

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Lowellville Project

Resident of Lowellville

O. H. 623

HARRY MCBRIDE

Interviewed

by

Thomas Kirker

on

July 16, 1985

HARRY A. MCBRIDE

I, Harry Anderson McBride, was born May 2, 1910, in Lowellville, Ohio. The family home was at 69 W. Walnut Street. My father was Freeman McBride and my mother was Cora McBride. I have two older brothers, Raymond and Leland. My father was a carpenter by trade and helped to build many homes in this area. He died early at the age of fifty-two. My oldest brother taught school which was a source of income to keep the family. My next oldest brother worked for the W. J. Lomax grocery and hardware store and later with the Johnson Limestone Co., of Hillsville, Pennsylvania. During school years I helped to deliver milk house-to-house for a local farmer by the name of George Allen who used a Model T Ford truck. I also cut grass or any odd job to bring in a little money to help.

Raymond McBride, along with teaching school in Lowellville and Struthers at different times, became interested in selling used cars. In 1924 he took on the Willys-Overland new car agency, and from then on we were all involved in the car business. In 1933 we changed over to a Chevrolet agency which became available. We operated under the name of McBride Motors. Leland was in charge of the business while Raymond taught school. I worked at the garage after school until I graduated in 1928. We all graduated from Lowellville High School; Raymond went to Youngstown College.

We operated a large, brick building which we built on the corner of First and Water Streets. It contained a large showroom and office along with a large well-lit repair shop. We had good mechanics and turned out dependable workmanship. In 1953

Raymond retired as a principal of one of the Struthers schools. The two older brothers handled the sales and I took care of service and repairs. Raymond died in 1966; from then on my brother Leland and I ran the business until 1975, at which time we both were of retirement age. We had the Chevrolet agency for forty-two years and could have had it as long as we wanted it, but we could not sell it to anyone else.

I spent thirty-three months in World War II as a crew chief on a PB4Y flying boat. It was used for rescue work to pick up downed pilots of the Air Force in the South Pacific. Our outfit was the 2nd Emergency Rescue Squadron. They were able to save more than 500 out of the water. Our planes could land on land or water. These planes were antiques even at the start of the war but were able to do a good job for the purpose they were put to.

Our wives need to be given credit for the part they played in the long drive in life which was not always easy. The following are the names of the people involved: Raymond McBride and his wife Margorie, Leland McBride and his wife Gertrude and daughter Rebecca, myself, and my wife Ann and son John. All GOOD things happen through the wishes of the Lord to carry out our plans.

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INTERVIEWEE: HARRY MCBRIDE

INTERVIEWER: Thomas Kirker

SUBJECT: McBride Auto, World War II, bridges, Great
Depression, crime

DATE: July 16, 1985

K: This is an interview with Harry McBride for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Lowellville, Ohio, by Tom Kirker, on July 16, 1985, at 9:30 a.m.

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

M: I have two other brothers; Raymond was the oldest and Leland was the middle child.

K: When were you born?

M: May 2, 1910.

K: What occupation were you in?

M: In the automobile business.

K: You said that you and your brothers were in the automotive business earlier. How did you get into that?

M: My oldest brother was a schoolteacher in Lowellville. I was about fourteen when I first started in connection with the garage. At that time I was still going to school, but my brother Leland was working at the garage steady and my brother Raymond was teaching school along with running the automobile agency. I only went down there after school for the first three or four years. Then I worked there on Saturdays. My work was limited as a boy; there wasn't too much I could do, but I did help and was kept busy there.

K: What type of work did you do?

- M: Mechanic work. I was in the mechanical end of it. Leland was selling cars mostly. Raymond was the head of the company at that time. He took care of a lot of the business end of it.
- K: Was this a Chevrolet dealership?
- M: No. From the beginning we sold Studebakers, Gardners, and even some used Pullman cars. Then we got in pretty extensivley with the Overland. We also sold the Whippet car. We also sold the Willys-Knight, which was an expensive car with an exceptionally good engine. Instead of a popet valve engine they had what is called a sleeve valve. In 1933 we took on the Chevrolet agency.
- K: Where was your business located?
- M: On the corner of First and Water Street, right across from the bank. The building is still there and it is being used as a carpentry shop.
- K: Was there a lot of interest in cars in Lowellville?
- M: Yes. We sold a lot of cars here. We had competition at that time; there was a Hudson dealer, a Ford dealer.
- K: Where were they located?
- M: They were close by in the town. Of course, there was business for everybody. We were doing really well. When we started in 1924 we had a little building down the street. In 1926 we built the building that is still there and things were going good. In 1929 is when the Depression came along. We got through that, but it was rough going. There wasn't much in the line of profit made, but we were lucky to hold on because we were in debt on the building. Some of the other dealers closed up, but we managed to keep going through the war. It was a long struggle. We made a lot of friends and people were well-pleased. When we retired in 1975 they said we could have the dealership as long as we wanted, but we were not allowed to sell the dealership. They said they would not put another dealership here, and they did not.
- K: How has the business changed from your end when you started in the 1920's to when you finished in the 1970's?
- M: There have been a lot of changes since then, both in cars and in prices. In 1926 there were four-cylinder Chevrolets, then six, and eventually eight. In 1926 we sold Overlands for \$480. It has surely changed from that. The brakes on those cars were mechanical at that time. It was hard work to do, but we did do repair work. The charge for adjusting the brakes was 60¢. Labor work, if we did a tune-up or put

parts in, if the bill was \$5 that was a pretty good size bill.

