? When you got six kids, you got to have a good job. We lived by the gun. If we wanted any meat, I would go get the gun out of my cupboard there and the first thing I saw, I shot. I didn't care what the hell it was or whose chicken or pig or who it was.

C: Because you had to feed six kids.

D: You're damn right. I had a few thousand dollars left in cash.

C: Did you lose your job at Cherry Valley?

D: Cherry Valley went out in 1927, left.

C: 1927 it went out? Is that right? So how long were you unemployed then? Was it a long time?

D: Well, no.

C: It was a long time ago.

D: I think maybe 1928 or something like that. I got a job at a lumber company.

C: So, okay. You were off for a while then you went to a lumber company. Was that in town here?

D: Oh yes, Mellinger's.

C: Oh, you went to work with Mellinger's.

D: I worked three or four years there.

C: I see.

D: I went to the service with two boys. They got a history too; I could tell you another thing about that. (Laughter)

C: But you're not going to tell me, are you?

D: Well, they had to leave the country, those two boys.

C: Did they?

D: We joined the Legion. There were only three of us who were members of the Legion. I didn't even know if nobody was going to. . . Were you down there?

C: The American Legion? Yes.

D: I'm the oldest one in there.

C: You are the oldest veteran. The only veteran from World War I.

D: Right.

C: Who was the last. . . There was another gentleman that died not too long ago?

D: Culver Stewart.

C: Culver Stewart.

Let's go back to the Depression a little bit. So it was kind of tough for you and your family until you went back to work at the lumber mill.

D: I worked for \$.10 an hour.

C: \$.10 an hour at the lumber mill? My goodness.

D: It went up to \$.19 an hour. The highest I ever made was \$2.40 an hour.

C: That's unbelievable.

D: And I did pretty good.

C: And you had six kids too, right?

D: You're damn right I did. Of course, I used to give them jobs setting pins up in bowling allies and stuff like that.

C: Your kids worked too.

D: Oh yes. Setting pins in bowling allies. I took time out and showed them how to hunt, how to fish, how to---everything. I took time out. In other words I was a buddy of theirs, I wasn't a father, I was friend.

C: I'm sure they appreciated that.

D: They do.

C: There is a lot of emphasis on baseball and football.

D: Oh, football. My kids played football over here. Two years they won the state championship. And a couple of years they have never been beaten.

C: Is that around after the war, after World War II?

D: Yes, in the 1940's, in the 1940's.

C: Well, Andy, is there anything else you can tell me about the town?

D: I can tell you all day, but that's alright.

C: You could probably go on forever. Okay. Thank you.

D: Yes, sir. Always welcome.

C: Alright. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW