

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Reflections on the 1930's Project

Ministerial Experiences

O.H. 180

REVEREND PAUL GERRARD

Interviewed

by

Ellen Daniels

on

June 6, 1978

REVEREND PAUL T. GERRARD

Reverend Paul T. Gerrard was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on June 3, 1902, the son of William R. and Mitilda Ann Thomas Gerrard. He spent his early life and college days in Pittsburgh, graduating from South High School and from the University of Pittsburgh in 1926 with his A.B. Also, in the same year, Reverend Gerrard received his STB [Sacred Theology Bachelor's Degree] from Western Theological College.

He married his wife, Rhea, on March 31, 1934. They have one daughter, Ruth Ann Gerrard, who teaches English at Austintown Fitch High School.

He has retired from preaching full-time, but is on constant call if he is needed by the present Presbyterian minister or his former parishoners of the Lisbon First Presbyterian Church. Paul is still involved in the church hierarchy.

Reverend Gerrard has received recognition from the American Legion, VFW, and other such organizations. Upon his retirement, the Lisbon First Presbyterian Church gave to him the house in which he now lives. Paul donates, every year, a set amount of money that goes to the outstanding senior in National Honor Society at David Anderson High School.

Herbert Hoover was one of the finest presidents in many respects. Politicians perhaps, and historians, might not give him full credit. He was a great mining engineer, a man who did a tremendous amount of work for this country, a man who was in Europe, and helped people, and helped feed the world because of his unusual ability in that particular field, having served as Secretary of Commerce in one administration.

Hoover was not re-elected. A new man came on the scene, a man of a very wealthy family, a man whose name was a by-word in this country, the name of Roosevelt. Franklin Delano Roosevelt came in, trying to help the situation. He declared a moratorium on banks and they were closed for four days to try to stabilize certain conditions.

It helped, as many things helped, but what to do next was the great problem of the hour. All sorts of programs were started to get situations clearing, many things such as welfare programs like the WPA, where men were paid approximately \$60.00 a month to try to keep their families; and many of them were able to do it.

And men worked. They did all sorts of things. Sometimes it looked like useful jobs. I can see men on the streets of Sebring taking the bricks out of the street, chipping them, putting them back in again and trying to re-vamp the street, very unusual work. Some of the best citizens of the community, men who had had good positions were now grateful for the opportunity to get enough to receive bread and butter for their families.

I remember that some of the people of means in the community were not able to do anything. I was pastor of a church, which, at that particular time probably had those whom we would consider affluent citizens of that particular community. And I can well remember some of these people going down, getting welfare checks in their beautiful Cadillacs. In a few years, nobody came to church in a Cadillac. Many of these people were ashamed to come to church, because they had very little means; were ashamed when the plate was passed in the morning service, they were not able to put anything in. It was not because they didn't want to, but they didn't have it. And that makes a very tragic and unusual picture.

I distinctly remember in the City of Pittsburgh, a city that was very hardly hit, a very prosperous city in the years gone by, perhaps the greatest steel city in the United States, things became so bad that men scarcely

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INTERVIEWEE: REVEREND PAUL GERRARD

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SUBJECT: Hoover's and Roosevelt's administrations;
Father Cox; people helping one and other;
significance of Salem during the Depression;
the Counties of Columbiana, Mahoning, and
Trumbull

DATE: June 6, 1978

D: This is an interview with Reverend Paul Gerrard of 335 East Chestnut, Lisbon, Ohio for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program about the era of the 1930's by Ellen Daniels on June 6, 1978 at 7:30 p.m.

G: Perhaps as we think in terms of the "1930's", as we call them, it might be well for us to go back and deal a little with the administration of Herbert Hoover, who went into office in 1928 following a rather prosperous time in the years of Calvin Coolidge, when the country was in good financial shape and the debt was of low ebb. However, conditions began to deteriorate. Financial pictures began to drop and the situation became extremely desperate. People who had large fortunes, men who had particularly fine jobs, scarcely knew what they were doing.

As the story goes--and I have reason to believe that it's truthful--that in the City of New York there were 2,500 men in a certain club, and out of that club, 300 committed suicide because the situation had become so desperate, they had nothing. And they committed suicide and left a lot of widows and orphans without anything. This was rather desperate when one thinks about it, but on the other hand, it shows a rather clear picture.

knew what to do. We had long lines, soup lines, in the community. All sorts of organizations trying to help people provide. Churches helped what little they could. And Father Cox of St. Patrick's Church, a very powerful Roman Catholic Church in a rather poor neighborhood, did the level best a man could do. As one looks back, we feel that he was a truly Christian gentleman that tried the very best to help people.

In this church, in the basement of the church, they had a kitchen. Women of the church helped. Food was provided, where they could get it; and many, many people who were hungry could come and get a meal. And he fed literally thousands over a period of years. He was so conscientious that he tried marching with his group to the City of Washington to try to go to see the President to see what could be done. But, all over the nation, the situation was the same. And so, Father Cox, in spite of his effort, was not able to do much more than the rest.

It was very difficult for people, older people, who had very little means, because there could be very little welfare. We were not prepared for welfare like we are today, where we have all sorts of organizations, where we have Social Security and many things that are existing at the present time. None of these existed. People had hospital bills; no money to pay them. Sickness came upon them. Hospitals were in distressing conditions.

I distinctly remember, of a nurse that I knew quite well, who was employed in a hospital, the hospital paid in script; and the script was hardly worth anything. In the days, now, where nurses are paid on a scale, perhaps, of \$35.00 or better for eight hours--\$4.00 was the total, when you could get the \$4.00.

I can remember distinctly about the teachers, fine, capable people away from home trying to live in houses where the landlord could scarcely keep them; had to let them go sometimes. They had difficult times to find a place to live. They doubled up, sometimes three and four in a home; and with what little means, they tried to carry on and get enough to eat.

I remember the meager salary which I received; and I did not receive it in any way, shape, or form, with any regularity. I remember one time, for a period of twelve weeks, I got a total of \$40.00, and that was a lot of money, because I hadn't seen anything like that in a long time. And with that, I was able to help

others. And I look back and think of some of those teachers, and think of the joyous times. We would go and we would get 25¢ per person meals. Breakfast was 10¢, and things like that. Hard to believe today, but nevertheless, the truth of that particular time.

Franklin Roosevelt tried the very best he know how to carry on. Congress was with him in many respects. Many programs were put forth, and yet, it was difficult, difficult to carry on. It seems strange and it seems tragic when one looks back, that it practically had to go to World War II in order to provide the income, and bring people back to a sense of prosperity, and a sense of realization that there might be hope.

I look back to these days, and these hours and I feel for the people; and yet, I remember one thing that was a wonderful situation: people cared for each other. One good thing come out of the Depression. Everybody was suffering; everybody had little of the worlds goods, but those who had, would share with those who had not.

Someone has said that if we had another Depression in this country, that people, in the greedy way in which people are trying to get things in our world, where they just as soon step on somebody as speak to them, that on the way to the soup kitchen now, they would kill you so they'd get your bowl of soup. I hope that wouldn't be true, but maybe we have lessons to learn. I would never recommend another Depression, because our country would not be able to stand it.

Let us also say this was not true only of the United States of America, but the countries of Europe were suffering. Parts of Asia were suffering. It was a world-wide Depression. Nobody had anything and nobody knew where to turn.

A lot of industries could have carried on if they had a little capital. I remember the potteries, the couple of potteries, if they even had \$50,000, they could have kept the pottery running. But after all, nobody worried about it. What do you care about a dish? What do you care about furniture? If you had something to eat, you could eat it off the floor. Just thank God you had food. That is the situation as I remember it, in that particular day and age.

In the year 1935, we went from Sebring over to Hubbard, which is in another county, but very close to the Youngstown area. We were only seven miles from Mahoning

County and Youngstown. I deeply remember the situation in the steel mills. I can remember back, how the steel mills, during World War I, were working night and day. And then, of course, when we came to World War II, they didn't have enough goods, really, to produce as much steel as they needed to carry on the war, because World War II was a global war rather than the individual type of war as in World War I. They won't like that, but that is true; I put that in.

But we come to Youngstown and we find the situation. And as I sit here thinking in terms of the situation at the present time, while Youngstown is attempting a very difficult thing, one realizes how important the steel mills were. A one-industry town, and in reality, it is a one-industry town. It is hard to realize, unless you have lived in the atmosphere of the 1930's, to know how the situation was. Men were walking the streets; had very little. There were large families. People, a lot of them had come from various countries in Europe, and they were trying to build homes and trying to get along. Some had fairly good payments made on homes and then they had difficulty, and some lost their homes.

I remember the vice-president of one of Youngstown's banks, in the middle of the Depression telling me that at that particular time, they had two Synagogues, five Catholic Churches, and fifteen Protestant Churches that could not pay the interest on the mortgages they had. And the bank was wondering what would they do? What would you do? With churches and synagogues, what could you do? And somehow, I do not know the complete answer. They were able, in the period of time, by the bank reducing interest rates as much as humanly possible, [to] carry on.

This is a picture of how things were. Churches were suffering. The schools were the same in Youngstown, the City. And yet, in those days, people had moved to the suburbs, as they have today, and are a part of the suburbs; and Youngstown is having it's many difficulties, which many know.

So, I think, as I look at this picture in Youngstown right now, I can relate it back, in a sense, to the days of the Depression. Now, Youngstown came back, became a wonderful steel community known and respected throughout the world. Right now we are wondering about it. But since they were able to come out in the 1930's, and into the 1940's, and into the 1950's, and into the 1960's, maybe Youngstown--and the thing that makes me very happy

is the coalition of people, the ability, the willingness--if they work together, I'm sure that somehow will come out of the picture.

I think of the days back there in the village of Hubbard--that was then a village, now a city--I remember how tough the situation's were. Merchants had a hard time buying merchandise to sell it to people. Grocery stores, they could sell it, but they couldn't afford to buy it. Wholesalers were having difficulty. A lot of fine people had a very hard time to succeed. I can remember these things.

Then I'd like to take you for a short trip over a few miles into Columbiana County. I well remember, that during the 1930's--and this is unusual, because it is the only town I know of, was the City of Salem. Salem was not a large city, not a prosperous city, but because of the industries, it was well able and was quite successful in weathering the storm of the Depression Days of the 1930's. These things are important to remember. It gives us, perhaps, the feeling as one man tried in a commune to get the lights going and running in a city.

I remember talking to a football banquet in the community. They lost all their games; and they thought it was hopeless. They asked me to speak and I said, "I'm not a football man." They said, "Well, after all, we don't want a football man. We want somebody to show some compassion upon us because we lost all these games." And I tried my best to fire into these young people, that sometimes in the depths of a depression, sometimes when you are at your lowest ebb, if you got a little fighting spirit, and a little cooperation, a little help, you can succeed.

Our nation needs some of that. The 1930's proved to us how difficult it was, and yet, this nation came out. Today we are more prosperous, at least we are in book value. And I'm not a politician or a man of the great civic field, but I realize that many things need to be done. And our country can learn, and every student, and every young person, if it is humanly possible to tell them, to tell them that after all, if one has the courage . . . I know today it is difficult.

Students have come out without any jobs. I remember attending a commencement at the University of Pittsburgh. The Chancellor of the University was speaking. It was a graduating class of probably 1,800 to 2,000 students. I can remember that chancellor saying, "You

are going out into a world that has no place for you. You will have a difficult time. My own daughter is in your class and she is going out in the world." And yet, as I look back to 1933 and those years of the Depression, and I remember some of the people who graduated, somehow, in some way, in a country where there is opportunity, were successful and came out. And many of those people in the Days of the Depression became prominent citizens of these United States, and some very wealthy and quite prosperous.

I distinctly remember that the Sharon Steel Corporation, and when my friend Henry Roemer became President, one of the first payrolls they had to meet back in 1930 or 1931, they had to take their watches, the executives, and members of the board, and take them to pawn shops to get enough money to meet the first payroll. So, it shows what the situation was. Many other steel mills were having the same difficulty. I knew men in various steel mills, executives; I knew many in the unions; and these men were trying. They tried to get the best they could. It was difficult for unions. It was difficult for capital. And somehow, I do not know. I often wonder. It brings to me the thing that after all, we can succeed if we try!

END OF INTERVIEW