K: What do you remember about the Depression when you lived here in Lowellville?

M: We were hit pretty hard around here. The mills slowed down and there was a lot of unemployment here. A lot of people were on relief. Quite a few people had to depend on picking up food, flour, and different materials. Even heat, you had to be allowed money to buy a ton of coal. It was very hard for the people to get by. Even buying clothing, a lot of people didn't have enough clothes to keep warm during the winter. Even in the garage work, I remember trading brake lining for cans of beans. The fellow owned a store and was hit pretty hard and was doing his own repair work. The number of people that were affected was really great. Around this town it has never really picked up like it should.

K: When did your family come here?

M: The McBride's ran all the way back to 1836.

K: That is when the city was founded?

M: Yes. Lowellville was given the name in 1840. The only town that was older was Poland; it started in 1798. Youngstown came around 1800. At one time Poland was larger than Youngstown.

K: What drew your ancestors to this area?

M: They were mostly all farmers and they came from mostly Pennsylvania.

K: I think you are Scotch-Irish, Presbyterian.

M: Yes. The first postmaster in this town in 1840 was Samuel McBride. There was another McBride that had a blacksmith shop on one of the hills out of town; he made most of the bolts and a lot of the metal shafts for the locks in the river.

The canal was started in 1835 and was completed in 1839. That moved a lot of coal and iron ore. A lot of the iron that was being made here in the blast furnaces was hauled on the canal. That canal only ran productively for a few years. At the same time the railroads were coming through. The railroads, on account of the speed of movement of freight, gradually wiped the canal out. About 1860 the canal was clear down to nothing as far as moving freight. We had a terrific number of trains and traffic through this town in my day. We were not the first to have trains. The trains came from the east as far as New Castle, but it wasn't called New Castle then; it was called Lawrence, Pennsylvania.

For a short itme there was a connecting rail line between Youngstown and Lawrence, Pennsylvania which enabled the rail lines to join from the west to the east.

When I was about fourteen there were about fourteen passenger trains that stopped here in the daytime. It was a combination of both sides of the river. There were a lot of people traveling who were coming into this town. Everything was moving. Our parts which came from Cleveland from Chevrolet came by rail. We picked them up over at the station. Coal was shipped in by rail too. The quarries had limestone; there were quarries on both sides. That involved a lot of rail shipment. The number of trains at that time was almost beyond imagination for a town this size and the business that they were doing.

The blast furnace was straight across from here. They made an awful lot of iron. They had four, large stacks here. There was almost a continuous movement of black smoke out of those stacks. That was the chief employment here other than the railroads. The railroads hired a lot of men. There were some railroad camps here that the men stayed in, which was not a desirable situation. They were down on the river and west of the main part of town. As I remember they had four, long shacks. They had one building that they ate in and the other building was sleeping quarters. They were a pack that did a lot of drinking and there was always a lot of carrying on there.

K: Were there a lot of hobos during the Depression?

M: In the Depression there was an awful lot of passage of people from all around. Every train that went by, you could see them all over the train, between the cars and on the roof carrying their bundles. At night often times they would stop at our garage there and pick up newspapers and would go to the city building and sleep on the floors. I asked them what the newspaper was for and they claimed that when they put it on the ground lice wouldn't get on that paper.

There was a lot of coal removed from those trains in the Depression. From the state line through here up towards Struthers it was the steepest grade between here and Pittsburgh. You didn't realize that because the tracks were at water level. A lot of trains stalled right in this town, and the people would march on them and throw off the lumps of coal. After the train was going they would get down and divide the coal amongst themselves. The railroad detectives would come along and chase them away. If the railroad car was short of coal the railroad company would refund the dealer.

