

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Depression

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1752

EDWARD MANNING

Interviewed

On

November 29, 1995

By

Cynthia Marsh

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Interviewee: EDWARD MANNING

Interviewer: Cynthia Marsh

Subject: The Depression

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This is an interview with Edward Manning for the Youngstown State Oral History Department by Cynthia Marsh at 461 Gypsy Lane, Youngstown Ohio on November 29, at approximately 1:15 pm.

CM: Mr. Manning can you tell me about your life during the Depression?

EM: My life, well I was born in Smokey Hollow and we moved up to the North Side in 1916. I went to St. Edwards and then I switched to the McKinley School and later on I went to Rayen School. In the meantime, I delivered papers on the North Side. I sold about 200 Saturday Evening Posts to the people on the North Side, Ladies Home Journal and the Home and Country Journal. That was a great experience, great sales experience. The North Side at that time was the quietest residential section in the city. Fifth Avenue, Norwood, Laura- there was crime going on – Fairgreen an North High Street and Broadway. It just seemed that everybody wanted to move to the North Side. Rayen School was one of the finest schools in the city- some say in Northeastern Ohio.

CM: I never knew that. Why do you think it was such a good school?

EM: Well, in the city back in the middle of the nineteenth century, Judge Rayen gave an endowment for the Rayen School and the teachers up there got an extra stipend or extra money and some of them were like college professors. And the ones I had in the early days of Rayen were from the old Rayen on Wick Avenue. They brought the same expertise and instruction right up to the new school. Education was the main thing and they were undoubtedly the best, some of them. This English teacher was a world traveler, and one of them had written the history of Northeastern Ohio. It was a monumental book and that book is in a lot of the libraries now. Well,

that is as much as anybody would want. It was undoubtedly one of the best high schools in this section of the country.

CM: Do you remember a lot of the families being on welfare? On relief?

EM: Well, that wasn't until the Depression see. I got something right here. Now when we graduated from Rayen the Palace Theatre was closed but they had to open it up for the graduation exercises. Up until that time, a few months before that, Vaudeville was here in Youngstown. But the Depression killed Vaudeville.

We've done education, what else do you want now?

CM: Did your father work at all during the Depression?

EM: During the Depression, well he was a city worker. He worked fairly steady.

CM: What kinds of jobs did you have?

EM: Well, he was a puddler in the mill and made rod iron. They melted that iron at 2000 degrees Fahrenheit. It was no longer a man's work when the prices got too high so they started using steel. That is what put him out of work and that is why he went to work for the city.

CM: Do you remember what kind of job your dad did in the city?

EM: Well, he worked for the street department.

CM: Did you work during the Depression?

EM: Well, I was working for the newspaper as a station manager and that is how I learned a lot about people on welfare. The people would get, during the Depression, they would get five dollars a week from the LA Council. That is the same as the United Fund today. The welfare was privately funded. Then there was the Red Cross gave flour to the people providing they [mumble]. And then there was a baker. There was a man who had a store, Ohl's, and it was across the street from the City Hall. He gave out loaves of bread. He was the mayor of Youngstown in a part of the twenties for a short time. Well, so much for that.

You talk about the Depression. Now all of the banks in Youngstown, when they closed, all of them closed except for The Mahoning National Bank. That was the only one that didn't close. That was our only local bank.

CM: During the Depression do you remember any of FDR's Relief Programs?

EM: Oh, yes. I remember they spoke about that. Well, when FDR became President, the banks were all closed all over the United States and they had banked up a whole lot of money. But anyways, in Washington at that time, they had what they called the Braintrusters. They brought them from Columbia University and they started writing a law and anyways at that time they looked upon Roosevelt as a modern-day Moses. He was leading these people out of the desert, see. And then he closed the banks for three or four days and he got everything straightened out. Then they opened them with some money. Then anyways they started the Civilian Conservation Corps. They took these boys whose parents were on welfare and they took them out into Montana and out into the mountains. And their job was to, well they were doing forestry work. And they got \$30 a month. Now \$25 was sent to the parents and the boys could keep five dollars. But one of the bad things about it, they said that Roosevelt was trying to be a dictator. And the Civilian Conservation Corps they were dressed in khaki, the same as the soldiers. So anyways there was so much thunder raised that they went ahead and changed it to forest green. It had nothing to do with the military. That was the undercurrent going around that Roosevelt wanted to get them in the army and make something of them. But anyways, that wasn't it. It was one of the most useful agencies of the New Deal. And another was the Federal Bank Deposits Insurance, so that the companies or the people rather who had money in the bank, the government would write off their loss. And one of the saddest things was the people at that time, if they had any stock in the bank, if you had \$10,000 in the bank and the bank closed, you had to come over with another \$10,000. This was called the Double Identity Law. In 1936, they repealed that because of the Bank Deposit Insurance. So that is why a lot of those old families lost so much money because the bank closed. It was an awful hardship on them. So the only bank that didn't close in Youngstown was the Mahoning National Bank. Then another thing was that they passed another law, the Security Exchange Commission to regulate or put a restraint on these stock brokers and the stock wasn't so easy to sell and it wasn't so easy to buy because there was too much speculation in 1929 and that is what caused the Depression, one of the reasons or one of the causes. And, of course, all the people seemed to have lost faith in Roosevelt though, they looked upon him like a modern-day Moses. And he started the WPA and the people who were on welfare were getting groceries every week. Well, they started getting fifteen dollars a week. The pay was based on the cost of living. Now in New York City they would get about \$24 a week, but down in Alabama they only got \$9 a week. But the person in Alabama with his \$9 was just as good as the fellow who was getting \$24. It was regionalized basis for pay.

CM: Do you remember how much bread cost during the Depression?

EM: Oh, yeah. Bread was ten cents a loaf and you could buy three for a quarter down at Ohl's.

CM: Do you remember having a lot of fresh fruit down at your house or a lot of fresh produce at your house?

EM: Produce? Well, that is a good question. At that time, they had what they called the people who never raised food before, and they started to raise their own gardens. And then that is what helped them out too, you see. Everybody was using vacant lots and a lot of times somebody would plow the land up for them and that would help a lot of the families who were hungry. And a lot of people were getting the Red Cross flour.

The Red Cross also gave out corduroy pants to the boys. A lot of people had gardens then and they did a lot of gardening. They did a lot of canning and preserving up until the First World War. I mean the Second World War. And then they made a mistake because the canneries today don't have any competition. But say up until about 1941 they had all kinds of competition because so many people raised their own food. And you'd go into these grocery stores and they had mason jars stacked up and they would sell seeds and everything. But now you go into a grocery store and you don't see anything. That is why the price of food has gone up because the canneries today don't have any competition.

CM: Did your family have a garden or a farm?

EM: No, but see you could buy bushels and my mother did a lot of canning and preserving. And on the farms, you could buy a bushel-load of anything. A lot of people had peach trees and then they would buy a bushel load of pears and plums, and the farmers would come around and sell them house-to-house. And then they would buy strawberry preserves, or make cans of preserved strawberries. But then as the war came on they started leveling off, they stopped. A lot of them started doing defense work and they forgot about the canning. You could buy a can of tomatoes for fifteen cents. And then, let's see... well it was during the Second World War and some of them were canning but it just wasn't as much as it was before. And now there are very few. And there are no gardens around really.

CM: Do you remember what holidays were like? Do you remember what Christmas was like during the Depression?

EM: Oh, it was just as it is now. Nothing really changed a bit

CM: Were there a lot of gifts? Did you have a tree?

EM: Oh yeah, we most definitely had a tree. And one of the things that kids in those days, they would get sleds for Christmas. But they don't get sleds anymore because now there is no more snow and it doesn't stay on the ground long enough for you to sled ride. So that is one item that they don't get for Christmas anymore.

CM: What did you do for entertainment during the Depression?

EM: Well entertainment, well that is a good question. Up until 1929 that Vaudeville was excellent entertainment. You'd have five acts and you'd have a picture show, you'd have the newsreel, and you'd have a comedy and you'd have five acts of Vaudeville. The Depression came on and they forgot about vaudeville because it was too expensive. But I really say that people in those days had more entertainment than we have today. Because Vaudeville was live acting and TV today is going over the tube, it isn't the same. At least that is my opinion. Because there is nothing that beats live acting.

CM: Did you ever go to Idora Park?

EM: Well, I used to work out there.

CM: Oh, what did you do out there?

EM: Oh, I worked at the swimming pool. Mostly the swimming pool was a separate entity from the park.

CM: Where you a lifeguard?

EM: No, I just worked by checking clothes.

CM: And you delivered newspapers too?

EM: Well, I worked on Saturdays and Sundays when it was real busy. See the Idora swimming pool was a separate company and they had to pay a certain percentage of their earning at the gate and that went to the owners, you see. The owners of the park.

CM: Do you remember your friends being very poor during the Depression?

EM: Well, now that is a good question but what we called poor, it was some of the people over on the North Side and their sons were delivering newspapers. And they weren't called poor. But in those days, if you wanted a quarter, you had to go out and work for it. Now everybody is trying to get the government to give them something. Over on the North Side, naturally, there were some fathers who didn't have a good job but we didn't really regard anybody as poor, you know what I mean? And another thing that I wanted to tell you about was that the grandparents then, they were part of the family. We would always talk to them. But now the grandparents, we ship them off to a nursing home. See that is the difference- there is a break up in the family. Back then all of the grandparents in the neighborhood, they were living with their grandchildren. And we talked to them and we used to learn from them, and in fact I did too. I did a research paper down there at the University about an eighty-five year old woman, a neighbor, when I was ten

years old and an eighty-five year old woman told me about how this man by the name of John Hunt Boardman was headed for Youngstown, and she was in church out in Liberty Township and it was Sunday and this man said that he was headed for Youngstown. I asked Professor Earnhart if I could do a report on it and he said yes. Well, if it wasn't for that woman telling me that she remembered when Clarence Darrow was sworn into the bar in 1877, and I did a book report. And it went on to Darrow had lived in Youngstown for two years- on Wick and Scott. On the fringe of Youngstown State University now. And his biography don't tell you that.

CM: That's true and that is interesting. What do you think caused the Depression?

EM: Well, the economists now they are saying that the cause of the Depression was the stock market crash and also the other reason was economists say that people didn't have enough money to buy back what they were producing. And then there was another thing that was probably the worst thing in the Depression was that Smoot-Hawley tariff bill. We put a tariff on everything and then Europe retaliated and then they weren't able to pay the war debt and that just made it worse on the Depression, instead of making it better.

CM: Yes, that's true. Do you think that your family was well off during the Depression?

EM: I don't know. For one thing we ate good. You see, the women then were born on farms and they were exceptionally good cooks, as all women are. I think they could make the dollar go a little farther than most women. That's what helped them out.

CM: During the Depression, was there one certain food that you ate more than others?

EM: No, we had a variety of food. But now in some sections of the city some people had their water shut off and they would have to go to the, which is illegal, they would turn on the hydrants at the curb.

CM: Oh really, so they would take water from the fire hydrants?

EM: Yeah.

CM: Well, what did they do for heat?

EM: Well in some sections they even had a faucet where they would turn it on. I've seen that. And then there was a law here in Ohio, that says that they are not allowed to turn the water off for not paying, especially if there was somebody sick in the house. So, they would leave the water on and they couldn't turn it off.

CM: Which newspaper did you work for?

EM: The Telegram.

CM: Did the Vindicator exist back then? Did you ever work for the Vindicator?

EM: Later on, I did.

CM: So, you worked for both newspapers?

EM: Both, yeah.

CM: But only The Telegram during the Depression?

EM: Yeah, when I was in high school.

CM: How much did you get paid?

EM: It was just four dollars a week.

CM: Did you keep that money or did you give it to the family?

EM: Well, I gave it to the family but when a new subscription was up, we got fifty cents, see, and that helped to increase the earnings.

CM: Do you remember if there was a big competition between The Telegram and The Vindicator?

EM: There was competition, oh year, there was a bitter competition.

CM: Can you tell me a little bit about the competition?

EM: Oh, yeah. Well, like on the extra papers. They would always try to- well, here's what happened. This one time there was a murder- a state policeman was murdered over in Pennsylvania by a man named, well I'm not really sure. I can't think of the man's name. But anyways to make a long story short, they chased them all the way from, I think it was right here in New Castle. So what happened was they chased them all the way and founded them in Arizona. And they brought them back and they were both electrocuted. And the way it was- you want to talk about newspaper competition in those days- well anyways, a lot of people thought that she wouldn't be electrocuted, but she was. But The Telegram had a man down in Harrisburg

in the electrocution chamber. And The Telegram had printed the newspapers even before she was electrocuted. They had them loaded on trucks and automobiles. Then when she was electrocuted, they had these trucks and when they received the signal (they had the long-distance lines open from Harrisburg to Youngstown) and when they gave the signal, they all started selling the papers. They actually started selling the papers before she was executed. Now that was just competition. They wanted to be the first, see? That's just how it was then. Although they didn't make any money on these extra papers. They had to pay all of their men over time, but it was just the idea of being first. That is what competition did. That is a good example of that.

CM: Did everybody go to school during the Depression?

EM: Yes, see that's a good question because when we graduated Mr. Guyoll came into the Board of Education and he says the mills are working at 6% but the schools are working 100%. They wouldn't quit school then because there were no jobs and they wanted to get as good an education as they could. And then, here's another thing. The assistant principal of Rayen School said that on the cold days he noticed that the attendance was high because their homes were cold. They would come to school. And another thing- the public library was open on a Sunday. And the private reading room was crowded with men and their reading. And their circulation was at an all time high at the public library, because they had more time to read. So I was down at that library many times and they were packed.

CM: Do you remember a lot of family activities during the Depression?

EM: Well yeah because people's entertainment, it was more home oriented. Today it is all really different. People used to huddle around their homes. Incidentally there was a theatre man who was in our neighborhood and he said, you know it's only 10% of the people who keep this theater going. Well, I know that people on the North Side and people in our neighborhood never went to a picture show. But now with all of this entertainment and your TV... Now look at how they can go up to Cleveland or Pittsburgh to a football game with their money in their hands. It wasn't like that then. If they went to a football game, it was either a high school game or they used to have the sandlot games at Evan's Field. It was home-oriented. They did all of their entertaining at home. But now they have everything and dinners are catered out if you have a fiftieth anniversary, or any kind of social event.

CM: Do you remember neighbors helping one another?

EM: Well one thing about the neighbors- there wasn't as many of them and all of the children were raised with the others on their three or four blocks. But today, they don't even know the people on their own block because the automobile has changed everything. See they used to walk

to the store, and they walked to the synagogue, and they walked to the church. But now, they get in the car and they don't know their neighborhood as well as they did then.

CM: Did your family own a car?

EM: No, never. The one you interviewed yesterday was the first to buy a car.

CM: Oh, wow. Can you think of anything else that you can add about the Depression?

EM: Well for one thing- take for instance shopping. The grocery shopping back then, they used to shop at a neighborhood grocery store. They were more friendly and they thanked you for buying two items. You go into a supermarket now and buy thirty items and you get no thank you. And there are fewer stores now, but I think it was better when they had all of these grocery stores on the corner.

CM: How did the city pay its workers?

EM: Well, if I remember reading right, the city had no money to run because the people weren't paying their taxes. And they had to pay in script. But after they got a hold of that script and later they would redeem it and they would get the money for it. A couple of the companies didn't want that script. They wanted cash, see?

CM: So, what would happen to people who didn't have the cash?

EM: Well, I don't know what happened to them. But the city could receive that script instead of the regular greenbacks. A lot of banks had passbooks and some people, brokers, were buying them for ten cents on the dollar.

CM: Oh, okay. Well, I think that sums everything up that I wanted to talk to you about. Thank you very much for the interview.

[end tape 36:18]