

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Idora Park in the 1900's

Idora Park Cafeteria

O. H. 358

TILLIE SMEDLEY

Interviewed

by

Donna DeBlasio

on

July 10, 1984

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: TILLIE SMEDLEY

INTERVIEWER: Donna DeBlasio

SUBJECT: Idora Park in the 1920's, Idora Cafeteria,  
Charles Diebel, Management, Ballroom,  
Orchestra, Wildcat

DATE: July 10, 1984

D: This is an interview with Tillie Smedley for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program Idora Park in the 1900's Project. The interview is being conducted in Mrs. Smedley's home in Boardman on July 10, 1984. My name is Donna DeBlasio.

S: My name was O'Neill at that time.

D: Okay, it's Tillie O'Neill Smedley. Let me start off by asking a little bit about yourself. When and where were you born?

S: I was born in Reading, Pennsylvania as far as I know.

D: What year?

S: I think 1895. My birthday is December 8th.

D: You were born the same year that Idora Park was then.

S: Is that right?

D: Supposedly, that's the date they give for their establishment.

S: Reading, Pennsylvania, is where I was born.

D: You were married?

S: Yes. I was married to Howard O'Neill in New Castle.

D: Is that when you came to Youngstown, when you got married?

S: No. I was in Youngstown years ago when I was a single girl, downtown, when streetcars ran and that.

D: Did you move to Youngstown when you were young?

S: Yes. I was a girl here.

D: How old were you?

S: I was in my teens. My first job was in a restaurant. I worked in the Park Motel. I don't know whether you want that or not. I never worked in a restaurant. I thought when I come to Youngstown, I want to get a job, so I went to this Park Hotel. It was on the corner of Wick Avenue and Front Street. I went there for a job, and they said, "Did you ever work in a restaurant?" And I said, "No, I never did." They said, "Do you want to start here?" They took me in and I started to work in there and Mr. and Mrs. Ring operated the hotel and they liked me. They took me in as one of their daughters, and I had a place to stay instead of going back to Rayen Avenue where I lived.

They took me in to stay there and broke me in. That's the first restaurant I ever worked at. I'll never forget, the first time I took the stuff in I dropped it. I thought I could be as smart as the other girls and I kicked the door and everything went on the floor. It was funny. The manager, Mr. Ring, said, "That's all right Tillie, you're just a little nervous today and that's okay."

I worked there until he went out of business, for a good many years. It closed up on Wick Avenue and Front Street. Then he opened a place up near the Hippodrome. They tried to locate me and they came in to see if I could come and help them out again. I worked there for a while. That's all I worked. I've lived in Youngstown all my life.

D: When did you start going to Idora Park? Do you remember what it was like?

S: I don't know that.

D: Do you remember what you first saw at the park, your first impressions? What did you see when you first went there?

S: The rides, the merry-go-round, and the Wildcat. The Wildcat was terrible. The dance hall, we used to go dancing. I used to go dancing at Idora Park when they

had dances, when I was a young girl.

D: Let me first ask you how you got involved with the cafeteria at Idora?

S: I had a restaurant at Republic Steel for years. I had a restaurant down there. Mr. Dible was the owner of Idora Park. He was the manager. I used to buy my meats from him at the market when they had a market on Federal Street. He had a special party, I guess, so he called me in and said, "Mrs. O'Neill, I want you to come and cook this meal for this banquet." That was down at the rink they had, where the skating rink used to be down there. I said, "I can't do it." He said, "Yes you can." I did and I went and I forget how many, quite a few, it was a big banquet. I had the cafeteria for three years at Idora Park. I don't know whether I told you that or not. I operated only in the summertime. I had a chef working for me; I had 35 people working for me. It was a big thing to take care of, manage it. I had it for three years.

D: Where was the cafeteria located in the park?

S: Right across from the Wildcat. It used to be the Penny Arcade.

D: You mean that was the cafeteria originally?