- K: During the war did you see a lot of troops and material move through?
- M: Yes, there was one troop train after another through here. There were a lot of tank cars hauling gasoline, and they had the privilege over all other trains. There would be solid trainloads of nothing but gasoline.
- K: Did a lot of men serve from Lowellville?
- M: Yes, we were in board then here in the Second World War. The town always blamed board ten for overquota; they were never short. They were pulling the men out of here pretty fast. I was in the Air Force.
- K: A mechanic?
- M: Crew chief, engineer. I got as far as staff sergeant in the Air Corps. I was a crew chief and an engineer. I went all over the Philippines and South Pacific.
- K: When you came home from the war was there a big reception in Lowellville?
- M: Yes, they had receptions here. They waited for a whole group to come back before they had any great reception.
- K: What was the attitude of Lowellville during the war?
- M: It had good backing and support. There were very few people here who were against the war. There weren't too many deaths here of local people, and they sure sent their number of soldiers in World War II.
- K: When you came back you went back into the automobile dealership?
- M: The garage, yes. I stayed with it until 1975. My oldest brother died in 1966, so from 1966 to 1975 it was just the two of us left. My oldest brother was a teacher and also principal of many schools in Struthers. He was also bank president of the Lowellville Bank.
- K: When you were growing up what would be some of the things you would do on a Saturday night?
- M: I never did anything special. I stuck pretty much to the work, but we would get together with schoolmates. Sometimes we went up to Conneaut Lake or Park, or over to Idora Park.
- K: How would you get there?
- M: By car. Before that as kids we went swimming in different ponds around here. We never swam in the river because it

was too polluted, but out in the country a mile or two we would swim. I was never much for dancing. We played ball and things like that.

K: Where did you go to school?

M: At Lowellville School. At that time it was the only school that they had. Now they have another small school on the south side of the river for the lower grades.

K: How has Water Street changed since you have grown up?

M: There have been businesses that have burned out down there. There is a spot there where Cunningham Furniture used to be. At one time the funeral home was in that building. There were a lot of saloons too; at one time this town had twenty-one saloons. One of the reasons for twenty-one saloons was that Pennsylvania was dry. People came by streetcar into Ohio, to Lowellville. That is the first stop across the line. There was a lot of money made in those saloons.

I hadn't mentioned the streetcar line. The streetcar line ran from New Castle to Youngstown for years. They gave really good service. They had a half hour schedule and you could get a streetcar to New Castle on the hour every hour. At quitting time at 4:30 or 5:00 in the evening, out of Youngstown people would be hanging on the outside of those cars on a ledge around the rear of the car.

K: Do you remember some buildings that burned on Water Street in that fire?

M: The post office was right at the end of the bridge; a saloon, and a hotel, those all burned. When the post office burned they moved to another building east on Water Street. There was a later fire on Wood Street that later took out a whole block; that was in 1917. There were two churches in there, a livery stable, and a couple wagon shops, some homes, and a streetcar station. There were two houses left.

K: What is the population of Lowellville now?

M: Around 1550. At one time it was up around 2,800; I believe that was the largest number of people. The two hills are what keep people out; there is no level ground to build houses. Property value is low but the tax rate is high. The town is a clean place to live since the mills are gone and there are also no steam trains with their smoke.

K: It seems on the south side of the river there are a lot of Italian homes. Has it pretty much been that way?

M: The surprising thing is that the south side of the river

right now is in wonderful condition. At the time that the steel mills were running the houses were in shack classification; they were run-down. In the past years there have been fires that have wiped out the homes that have been more or less a disgrace. All the homes there now are pretty decent, and the people are all of Italian descent. This town is 75% Italian. Things run along quietly here and we have very little trouble. There is very little stealing.

- K: Do you remember any big crime or anything that has happened in Lowellville, any bank robberies?
- M: No. They've attempted robberies at the bank several times. They tried to go through the ceiling and once they came through the back door. No money was taken. They've had murders here, especially farther back. We've had youngsters that got into serious trouble. We did have one arson case too, but it was nothing terrific. In fact, I was on the fire department for eleven years.
- K: Was that a volunteer fire department?
- M: Yes. I was on it until I went to the service in World War II.
- K: What kind of equipment did you have?
- M: They had an old Ford truck when I first came on, and then they bought a 1926 secondhand American-France fire truck that had originally been in Texas. It had solid tires, was right-hand drive, and eight cylinder. I drove it almost all the time in the eleven years. We have a volunteer fire department of twenty-five men and they do a really good job.
- K: During the 1930's did you have a junk man or a rag picker?
- M: I don't remember too much about that. Back in horse and buggy days they came around with a small wagon and gathered up iron and rags. They also came around with fish. There was ice in the wagon and the fish were kept on it. The fish was usually blue pike. If you bought the fish he cleaned it for you.
- K: Living so close to the railroad tracks and the river are there any types of stories or superstitions or legends that you can recall?
- M: The 16th of July is always celebrated here. At one time at the lock in the river people were crowded around and a prominent person fell over into the river and drowned.
- K: Is there anything that you want to add that I missed?
- M: There are a lot of things that happened.

K: How big was your showroom?

M: The building was 50 x 117; it was a brick building.

K: How many cars did you have there?

M: At one time we had thirteen new ones.

K: When were you married?

M: In 1941, before I left for the war.

K: Is your wife from Lowellville?

M: No, she came from Ravenna.

K: How did you meet her?

M: Actually she was a nurse and she came down here to take care of my mother. It has been very nice and we have had a pleasant life. We have one son, and he has turned out really well.

K: Thank you for the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW