

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Irish Community in Youngstown

Personal Experiences

O. H. 520

CATHERINE RING

Interviewed

by

Mary Beth Choppa

on

February 7, 1981

CATHERINE E. RING

Catherine Elizabeth Ring, the daughter of James and Anna McLoughlin Crean, was born in Ballina, County Mayo, Ireland on September 26, 1903. She was educated in Ireland and came to the United States in 1923 through New York with a group of friends from Ballina. She had relatives in this area and settled in Youngstown, Ohio with her aunt and uncle.

She was employed at the General Electric plant near Market Street. Later, she kept house for a local doctor and his family. She met her husband, Thomas Ring, from County Cook, Ireland, in Youngstown. Her husband worked for Youngstown Sheet & Tube, drove a bus, and worked for St. Edward's Parish for a time. Mrs. Ring has lived on the north side of Youngstown for the majority of her years in this country, except for one year spent on Youngstown's south side. She had three sons; two are still living in the Youngstown area.

She currently resides on the north side and is active in parish groups at St. Edward's Church.

Mary Beth Choppa

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INTERVIEWEE: CATHERINE RING

INTERVIEWER: Mary Beth Choppa

SUBJECT: St. Edward's Church, dances, schools, immigration

DATE: February 7, 1981

C: This is an interview with Mrs. Catherine Ring for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on the Irish Community in Youngstown, by Mary Beth Choppa, at 2021 Ohio Avenue, on February 7, 1981, at 2:00 p.m.

You had been telling me about your family. What do you remember about your family in Ireland?

R: I was the oldest of five children. I wanted to come to America. I was going to school and my mother and father wanted me to continue on with school. I had pictures from my family, from my aunts and uncles, of America. I thought they were all dressed up all of the time. I thought they had nothing to do but be dressed up all of the time. I did have in mind that I wanted to be a nurse. My mother and father wanted me to go to school. I did go to school, but I still had in mind to come to America. My father didn't want me to come. He wanted me to go to school, get an education, and make something of myself. I was coming to America where the gold was on the streets; I'm still looking. I came all right, and when I got here I did not like it. It was an entirely different life. I was here a whole year before I got to like it. After I got to working and earning my money and buying my own clothes and got to go and come and do what I wanted to do I got to like it. Now I'm glad I stayed because I wouldn't want to live in Ireland. I love Ireland and I've been back five times, but the weather over there is very discouraging. It's damp and cold. There is a lot of rain. I would like to go back for a visit. I have a brother in Ireland. My husband has family over there. I came from Mayo and he came from County Cook. He has brothers and a sister over there. I visited all over there, but I'm always glad to

come back.

C: Were you the only one of your family who came over?

R: I was the first one.

C: Did any of your brothers and sisters come over?

R: Yes. I brought a brother out who is now deceased. Also I have a sister who came out to Boston and she stayed in Boston for five years. Then she came here for my cousin's wedding and we coaxed her to stay; we didn't want her to go back. She stayed, but she didn't like it here. She liked Boston. She stayed here maybe a year or so. She wasn't happy here. She is living in Cleveland now.

C: What was a typical day like in Ireland for you?

R: I went to school and then I came out here. The day was getting up in the morning, getting your breakfast and getting ready and taking our lunch to school. We had to be at school at 9:00. We started the morning with a prayer and then we had recess at 12:00 and then we had a prayer before recess. Then we would eat our lunch. We would finish our school at 3:30. We would walk to school about a mile and a half. We lived in the country.

C: Did you have things to do around the house then?

R: Yes, we had to work around the house and around the yard. We had chickens, ducks, and geese. We did most of the work in the house.

I would love to go back and visit. I wouldn't want to live there. The climate is much colder than here. It's a beautiful country. The homes are lovely and the flowers. There, where we have a lawn in front here, they have a flower garden. Their lawns are all flowers. They have a wall along the sidewalk in front of their lawns and a gate to go in the front. It's all flowers on either side of the walk. The flowers are so luscious. I often wonder why we can't have flowers like that.

I came over on the boat.

C: Where did you leave from Ireland?

R: I left from Liverpool. I went from Dublin to Liverpool. We got into New York and the quota was filled when we got into New York and we had to stay two days on the boat before we could come here. We couldn't get off the boat until the new quota began. We went through Ellis Island, which they don't have now, and that was very hard.

C: When did you come over?

R: I came over in 1923. If I would have had the money I would have gone right back. I didn't like it here at all. First of all, I was lonesome. I was the first of my family to leave and I was lonesome and I missed them. At that time coming on the boat it took us nearly six days at sea. You think you're at the other end of the world. Now you can make it in six hours. While we were out in the mid-Atlantic there was a terrible storm. It was frightening. When you're young I guess you're not afraid; I wasn't afraid. The waves were so high over the ship. The water was coming in on the deck and down into the rooms. We were anchored for twenty-four hours in the mid-Atlantic. It was a terrible storm in September.

C: Did you come over alone or did you travel with someone?

R: Paul Judge and his sister were with me. They were neighbors from home and a few more friends I knew. There were five or six others from home that we knew on board. There was a group that knew each other and we did have a good time. Still I was very lonely. My aunt, and my uncle, and my cousins were wonderful to me.

C: How did you get from New York to here?

R: We came on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. They called us greenhorns. They put us on a train and we left New York at 7:00 in the evening. We didn't get in here until 2:00 in the afternoon. It was like a cattle train. It was the worst thing. I thought--this is America; boy, it's some country. I was disgusted. We were all disgusted.

I was here a few years when I met my husband. I met him here in Youngstown. He was from Ireland. We went together for two or three years and then got married.

C: What did he do?

R: He worked at Sheet & Tube. He worked there for eight or ten years. Then they were getting slow and they wanted him to change jobs. Then he would start in another department as a new man and he wouldn't do it, so he quit. He had an application at the bus company downtown and they took the application. They weren't hiring just then, but they told him when they would be hiring they would call him. In the meantime, he went to work for Tony O'Hora Construction. He only worked there about a month and they called him. He worked for the bus company for about thirty years until he retired. He drove a bus. The money wasn't big, but in the mill they were on strike and they never knew whether they would be laid off. You just couldn't plan on anything.

Driving a bus, the money wasn't big, but it was steady. We knew what we had coming. He never missed a day.

C: What did you do when you first came here?

R: When I first came here I thought I would go into training to become a nurse. Then I had no money. I thought I couldn't rely on my aunt because she had seven children. I had no money so instead of going into training to be a nurse I went into housework, which I hated. I had to make a living. Now if they're smart they go into office work and office jobs, but at that time they didn't do that. I worked at General Electric also for two or three years. I guess we broke the company; they laid a bunch of us off and told us to find other work and they would call us back. I found a nice job for an old couple doing housework. When they called me back, my aunt didn't want me to go back. She said I had it nice and should stay there, so I did. I stayed there until I got married. They were very, very nice. Dr. and Mrs. Hill were their names. They were on Ohio Avenue near the park.

C: Did you always live on the north side then?

R: Yes. I lived on the south side, but I didn't like it. I lived there for a year. Then after we got married we lived on the north side. I've belonged to St. Edward's Church all this time. We're in this house now 38 years.

C: What have you noticed that has changed about Youngstown over the years?

R: There is a lot that has changed in Youngstown over the years. If someone left for ten years and came back they wouldn't know the place. The changes are great. When I first came here the buses were coming to Redonda Road; that was the end of the line. There was nothing in Liberty; it was all woods.

C: This was during the 1920's?

R: Yes, when I first came here. There were very few cars on the road when I came here too. Radio was practically new when I came here. They had old gramophones when I came here with the big horns. Some homes had gaslights on the walls. Things weren't as modern as they are now. There was nothing in Boardman or Austintown either. Gypsy Lane was the limit for Youngstown. When I came, Youngstown was very small.

C: When you were staying with your aunt and uncle were you staying with them and working at the same time?

R: When I worked at General Electric, I stayed with them. When I did housework I stayed where I worked; I had room and board.

C: Where did you meet your husband?

R: Here in town.

C: Do you remember how you met him?

R: I do.

C: Would you mind telling us?

R: To begin with I met him downtown. I made a friendship with him downtown. My girlfriend and I were going to the show and we met somebody we knew downtown and he was along and they introduced me to him. Then I met him at an Irish dance later on and he asked if he could take me home. I said yes and he took me home. He took me home ever since.

C: Where did they hold Irish dances?

R: They had them down on East Federal Street; I can't remember the place. We were a half a block from the square.

C: What did they have there?

R: Irish music and Irish dancing. We had a good time. We used to go to Scotch dances too. They had them at the corner of Rayen and Fifth. They would have Scotch bread. I think in Scotland they baked it on the open fire, on the hearth. They served this oatmeal bread that was as hard as a rock. We used to eat it anyway.

C: How often did they have the dances?

R: They had them every week. They were on Saturday night. We had a good time. At that time there were a big bunch of Irish, but they're all gone now. Two or three people played the accordian too.

C: What other things did they used to have with the Irish community?

R: They didn't have Irish Day or anything like that. In later years they had that. It was once a year in the fall. Now they have the Gaelic Park in New Springfield. They have a clubhouse out there and things out there quite often.

C: Was St. Ed's largely an Irish parish?

R: No, not especially. There was every nationality. It

- wasn't an Irish parish. There were quite a few Irish, but it wasn't totally.
- C: It was a mixed parish then?
- R: Yes.
- C: What do you remember about changes, was it always one building there?
- R: St. Ed's was practically new when I came here. I think it was built in 1917. St. Ed's was a temporary church; they intended to build another church. Both sides of the church were the school building, but they intended to build another church. Later on they got a chapel down at the junior high across the Ohio Avenue Bridge. They used to have masses there, and that took the crowd. Then they bought a place on Ravine Drive that they were going to build. They never did that; they don't need it now because there are so many masses; they have two masses on Saturday afternoon, 4:30 and 7:30. Then they have several masses on Sunday morning so they don't need the extra church.
- C: The masses were in Latin weren't they?
- R: Yes. In Ireland they don't have Saturday masses now.
- C: Did you like having the mass in Latin?
- R: No, not especially. It didn't bother me any when they changed them. The only thing I felt was when it was in Latin it was more solemn.
- C: What was downtown Yougnstown like when you first came over, do you remember?
- R: There wasn't that much of a change downtown until it was in Federal Plaza. That's what made the change downtown. East Federal Street was the same for all those years. When they started with the plaza then they changed everything.
- C: Did you do a lot of shopping downtown?
- R: Yes, I did most of my shopping downtown. On East Federal Street there is a big change because they tore all those buildings down. West Federal Street is about the same.
- C: You said you met your husband going to a show. Where did you go to see the shows?
- R: We used to go the Palace on the square. Then they had the Hippodrome; that was a vaudeville show. It was in the parkade. There were a couple of small theaters. They



were going to tear down Powers Auditorium too years ago. They had Irish shows there on St. Patrick's night and they had shows from Ireland, Irish plays. I heard some of them saying that they had done a lot of traveling in this country and that was the most beautiful theater they were in.

C: What did you do in the evenings besides going to shows.

R: We used to visit each other. You weren't afraid to be out in the evening then.

C: Where did your kids go to school?

R: Here at St. Edward's and to Ursuline.

C: Have you noticed any changes in Ursuline besides the priests?

R: I haven't been down to Ursuline for a long time.

C: Were your kids in school before they added the new part on?

R: I don't know.

When I was ten or eleven years old Ballina, County Mayo Ireland, was four miles from us. I had two shillings and I thought I was in heaven. It was summer and I walked to town. We knew very little about town. We knew the way and we knew one main street that went in the center of the town. On the way this lady who I knew came out to the road and she had a letter to mail. She asked if I would mail it for her. I told her I didn't know where the post office was. I walked to town four miles and thought nothing of it. This one store in town had all kinds of dolls and different things for kids. I bought a doll and it came in a little basket with a lid on it and a handle. I think the whole things cost two shillings. My sister was with me and bought the same thing, so we came home with two dolls. We didn't know any of the shops over there only this one on the main street. I knew it because I had gone to town with my mother and father a few times. So that was eight miles we walked there and back and thought nothing of it.

C: Did you ever mail the lady's letter?

R: We didn't take it because we didn't know where the post office was.

C: What can you tell me about the dances in Ireland?

R: They used to have school dances and they had balls where

they held the dances. They were held on Sunday nights mostly. On Saturday night you wouldn't go out over there at all; there was nothing on Saturday nights when I was growing up. They would also have school dances in the schools. They would have concerts and everything. We took step dancing and singing in schools. They would have Christmas concerts in the schools. I remember we would have to wear white dresses and we would have to stay in the evening after school for more than an hour to practice. The boys were in one school and the girls in another. We didn't go from class to class either. One teacher taught the fourth grade and the other teacher taught the eighth grade. We didn't change classes; we just had a half hour at one class and a half hour at another class. We were in the same building in the same room all of the time.

C: Was the school in Ballina?

R: No. We had to walk to school about a mile and a half. Then there was the parish school also, but that was more than two miles. There were no nuns teaching at the school. The teachers were very strict over there. There was homework to do and if you didn't do your homework and went to school, you were sent right home. Then you would get it at home. Kids today talk back to the teachers; we wouldn't dare talk back to the teachers then.

END OF INTERVIEW