

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of East Palestine Project

History of East Palestine

O. H. 145

KENNETH E. RUKENBROD

Interviewed

by

Stephan Casi

on

May 1, 1979

KENNETH E. RUKENBROD

Kenneth E. Rukenbrod was born in East Palestine, Ohio on December 5, 1899. He graduated from East Palestine Middle School in 1914 with an eighth grade diploma and began working for his father who owned Rukenbrod's Meat Market.

The market was first started in the late 1880's in Unity. It was first called King and Rukenbrod. Around the turn of the century the store's location was moved to Market Street in East Palestine, where it is still operating today.

Kenneth Rukenbrod's father died in the 1930's and he took over the store. Although Mr. Rukenbrod is eighty, he still goes to work every day. He also keeps busy through his activities with the Masons, Kiwanis and serving on the board of several banks.

Mr. Rukenbrod presently lives on 45 West Clark Street in East Palestine. He was married to the late Pauline Ashbaugh. He has three children, one who is Pete Rukenbrod who continues to work with his father in the meat market. Mr. Rukenbrod is a member of the Methodist Church of East Palestine and his hobbies include golf and bowling.

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INTERVIEWEE: KENNETH E. RUKENBROD
INTERVIEWER: Stephan G. Casi
SUBJECT: History of East Palestine
DATE: May 1, 1979

C: This is an interview with Mr. Kenneth E. Rukenbrod for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Stephan Casi at 45 West Clark Street on May 1, 1979 at 7:30 p.m. The subject is the History of East Palestine.

Mr. Rukenbrod, I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about your parents and family, when they came to the East Palestine area.

R: Well, my grandad started in the meat business in Unity originally, it was King and Rukenbrod in Unity and about the time the railroad went through there, about 1885 to 1892, I don't remember the correct year, my dad come down here to East Palestine and opened up a market and he and his brother Park, operated a market here and run peddle wagons, horses and wagons, and had a bell and go around and have a regular route. Every so often they'd make a different territory and pull up and ring the bell and open the curtain at the back of the wagon and the woman would come out with a plate and pick out the meat she wanted and that was it. You did all this scale work on a hanging scale and you had to be pretty sharp with figures as far as fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five cents a pound, and if you had a pound and a quarter, you had to do some calculating that machines do for you today.

Later on, my Uncle Park, that was my dad's brother got in the automobile business with Sam Faylor, Faylor and

Rukenbrod, and started selling automobiles down where the five-and-ten is now. I don't know. I suppose that was in 1912 or 1913.

C: You mentioned how you used to have a peddle cart. What type of items did you sell when you had to go around from area to area?

R: Oh, it was all meat.

C: All meat and that's it?

R: You cut the meat and put it in a pan. You had it all cut and in the pan and you just opened up the rear door of the rear gate on the wagon. A woman would come out and picked out the roast or the steak or the chops and put it on her plate and payed for it. And we had some credit too. It wasn't all cash.

C: How about prices in those days, do you have any idea or remember what some of the prices on the different items were?

R: Really, prices were less after the 1929 Crash. I think in 1929 to 1931 or 1932 or 1933, prices of meat were less at that time than they were way back in 1910 or 1912. And you didn't have any electricity and you didn't have a grinder like you have today. We had a gasoline engine in the back room down there at the shop and a belt that run the grinder. And hamburger wasn't near as popular then as it got to be later on. Baloney, that was the thing. I make a lot of baloney. Instead of using hamburg, they put it in baloney.

C: And you sold pork, a lot of pork, other than beef too?

R: Well yes, but I don't remember so much about much pork. It was mostly beef.

C: And all the meat was from local farmers?

R: Yes. My dad used to get carloads of cattle out of Chicago. There used to be a yard down here where the Nash company is now. There used to be a pen there to unload the cattle and at that time they'd fit 22 to 25 head of cattle in a freight car, cattle car.

C: Offhand, you couldn't think of some prices maybe to recollect?

R: I can't. I just can't recollect at that time. What's

outstanding to me in the 1930's, from 1929 to 1932, that hogs got down to four cents a pound, live hog. That's eight dollars for a hog. And today I sell fresh hams down there. I threw a fresh ham on the scale the other day. It come to more money than I would have payed for three, two hundred pound hogs, in the 1930's. But I peddled meat. I run one of those wagons when I was fifteen years old to Jimtown. You know where Jimtown is out south of town?

C: Right.

R: Tuesdays and Saturdays. I had a horse and a peddle wagon and I run that Jimtown run for a year or two, myself, when I was fifteen years old, summer and winter there.

C: How about storing meat in those days? Was there any type of refrigeration you had?

R: No, you had ice that's all, and in the summertime if you could get a cooler down to fifty degrees, that was good. And on Saturday night we stayed open till eleven or twelve o'clock at night. On Saturday night you had to be pretty well cleaned out or it was no good Monday morning. You had to be awful careful not to buy too much. You didn't have a freezer or a cooler to hold it.

C: Going back to your childhood, what part of the East Palestine area were you raised?

R: Right up here on Market Street at the foot of the hill, on Market Street.

C: And what do you remember about your childhood, about East Palestine? What you did? Some of your friends? What did kids do for fun in those days?

R: I had Jack Meek and Ellen Meek, his wife lives out. . . Evelyn Meek, she's married to one of the kids that was across the street from us up there. There was two or three boys in that family and Yoders up at the top of the hill on Market Street there, there was two in that. We all had ponies, horses and ponies and in the summertime we'd hitch up the pony to a buckboard and go out along a creek to go swimming and stuff like that. You didn't have, I don't know, hardly what. And we played baseball, scrub. You never heard of scrub, did you?

C: No.

R: That's where you had. . . Oh, you pick up any size team, scrub and out in the field, if I'm out in the field and catch your fly, you've got to go out and take my position and I get in to bat. Then they'd work it around, when a guy got out on base, well the catcher got up to be bats and revolved around from first, second or third base to pitcher to catcher and then he got to bat as soon as somebody got out or a fly ball put them out.

And we used to play what they called sock-ball with Bull Durham sacks of tobacco, fill it with sawdust and wet it down a little bit and played sock-ball. If you hit the Bull-Durham sack out and I got it and hit you between the bases, three bases around, that put you out, sock-ball. And we played caddy. Had a broomstick sharpened on both ends and on another broomstick. You'd lay that caddy down and hit the point and have it flop up and then if you could hit that thing in the air and put it out there, from there to out there into that other room, and you got it and I layed that broomstick down and if you could throw that caddy and hit my stick then you got to be bats and I was out.

C: You mentioned you went to a creek, where did you do your swimming in the East Palestine area?

R: Well, it was rock bottom down at Negley and it was quite a hole down at Fredrick Town and then there was Greens out here at Dulls. Do you know where the turn is on the road to Petersburg? That sharp turn down there. It used to be Dull that lived there? Well, that creek right there. I've looked at some of those creeks in the last few years and wondered. . . I think the holes were surely deeper than they. . . Of course, we were just kids. A three foot hole would be a pretty good size. I think it was most all creeks. It was all creeks. You didn't have any pools to use.

C: How about your family itself? What do you remember about growing up as a child? Did you have any brothers and sisters, what you did as a family, your dad's discipline?

R: Well, I went to church, prayer meeting. I went to church, Sunday school. I used to finagle around when I was five or six years old or seven. Thursday night, I figured around anything to get out of going to prayer meeting. I'd go over to the neighbor, or try to get over to the neighbors and I think sometimes that if my

family hadn't have been quite so rigid about me going to church every Sunday and Sunday night and Christian Endeavor and Sunday school, I think I'd have been a better church member today, but I just got so fed up with sitting there.

One thing I can remember about my dad in the Presbyterian Church over here, he was reaching down in his vest, he used to chew Tobys, he didn't chew regular chewing tobacco, I can remember him reaching in his vest pocket and breaking off a little bit of Toby and putting it in his mouth and he would chew that when the preacher was preaching and I could never understand what he did with it, how he kept from getting sick. (Laughter)

My dad and mother, as I say, lived up here at 442 North Market and I have a sister that's four years younger than I am. She married a fellow from Rochester and he had a lot of sinus trouble and they went to California in about 1940.

When I was eighteen, I didn't get along with the teacher in English History and I had to have English History in order to graduate and I saw at Christmastime I wasn't going to make it so I went to work at the shop and I just skipped the graduation, I skipped everything. I never graduated from high school. But my sister graduated four years later and went to Ohio Wesleyan for four years and she come back here and worked in the store for two or three years and finally got married.

C: Today, a lot of kids have a lot of time on their hands and you see them downtown just standing around two or three hours. When you were a boy, did your family give you plenty of things to do? Did you have plenty of chores?

R: Oh, I had plenty of work to do.

C: What were some of the things that were your responsibilities?

R: When I was fourteen years old, I had a pony and a buckboard. A buckboard, that's no roof on it or anything, just a buckboard. And the State Line Coal Mine was running down here and there was a tipple over the tracks where they dropped the coal onto the coal cars on the trains, and that was a big coal mine on a cable. They run them, maybe fifteen or twenty cars on a cable and the Austrian people come over here from Austria and

there were three or four boarding houses down there. And when I was fourteen years old, I was in the sixth or seventh grade and if I wasn't out at the end of East Main Street, you know where East Main Street is, when the seven o'clock whistle blew over here at the pottery, I was going to be late for school. Taking meat down to those boarding houses down there, you'd take it down and deliver it. As I remember, they run a charge account and they'd give you the order for the next day. And every other day, I'd go on down over what is State Line Hill to another row of boarding houses, every other day. It was oh, three mile anyhow, down there and back, three and a half. And there used to be about four or five double houses down there that were all Austrians. I delivered to all them.

C: When you were fourteen?

R: When I was fourteen. Fourteen or fifteen. In about 1914 or 1915, we got our first Model T Ford. But of course, in the wintertime or in the spring, when the roads were bad, it was all mud roads. You couldn't get down there with a car. You had to use horse and wagon or a pony and buckboard. Or I can remember going down there on horseback with meat on each side of the saddle in front and in back. That's the way you dumped it. My God, the way inspectors come around today, why they'd crucify you if you handled meat that way. Oh, gee, I never killed anybody that I know of or poisoned anybody! Well, with fifty degree temperature, that's as cold as you could get it and in summertime you'd have flies. Oh, gee, you talk about these guys coming around now and picking around and picking little things. My God, (Laughter) I don't think I ever poisoned anybody but Jesus today. (Laughter) We had two inspectors, the things they make you do, the government.

C: You mentioned inspectors. When did they first have inspectors, about what time?

R: Well, we butchered cattle and hogs up here at Unity at the slaughterhouse. You know where the slaughterhouse is on this side of Unity? You know where Pete's house is, where my son lives? Across the road from that, that block building, where they started that new gas station there on the point.

C: Yes.

R: Down that road right there, that tile building. That

burned down in 1940 and my dad and mother were killed in 1939 in an automobile accident, up in front of Glen Neal's restaurant, coming from the Canfield Fair on Labor Day of 1939. My dad liked horse races and they went to the fair and they had put in a test block of cement just on that little turn there at Neal's Restaurant and he slid into a car going the other way a little bit, hit their little left back fender and it blew out his left front tire and it swung around and another car coming the other way hit them right in the middle, between the front and the back door. I went to the hospital with my mother and I sat there in the ambulance and watched her die between there and Columbiana. She never regained consciousness. But my dad got to the hospital and lay for about an hour after he got to the hospital. That was just out of the clear blue. They were both enjoying pretty good health. My dad was 73 and my mother was 69. Oh boy, I tell you. That was in 1939 and I kept on operating the shop down there and in 1940, that next fall, the slaughterhouse burned down and I hesitated about even rebuilding it at that time, but I did. And then along come the war and the meat shortage and I'm glad that I rebuilt the slaughterhouse. And that went on till oh, we butchered cattle and hogs there, that went on till 1966, 1966 and then they come along with inspectors and whatnot. I had a daughter, Kay, that got married. Married Jack Beck and they moved to Seattle and in 1966, Pete was in the store with me there at that time Reege Archibald was in there, Frankie Early. I had good help. And Wall Trapman and Lukey Hughes. I had good help. And in 1964, my wife and I decided we'd go to Seattle, drive, go to Seattle and then down to Carlsbad to see my sister. We were gone about a month and made that trip in 1964, and we did it again in 1966. And in 1966 when we left, I told Pete, "Now, if you can't get the work done, buy the meat, just quit butchering," and we left here on Declaration Day of that year. And they butchered that week on Monday and that was the end of the butchering. We never butchered anything after that because they got to buying the meat and then these inspectors come along right at that time in 1966, they were commissioned to inspect. If you didn't have an inspector right there when you were doing the slaughtering, you couldn't resell the meat.

I had farmers out here at the base, you know the Tombstone Base, I used to butcher a cow and bring it in and I'd cut it up and wrap it and freeze it for them. They'd butcher it right there on the farm. I pretty near got fined five-hundred bucks because I had one hanging in

there that I was going to cut and wrap for these guys, and the inspector come in and it wasn't inspected. It didn't have the stamp on it.

C: Well, you know today they say that these guys in these big meat houses, they don't check the meat, they just go along and stamp it.

R: Oh, yes, sure they stamp it.

C: They stamp it but they don't really check it.

R: Oh, they don't check it. No, it's just another job. It's a political job. It makes another Democrat or Republican or whatever. It's a political job.

C: Maybe we can get back to butchering a little later and talk about what it was like years ago and today. But I would like to go back to your childhood talking about the clothes that people wore back in those days, and where you bought your clothes? Did your mom make them? Maybe you could say something about that.

R: Well, my mother made me shirts, sateen shirts. I can remember in my first long pair of pants, walking down the street. I don't know how old I was. I don't know where I got the long pants, some clothing store here, yes. They had clothing stores, tailors; you had tailors then. I can remember walking down Market Street here with my first pair of long pants on. I thought everybody was looking at me after having those knee pants up until you were, I don't know, twelve or thirteen.
(Laughter)

C: You mentioned school briefly before. What do you remember about school? What schools did you attend here in East Palestine? Maybe you could say something about the subjects and the discipline you remember.

R: Well, I started over on East North Avenue in 1906. That school was built in 1905. Then I went through up till the seventh grade there and then I split up eighth grade. Eighth grade had to go over to Chapman Taggart for eighth grade. And I just got out of eighth grade on condition. She passed me into high school on condition. I wasn't too sharp a student. I didn't spend much time with studies. I was working, but I got out of eighth grade on condition into high school. (Laughter)

C: What do you remember about some of your teachers and subjects? Were they strict?

- R: Pretty strict, that eighth grade teacher over at Chapman Taggart, she had to have over a good many years. Her name was Southern, they used to call her Mammy Southern. I think her son is still living in Cleveland. I believe he is. Maybe he's dead now. I don't know. But she taught there. Boy, she was rough, she was strict. When Ryan was principal up here at the high school, he was pretty rough, pretty strict. But I don't know how it is today. I did have Jenny, Pete's daughter, sit in your chair the other day, she's a senior. And she said the attitude of kids that are freshmen today, it's a lot different in the freshman class than it was four years ago when she was a freshman. Now, Jenny, she's a pretty sharp little kid and she remarked about that. I don't know. I just squeaked through all the way. I was down on the bottom of the totem pole. Boy, I'll tell you, (Laughter) I just made it through, up till, well, I saw I wasn't going to graduate and I wasn't going to spend another year in high school to get a diploma so I went to work.
- C: When did you get married Mr. Rukenbrod, and where did you first take up housekeeping?
- R: I got married in 1927. I went with my wife or I figured she was my girl when I went to East North Avenue School. There used to be a bank here where you helped pull the girls up over the bank and I always tried to get her hand to help pull her up over the bank. That was in first or second grade. And off and on I went with her all up through the years of school. We were in the same class. She pretty near married another guy in high school. He was two or three years ahead of her in school, Bob Chamberlain. They were engaged to be married and I don't know what happened. Something happened; but I went with her off and on, even when she was still going with Bob Chamberlain, I went out with her once in a while. But not after she was engaged to him, not while she was engaged but after they got engaged and then in a year or so they broke it off and I started up again. Another guy in Columbiana, Clarence Cole, he come down here quite a little to see her. I had quite a hassle but I finally married her in 1927. I went with her off and on all those years.
- C: She must have been very pretty.
- R: She was. She was a nice looking gal. Her mother lived right here and run a tearoom right there. She opened that sun room there and put a tearoom out there, and

her mother kept boarders here. She had oh, five or six office men that boarded with her.

C: So this house that we're talking in right now was your first home when you got married?

R: No, I rented that house over there across. That belonged to her uncle, Mike Meek. He's still living, he's ninety years old. That was my wife's mother's brother, Mike Meek. She was a Meek. When we got married we rented that house over there, his house, and moved in and lived there from 1927 till 1932, and her mother died in 1932. She was only 56 years old, I think, and her mother died and she had two brothers and a sister who were all here at home and her dad, and we just moved over here. She took over and in a matter of a few years her brothers both got married and finally her sister got married and we kept on living here and her dad stayed with us. He lived to be 93 years old but I don't know what year it was he died. Over there and right here are the only places I ever lived.

C: How many children did you have?

R: Three.

C: Three children. And they are?

R: Well, Pete's in the store down there with me, and my daughter, Kay, that married Jack Beck and then my son, Jack, he's in the brokerage business in Cleveland. Right now he's in the brokerage business.

C: I passed over a few years that maybe I'd like to go back. How about World War I? Let me ask you, did you serve in the war and if not, what do you remember about life in East Palestine?

R: I remember about it, I'll tell you. I enlisted, I think I was seventeen and I enlisted. Maybe I was eighteen, 1918 at the end of the war in November of 1918. Anyhow, I enlisted and was taken to Salem and examined and passed and was to leave for someplace, I don't know where, October 29, and they never called me. The war was over on November 11th. They never called me. And I just missed out on that war. In the Second World War, I was just 36 or 37 years old. I was too old. I had to sign up but I was too old. They didn't call me.

C: Why did you sign up to serve in the First World War?

Weren't you needed at the store?

R: Yes, but I don't know. (Laughter) Yes, I was needed at the store.

C: I guess a lot of fellows in those days felt that it was part of their duty or responsibility.

R: Yes, yes. Part of their duty. In 1918 here, we had the influenza in this town in 1918. People were dying like flies from that influenza. Down where the Vet's is now it was a Rubber Club, a clubhouse that they built, McGraw built there. And they moved people in there, sick people, and they had doctors in there and big fellows that is 240, 250 pound men. Mostly men as I remember that got that influenza. They just died like. . . People were just . . . Funerals. I don't remember. It was terrible. We used to wear masks. I don't know what they put in them to keep from getting this influenza. But I remember about working in the store there in 1918.

C: What do you remember about the 1920's in East Palestine, thinking about Prohibition? Do you remember were there any speakeasies in East Palestine?

R: Yes, in the surrounding territory maybe. I remember, oh, a couple, three people that were bootleggers, sold whiskey. Down in Negley there was guys making home whiskey. You would put in some flavor and get any flavor, sarsaparilla or raspberry. (Laughter) It was just homemade whiskey. Then, of course, we had a mayor here and a chief of police that really cracked down on bootleggers. They even stepped out and went over to Youngstown. They stepped out of their territory on bootlegging. Gee, they were tough on bootleggers. That mayor that we had here, Warren, no, Warren was a cop's name. I can't think of the mayor's name. Oh boy, they were tough on bootleggers. But there was still some bootleggers around Palestine here that sold home brew. I had Ducs Arnold, a fellow a year or two older than I was running a bowling alley and at the turn of the century his folks were in the brewery business here. Arnold had a brewery and Ducs came down to me at the store and he said, "If you furnish some malt and the sugar," his mother died. He lived right up the street here on Clark Street. And he said, "You furnish the malt and the sugar and I'll make the beer and we'll have it up in my cellar." And we did that. Boy, I'll tell you, that was really powerful beer. He put it turned out, put it in quart bottles. (Laughter)

- C: What do you remember about the store in the 1920's?
How was business?
- R: Pretty fair. Pretty fair.
- C: Were you still primarily dealing in meats only?
- R: Meat yes, mostly meat. Then Armour come along and he got to packing. Armour and Company got you kind of into some of the canned goods and catsup and baked beans and bought them from Armour, the same guy that we were getting some of our meat from. We just gradually worked into the groceries and then in 1938 frozen foods were just coming in, frozen foods. I should have waited on Birdseye, that's the one I wanted but I couldn't. They were busy. They had so many people wanting their stuff that they passed me up and I went to Pittsburgh and bought Little America, it was called and a case about the size of this bar here with four glass in front. Four glass to keep the refrigeration in, and the unit that I had in the back room to keep that down to freezing. That's when I got into the frozen food business, in 1938.
- C: Were frozen foods quite popular?
- R: Well, they started to be. Especially the strawberries. That was a big one, the strawberries, and there were other things of course, lima beans and peas and some of the vegetables. I have an article someplace around here that the Daily Leader published when I first put those frozen foods in about Rukenbrod's frozen foods, 1938.
- C: If we go to the 1930's, what do you remember about life in East Palestine? Raising a family, the store?
- R: Well, I just had the one son, and Pete was born in 1929. And in the early 1930's, my daughter Kay wasn't born till 1936. I just had the one son when really the Depression hit and the banks closed. My sister, Martha, was keeping the books and taking care of the money and I've often told other people that two or three months before the banks closed we dealt with Armour and Swift. I told Martha, "Just don't bother going to the bank. Just pay these guys in cash and keep the money." Now why, I can never understand why I told Martha to do that, two or three months before the bank holiday. Harry Lawrence down there, across the street on that Saturday night, took the money over and put it in the

bank and Monday morning the banks didn't open and he had to meet all those checks that he had out. He had to pay those, the bank was closed.