S: No. I made it in to a cafeteria. When they had picnics, it was a regular pavilion, the tables were in there and that. That was made for the picnickers to come and eat their meals. That's how that happened to be. It used to be the Penny Arcade and then they made that into a place for people to stop and eat. On rainy days, they didn't have any place for them to go out. That's when I took it over. We went in there and I fixed it all up and fixed the kitchen and that. I had some pictures of that. I had pictures taken with a couple of girls right on the steps, some girls who had worked for me.

D: Could this be it?

S: That's one of them. Do you want any names?

D: Sure, why don't you and I'll check them. Who's in there? Where are you?

S: This is Pat Duffy, the manager. He was the manager of the park. He had the popcorn stand caked up, Pat Duffy.

D: He was the owner?

S: Pat Duffy, years ago.

D: The father of the current owner?

S: Yes, Patty Duffy. Here's Patty Duffy here.

D: That's the boy?

S: Yes. That's Patty.

D: That's Pat Jr. the owner?

S: Yes, it is.

D: That's his mother next to him?

S: No, his mother is holding him.

D: I see.

S: This is Mrs. Gilronan. Eddie Gilronan was the assistant manager of the park. He's still living.

D: Is he?

S: Well, he's sickly. Not so long ago I saw a piece in the paper where he's sickly. He lives out in Boardman someplace. That's her, and that's Kate. That women, I don't know who she is. This is Mrs. Billings.

D: Rex Billing's wife?

S: Yes.

D: What was Mrs. Gilronan's first name?

S: Rosemary.

D: Is the Penny Arcade still the Penny Arcade now?

S: It's still down there.

D: Yes, right across from what's left of the Wildcat.

S: I had the first ride on the Wildcat.

D: You did?

S: The first ride when they tried it out. I was scared to death.

D: Was there anyone else on there when you went?

S: No, I was all by myself.

D: That would be what, 1929?

S: When it first opened up, I guess. I guess it was around that time.

D: What did you think when you rode on it the first time?

S: I was scared to death. They said, "Come on Tillie, you can do it." So I did.

D: Have you ridden it since?

S: After that I did. That was the first ride when they tried it out. I was the first one coming down that hill.

D: You broke it in.

S: It was interesting. I can recall a lot of things there.

D: Back to your cafeteria. Could you describe what it looked like on the inside?

S: It was like a penny arcade. It was all open. There was one great big room and it had a banister. I don't know whether I have some pictures of it or not. It was all open and we had to put the awnings down to keep the rain out. The kitchen was on the side there. There were big steps coming down the front. There are three entrances in there. The kitchen was in the back, right up against the hill. It was interesting.

D: What kind of food did you serve?

S: Everything, it was cafeteria like. We had everything. It was nothing for me to have the chef bake 60 to 65 hams in one day. We had big ovens in the back in the kitchen. I got all my meat from Mo Higgins down on Federal Street.

D: Really?

S: Yes.

D: Did you actually own the cafeteria, was it yours?

S: No, I rented the building from Idora Park. They furnished the heat and everything, but I rented the building. I forget how much I paid for it, not very much. In those days they would let you do anything to keep business going.

D: How much did the food cost? What would be your typical meal, what would somebody spend on that?

S: About three dollars a dish or spoonful. A spoonful of this and a spoonful of that. Three dollars was the starting of it, up to five dollars. Meals were very reasonable.

For a quarter, you could get a good meal for a quarter.

D: You can't even get a coke for that now.

S: No. We used to get our hams reasonable and everything like that. My mother helped at that time and she was 63 when she used to help me. She did all the chopping of the coleslaw, cabbage. We always made our own coleslaw. I used to make it this way, in a tub, with my arms. That's the only way you fed people.

D: If you're going to make a lot of food, yes.

S: You don't do that with sanitation today. Nobody got sick. I had it three years there and we never had any complaints of anyone coming and getting sick.

D: What year did you start?

S: I don't know if there are dates on those pictures or not.

D: The only one is this one. It says 1931. There's a little placard in front that says July 4, 1931. You can barely see it.

S: It was from around 1925 it started. That's when this picture was taken.

D: What kinds of people did you employ in the cafeteria?

S: Girls.

D: All women?

S: All women, yes. We had busboys too, young boys to clean tables off. On busy days I'd have two or three busboys to carry the dishes. I'd have about three dishwashers. You washed the dishes by hand then.

D: Of course.

S: We had a line of tubs across the wall. You washed them that way. In those days, it was all together different.

D: What was your best month of the year of all the summer months?

S: On picnic days, when the crowd would come, we used to have busy days. We'd take in a couple thousand dollars a day.

D: That's pretty good for 1934.

S: Yes. It was interesting. We would close up about midnight,

then the band used to come up, Ace Brigot, and I'd fix a meal for them and serve them a bite to eat after midnight. We'd stay there until about two o'clock or three o'clock in the morning.

D: Was Ace Brigot there every summer?

S: For the three years that I know of, yes. While they were there, I rented my house to them. I kept the bedroom, but they didn't have any place to stay so I gave them the privilege of my home. Mrs. Brigot didn't work or anything. They had a couple of children. I lived right off of Glenwood on Brentwood.

D: That's not too far from the park.

S: No. It was right there.

D: What was it like having those musicians in your house?

S: It was nice. I never entered the house while they were there, until they moved out. We went to bed and left. I had to go early to work. We never got back until late. We became very friendly. It was just like one big family. I got acquainted with all Ace Brigot's and that. A lot of times I would give them a meal, and what they used to like was when I made chop suey for them after midnight. They enjoyed that.

D: Did you get time to go dancing while you were there?

S: I'd sneak in once in a while. I had one nephew and he loved to dance, and I said, "Come on Chuck, let's go down." I used to love to dance when I was a girl. I like the one-step the best. That's what they used to dance, the one-step. What else can I think about?

D: What kind of maintenance did you have to do around the cafeteria or did the park take care of that?

S: They took care of it, and then I paid my share of the gas and that. I paid my share. You had your own meters and everything. They took care of that, and the water. Everything was okay, we never had any problems that I can think of. It has been so long though, my memory is kind of failing me a little bit.

D: What kind of relationship did you have with Mr. Dible?

S: Very friendly. He loved my cooking. He was very clever.

D: What did he like best that you made?

S: I used to fry his steak. He would bring steaks from his shop and he would say, "You're the only one that can cook the steaks for me." That's right, steaks. He had the butcher shop, and he would get special steaks. And whenever he had a gang, he'd have a party and say, "I want you to come and cook these steaks." I fried steaks, that's the way we cooked them. To make a good steak, you have to have the skillet really hot and you put the steak in and season it a little bit, sizzle it, turn it over two or three times. Don't cook it too long because it makes them tougher. He always used to have me cook the steaks when he would bring a bunch in. It was a lot of work for me a lot of times.

D: Did they actually eat in the cafeteria when he brought people in?

S: There was a place where the roller rink was, way down, almost at the end of the park as you come in from Park-view. There was a building down there and I think it used to be the roller skating place. It used to be roller skating. They made that in to a place and put tables in there and that's where he would always bring his crowd in special and I'd cook the steaks for them.

D: What kind of people did he have in?

S: Very talented people, friends.

D: Were they business acquaintances?

S: Some were. I was busy taking care of the thing there and I had the girls. I had so many girls take so many tables, so everybody got wonderful service. In those days, they still do that, but you just give the girls so many tables to take care of. The girls had to stand with a cloth over their hands and stand beside them and watch every little move and see if there was anything they could do to make the customer happy. It was interesting.

D: Did Dible pay you for doing this?

S: He paid for the food. Whenever I charged for it, I forgot what it was, but he did the paying.

D: Did you cater for other things besides?

S: We used to cater for picnics when picnics used to come in from Pittsburgh and all around.

D: What kinds of organizations would come in that you catered?

S: Picnicers, people that go out on picnics that come from Duquesne. People would bring their baskets and some would eat in their baskets, some would bring them in the cafeteria and eat them there, and some would go out. They used to have tables around in through the park for people to sit down and eat.

D: Were they specific companies that came in?

S: Some of them, yes. Different companies would have a picnic. I'm trying to think of some of the Pittsburgh companies that would come in and hold their picnics at Idora Park. Some of the people from town also came. I should have written a lot of this stuff down.

D: Would Republic Steel come?

S: I'm trying to think if Republic Iron Steel, yes. Some of them that had picnics up there would say, "Tillie, could you give us a dinner. We're coming out." Maybe fifteen or twenty and we would set the tables for them.

D: Did they have to make their reservations way in advance?

S: They would on account of the park being busy. We had to reserve the cafeteria. When we had picnics, the dining was open for people to come in. Other times, we used to have to reserve tables and that, and set the tables for different people to come in. We had Ace Brigot when he had his farewell party. When he left we had it after midnight. We had it all decorated up and bid him goodnight in the cafeteria. Eddie Gilronan was the assistant manager.

D: When you catered, were walk-ins, people in the park, could they come in at the same time?

S: Sometimes they would see it was busy and it was closed and they wouldn't come in. They wouldn't come in because there were a lot of tables outside for the people to go ahead with their baskets. A lot of them liked to come in and bring their basket and sit down at the table. When we had big picnics they didn't usually do that.

D: How many people do you think you could have served at one time in the cafeteria?

S: About 1,500. They kept coming in.

D: You could fit all those people in there?

S: Yes. There was supposed to be four people at each long table. I think I had 21 or 25 tables. People came and

went. Usually when there was a picnic we would rope off so many for the people, for their picnics, then the other open for the public to come in. We would rope off some of the tables.

D: If someone were having a picnic would they have to pay to use the cafeteria, to reserve it?

S: No. They just made reservations so we could take care of them. They paid for the food, that's all.

D: How was the food determined for something like this? Did they have to pick a few things ahead of time or could they just get what they wanted?

S: No. We used to have a counter, and we would put it on the counter and dish it out and just have a woman standing there. As soon as the people picked their dishes, it went in rows, we would then pick them up and refill them again.

D: I mean for these special picnics, they just didn't order one or two things, they could get whatever they wanted?

S: They just picked up what they wanted.

D: When you go to a banquet sometimes you choose one or two things.

S: When they came to the cafeteria they picked out what they wanted and you would charge each one individually at the cashier. They would pay as they went out with their trays.

D: What was Mr. Dible like?

S: He was a wonderful man. He was bossy, but you had to do what he wanted you to do. He was very good. I never had any problems with him.

D: Did he come to the cafeteria often to check for standards or anything?

S: No. He would always come in and say, "Fix me something to eat." I'd fix him something to eat special. He was a very easy man to get along with. I bought a lot of meat from his shop too, you know.

D: Did you get all your beef from him?

S: Yes, I did. I used to buy the hams from the wholesale house on Champion Street, Home Street and Spring Street, I guess. Is it Spring Common? That last street next to the railroad, do you know what it is?

D: No.

S: Next to the railroad.

D: That's Commerce.

S: Yes, Commerce. They used to have a wholesale house there and I used to get my hams and that in there.

D: Did you buy everything else from Dible, as far as meat?

S: Yes. Different stores. They used to have a Front Street Market and I used to buy from them. My coffee, the coffeeman, I used to buy my coffee from him for years and years. It was the Quality Tea Company. He used to roast his coffee. He used to bring it in. They roasted it fresh and brought it in.

D: Where did you get your fresh produce from?

S: I think A&P and that. I did go to the Farmers Market a lot of times. They used to have a Farmers Market and I used to buy my tomatoes in baskets because I used to have to put them outdoors because we didn't have enough room in the refrigerator. We used to go to the Farmers Market and buy baskets of tomatoes and different stuff. Cabbage, I used to buy it by the bushel and I forget now. Potatoes, I used to buy them by the hundred-pound bags, sacks of potatoes. I had a chef working for me. He was a good chef. Everybody knew him. I had him for three years. He sure liked the bottle, but he was a good cook though. He was a very good cook. I used to have to watch, we had a big cooler and he would go in there and he drank, not liquor, alcohol of some kind. He used to carry a bottle with him.

D: Beer maybe?

S: No. It was liquor. We never had any trouble with him at all. His wife used to have to come and take him home at night.

D: Do you remember what his name was?

S: Bob.

D: What did your husband do around the cafeteria?

S: He helped. Another thing, we had a restaurant down at Republic Iron Steel at the same time, under the the Market Street Bridge. While I was at the park, he used to take some time off and get other help to take care of the restaurant down there and he would come up and give me a lift at the cafeteria. Trying to operate both

places, it was tough.

D: I can imagine. In the summer, yes.

S: It was only for three months.

D: When did you open, what month did you open out there?

S: May, just before decoration I guess.

D: It closed in . . .

S: In September.

D: Around Labor Day or so?

S: Yes.

D: How did the other people feel about Charlie Dible?

S: I don't know. They seemed to get along. He was a pretty old man when he had the park. He was pretty old at that time. He wasn't a hard man to get along with, I don't think. Whether anybody else thought he was . . . Gilronan was his assistant. You could get some information from Gilronan.

D: I have a feeling I'm going to have to talk to him. I hope he is okay.

S: He has been sickly. If you do talk to him tell him you talked to me, he'll say, "Tillie!" He's been sickly though from what I read in the paper.

D: Was Dible around a lot or was he more like an absentee landlord?

S: Yes. He would just come in and go. You never saw him very often. I think towards evening he used to come in and just sit around a little bit to see how things were running. He was a nice man. He wasn't a very bossy man or anything, at least I didn't seem to think he was. Everybody seemed to get along with him pretty good. Did you know Pat Duffy? I mean the older guy, the father.

D: No. I've only met the son.

S: He was the one who had the popcorn stand. He was a good guy. Kate Duffy, that's his wife. He used to run the cotton candy.

D: Do you remember something that they used to make at Idora called Crispettes? It was popcorn, more like a

Cracker Jack type thing, popcorn and peanuts. I guess they made them into little squares.

S: Yes. They sold a lot of those. He did that a lot in his little popcorn stand.

D: Duffy, Sr. did that?

S: Yes, that was all popcorn in there.

D: Where was the stand located?

S: Across from the cafeteria towards the east office.

D: Well, you said where the Penny Arcade was.

S: Yes. Across from that I think was the stand. A little bit towards the office, going down to Mill Creek, down in there, where the streetcar went around.

D: It was on the Mill Creek side rather than on the other side?

S: No. It was right off the freeway.

D: Parkview?

S: It came in from Parkview and that was where the people all walked to go down in to the pavilion and that. He was across the street like that, next to the Wildcat.

D: There are still some food stands in there now?

S: I suppose it has changed. I haven't been out there for so long. A lot of things have changed. They used to have a skating rink down in there too, years ago. They had a lot of things there.

D: What kind of competition did you have from the other food concessions?

S: Nothing. There was only the dance hall. They served hot dogs and rootbeer.

D: That's the ballroom?

S: In the ballroom, yes. I was the only one who served more food than anything else.

D: There was just popcorn and things?

S: Yes, stuff like that.

D: Basically, we call it junk food.

S: Yes, that's right. Most of the people used to bring their food there, picnics, they used to have a lot of picnics on top of the hill there.

D: Where the train goes through, where that little miniature train goes through.

S: Does it now?

D: Yes.

S: They changed it.

D: There are picnic grounds there still, too. They overlook the ball park. You can see the ball park from there.

S: There are a lot of things. It has been a good many years.

D: What do you remember about Rex Billings?

S: He was a nice man. His wife was very nice. We were very good friends. We used to associate. We'd get together and I'd have the meals here at the house with them. We used to have good times together.

D: Do you remember what the photo gallery looked like on the inside?

S: They just had a curtain. They camouflaged it with curtains and that.

D: Where was it at?

S: Not very far from where the popcorn stand was, right around in there someplace.

D: Do you remember the roller coaster called the Fire Fly?

S: The Fire Fly, before the Wildcat?

D: It was located approximately where the Old Mill and the Wildcat were located, where the park office was.

S: Yes. Did it go down into Mill Creek? They used to have the Indians down there.

D: Real Indians?

S: Yes. They would put the wigwams up, and they would sing.

D: Where did they put it? Were they in Mill Creek park?

S: Yes. Right down off of my door. They would hang them up in the trees. They called it the flats; there was a flat piece of ground there.

D: And they put Indians . . .

S: The Indians would go up there in a hammock, or whatever they used. I think, if I can remember, they sang the Minne Ha Ha. I knew all those songs and I can't even remember them. They made believe that the Indian died and they would bury him. They did all that down in Mill Creek.

D: Did they have shows.

S: Yes. It was like a show. People would sit in the dark.

D: And watch this?

S: Yes.

D: Did Idora bring them in or did Mill Creek bring them in?

S: Idora, because it was just right down . . .

D: It was right below their property?

S: Yes.

D: I've never heard that.

S: Yes.

D: That's a new revelation to me.

S: It is because they even had them hanging up on the tree. Do you know how they hung the Indians up? They died or something.

D: Some of them, yes.

S: That's what they did. They did because we all sat down there at night and listened to it. We couldn't see it very well, but we heard the music. It was interesting. I gave a lot of pictures away which I shouldn't have done.

D: What was Pat Duffy Sr. Like?

S: Nice, very nice, easy to get along with. He had a wad of chew in his mouth all the time. He had a lot of friends. Everybody knew him in Youngstown. He was well-known in Youngstown.

D: He ran the popcorn stand before he became the owner?

- S: Yes. He had the popcorn stand and then after that, naturally, you go up in business. He put a lot of sideshows on too, that they put in. They didn't have a lot of shows in there. He put in a lot of shows. I'll tell you who else used to have a picture gallery there, Hoovers, didn't you ever get their name?
- D: I've heard the name, yes.
- S: Elizabeth and I are very good friends, we're still good friends. She lives out of town.
- D: Do you recall the pool at Idora?
- S: Yes. I swam a lot of times in there. My brother used to take me and make me paddle to the thing and he would say, "Come on." I thought I was going to drown. I paddled like a little dog. I swam in there.
- D: Was it true that it was salt water? Rumor has it that they went way down to tap an underground salt spring or something.
- S: There was a lot of that in Mill Creek.
- D: Was the pool, itself, like salt water, like if you went into the Atlantic Ocean or something?
- S: No, I don't think it was that much. They cleaned it all out all of the time.
- D: I ran across a newspaper article from the 1930's. It talked about how clean Idora Park's pool water was, that you could practically drink it because it was so clean.
- S: You could see at the bottom of it. That's true.
- D: Really?
- S: Yes. I guess they had a filter in there or something that cleaned it out.
- D: Was there sand in around the edge of the pool?
- S: Yes.
- D: So it looked like you were at the beach?
- S: Yes. It was nice. It was a good size beach. After the park would close, a bunch of us would go at night and swim down there, Ace Brigot and everyone. It was just open for the employees. We would all have picnics down in there.

D: Did they ever run the rides for you late at night, if you wanted to?

S: No. They wanted to be with the gang and have a good time. They worked hard all day. You got all the rides you wanted though, if you wanted a ride.

D: During the daytime?

S: Yes.

D: What time did the park open in the daytime, do you know?

S: I think for the rides and that, I don't think it opened up, unless they had a picnic early, until about noon. When they had a picnic a lot of times people were there at eight o'clock in the morning. When the train would come in from Pittsburgh or Cleveland we would have picnics come in and people would just flock in there.

D: Do you know what time it closed at night?

S: Midnight.

D: The rides closed at midnight?

S: Yes.

D: That's really late.

S: Midnight, because after Ace Brigot would play they would come up to my place and I'd make coffee and we would all sit around and have a coffee after midnight.

D: It makes you tired for the next day though.

S: Yes. You were young, you didn't mind it. Those were my young days.

D: Do you recall what the ballroom looked like?

S: Beautiful. The floor was waxed beautiful. It was always neat and clean. I loved to dance on it. I had one nephew, my sister's boy, Chuck; he used to come from Pennsylvania and he loved to dance. Chuck and I used to dance the one-step. We never went to be close together. We just went on that floor like it was nobody's business. I enjoyed my life years ago, really I did.

D: Did your husband like to dance?

S: No. He was a close dancer. He would let me go ahead and dance. We would dance at home, but he never cared much about dancing. Sometimes I'd start up at home and I'd

say, "Come on, Howard, let's dance." He never cared to so we got along wonderful. We were married 35 years and then he passed away.

D: What year did you get married?

S: In 1924 or 1925 I think it was. I was a widow for three or four years and then I got married to Smedley. I knew Smedley before I knew my first husband. He and his first wife used to come visit with my brother from Michigan. The world goes around.

D: That's really funny. Things always work out that way.

S: He was a good man, though. My husband was a good man, my second husband. The husbands were good. I had no problems. I never had a want for anything. I always had plenty.

D: I don't know if you would remember this, but we heard about a dark ride, one of the rides that you went in that was dark, supposedly had scenes from the Wizard of Oz. Do you know anything about that or do you remember?

S: I remember. I can't recall, here were a lot of pictures that they would show inside while you were in the boat. I can't recall now. Maybe it was after my days that I didn't go there, I don't know.

D: Did you like to ride the rides?

S: Oh yes. The first ride was right by the dance hall, what do you call it?

D: The Jack Rabbit?

S: No. The Jack Rabbit was right across, maybe that was the Jack Rabbit.

D: It's right next to the ballroom.

S: Yes. I used to ride that a lot.

D: Do you recall anything about the theatre that was there, the summer theatre?

S: Yes. I used to feed . . . What do you they call them? It was stock of some kind.

D: Summer stock?

S: Yes. Summer stock. There would be shows coming and they would only come in the summertime.

D: Do you remember Lillian Desmond?

S: Yes.

D: What was she like?

S: A nice person. She was a nice person.

D: Did she eat at your cafeteria often?

S: Yes. I fed her many times.

D: Do you remember if that theatre was open? Was that an open theatre or closed? Could somebody sit on the outside and see what was going on inside?

S: It was closed.

D: Do you have any stories about your cafeteria, anything interesting that happened there or any stories about the people who came there?

S: I used to go out and pick wild daisies and put them on the table so everybody had a bouquet on the table.

D: I imagine that was pretty popular.

The Carousel, did you ride that, the merry-go-round?

S: The merry-go-round, I rode that so much. I used to stand on it and put the kids on it, a lot of little kids that would come in. I rode that an awful lot. The merry-go-round was the thing that everybody liked. They loved that. Two of my nieces, I used to put them up and hold them on it.

D: Did you have to pay any taxes on the cafeteria or was that just part of the park?

S: They didn't do those kinds of things in those days, that I know of.

D: Did you notice a variety of ethnic groups that would come to the park?

S: Yes. Different companies from Pittsburgh would come to a lot of picnics. It was nothing for that train to pull in at eight o'clock in the morning and then the open streetcars would come out to Idora. People didn't have cars in those days, it was all train and walking, hardly any cars at all.

D: They were mostly streetcars from the city?

- S: Yes. I mean trains, they came on trains and that. People didn't come in cars.
- D: What did they do, did they take the train to downtown Youngstown and then take the streetcar?
- S: Yes. They'd have a special car just to bring the people out.
- D: Did you ever go out and ride on the streetcars?
- S: Yes.
- D: To town and then back to the park?
- S: Yes. I used the streetcar when I lived in town. We had to. I lived on Brentwood and the cars just came up as far as Grace Avenue. Sometimes I would take that car and get off and then walk a couple of blocks home. They were every fifteen minutes, over Market Street Bridge and that, around the loop downtown. Those were the days. The square, do you have any history on the square?
- D: I have some photographs of the streetcars on the diamond. We have some photographs, but that's about it.
- S: It used to be open. You used to get on right there at Federal and around the loops there.
- D: Did you ever do anything during the off-season at the park, did you ever open the cafeteria at all during the off-season?
- S: I did later on. I opened a place on Market Street and called it O'Neill House. I guess it was down the mill. Did I tell you I was in the mill?
- D: Yes.
- S: After I gave that up I had to do some work so I went and opened a restaurant on Market Street. There was a big home there and I bought the home and lived upstairs and had the downstairs turned into a restaurant. I remodeled that all up there. I guess the building is still there. I had that. After my husband died, it was too much for me to operate, so I had to give it up. It was too much. It takes two people to do the earnings and I had to do all the bookkeeping and everything. In those days you did a lot of your own bookkeeping and everything, unless you had a big place.
- D: If you made a lot of money.
- S: Yes.

D: Can you describe a typical day at your cafeteria at Idora?

S: We would get all ready waiting for the crowd to come in and they would just bang in and hurry up to eat. We would get ready early in the morning.

D: You would have to be out there at what time?

S: I used to get out there at five o'clock in the morning. We just got a couple hours of sleep and that's all.

D: Were you open every day, seven days a week?

S: On Mondays, towards the end of the season, we had what they called colored day, Monday was colored day.

D: Didn't they let them in the park any other time?

S: No, colored people didn't come in in those days. They didn't that I know of. When they opened this colored day on Mondays, I don't know how that started, I can't even think. Monday was their day. There were no white people, only the ones that worked there.

D: Every Monday?

S: Yes, towards the end. You had to give them a day because they weren't allowed to come in the park at other times, at least they didn't. I don't know whether they allowed them or not, but that was the ruling.

D: I didn't know about that.

S: Yes. Colored people didn't mingle with the white at that time, did you know that?

D: I just assumed that they didn't.

S: I'll never forget, they had colored girls working in the dance hall, in the restroom there, in the dance hall, and they served beer on the dance floor. They had colored girls working there. Those were the only colored girls. They used to come up every once in a while and eat with me. I wasn't opposed to them. They would stand at the end of the counter at the doorway and have a cup of coffee or something. They never pushed themselves. Colored people never pushed themselves at all. Really they were nice. Of course, they're human too, you know, when you stop to figure it.

D: They weren't working anywhere else in the park?

S: No, just down at the ballroom.

D: No ride operators?

S: No. Just in the restroom they would take care.

D: Did you mingle much with the other employees of the park?

S: With the business ones. More of the business ones, like Eddie Gilronan and Pat Duffy.

D: Management?

S: Yes. That's about all.

D: Did you know Mr. Murray?

S: Yes. He's Mr. Dible's son-in-law. He was very nice. Mr. Murray was very nice.

D: His son is Richard Murray, the plastic surgeon.

S: Is he? Dible and all of them ate with me up there. They would all come in. We got along wonderfully. I had a lot of friends there.

D: Why did you leave the park?

S: I guess they quit. I guess they didn't re-lease it anymore, the cafeteria. I think that's what it was. The reason was because I had a restaurant down at the mill too, and it was too much so I had to give up one. Idora Park was only in the summertime and the other one was year-round so I was down at Republic Iron Steel for a good many years. I catered to all the office men and that.

D: Did you still do Mr. Dible's dinners after you left, the special things that he wanted catered?

S: At times he would call me. When they opened it up down in the corner, they used to have a rink down there and they made that into it, so I went down there and cooked special steaks for him.

D: After you left Idora?

S: Yes. He would always come and ask me to cook the steaks for him.

D: Did they replace anybody in the cafeteria after you left or did they just close the cafeteria?

S: I think they closed it. I don't think they operated anymore. I forget.

D: Do you remember the animals that they had there?

Supposedly, they had monkeys or something?

S: Yes. Those were the days.

D: Do you remember when they built the Wildcat? Do you remember anything about them building it? I'm sure they made a lot of racket.

S: No. I don't think. I never paid any attention. When they were building no one was out there, they built it when the park wasn't open.

D: They built it during the off-season?

S: Yes.

D: They didn't work on it at all during the summer?

S: No. Only what needed fixing, if anything happened to go wrong.

D: That's interesting. I would have thought that they might have just continued building until they got it done.

Is there anything else you would like to say?

S: I don't know. I don't know what to say.

D: I think it gave me quite a lot of information. I'd like to thank you for taking time on this rather hot day to talk to me.

END OF INTERVIEW