C: Who was this Mr. Rukenbrod?

R: Harry Lawrence. He was in the grocery business, grocery and dry goods down the street in the Labate building, where Labate's building is now? Harry Lawrence, he was in the grocery business. He eventually went into meats later on. But he put his money in the bank on Saturday night and just sold a lot of creamery butter, Petersburg Creamery over here. The check that he gave the Petersburg Creamery for his butter that week, he had to dig down and try to get the money to meet that check to pay that check off. He put all his money in the bank and it didn't open. Nobody had any money. I had a little bit of money because, for the life of me, I could never figure out why I told Martha to quit going to the bank. I don't know why I ever did that. I've thought about it and thought about it afterwards and at the time.

C: Had you not done that, do you think there was a possibility that you might have even had to close for a while?

R: Oh, well, I don't know. I just don't hardly know what would have happened. Harry Lawrence made out, but he had a friend Burt Quay that had some money. If you had a friend that had some money that could help you out, just a little bit you know, just enough to get going again. Of course, Harry Lawrence had a lot of rental properties in this town. I don't know how tough it was but I do know that it was a lot rougher on him than it was on us because we hadn't put our money all in the bank that Saturday night.

And, of course, then you got OPA [Office of Price Administration] and people over here at Lisbon they'd send you an order. You'd get fifteen or twenty dollars worth of groceries that they'd send it to me, the order. Then you'd deal out those fifteen or twenty dollars worth of groceries. It's a good bit like social security now. Now they give them the money, at that time they'd give them these relief orders.

C: What about the people that you dealt with? How could they meet their bills? Did you have a good deal of credit in those days?

- R: Well, not a good deal, we had a little, a little credit. I put out a lot of credit to people that dealt with me. You didn't see that piece in the paper within the last three or four years of the guy that sent me fifty bucks from California, a money order?
- C: One of your customers from the Depression?
- R: From the Depression. He said he didn't remember what it was but it was more than fifty dollars but later on he said, "I'll send you more. I know it was more than that." He did, he sent another fifty. I got a hundred bucks from him that he said he owed from the Depression, that we took care of him. I had a whole. . . I had a book and I tried to collect. I tried to collect but oh, boy, it was rough. It was really rough.
- C: How about the business itself, were you making less money because people just didn't have the money to buy the food?
- R: Well, I don't really remember hurting too bad. I was hurting. We didn't have any money to speak of but not really . . . I didn't owe anybody a lot of money like you do today. Then you didn't get credit like that. You didn't get that kind of credit. You didn't have a credit card. But customers that had dealt with my dad and I up through the years, then the Depression come along and they don't have enough to eat and they got three or four kids. As long as I had something there, I went along with a lot of people. I had a book and it's still laying around someplace. I don't know where it is now. But, I had a list after it kind of got over, of people that owed me money.
- C: But your good customers were going to pay you back so you knew that.
- R: Yes, yes. Yes, a lot of them did. I had the Gillowlys. You don't remember the Gillowlys? Their mother lives out here now. They had seven kids. That was later than the Depression, this was I suppose back up in the 1940's, 1950's. They had seven kids and they owed me, at one time, eleven hundred dollars, and the kids kind of got grown up, one or two of them at a time and got away and got jobs or got to helping out at home. And it's just been within the last three or four years . . . He died, Pat Gillowly died, oh, I suppose four or five years ago. But anyhow, it just was in the last five or six years that they eventually paid the last of that eleven hundred bucks. He was a cello operator and got to making pretty

fair money.

C: How about getting the food into the store, was there any problem during the Depression, getting the food or was there plenty of it?

R: I don't remember having a problem. We were doing our own butchering. You could go out and buy cattle or buy cows from farmers around or go to the sales and buy them.

C: Did the price of beef go way down during the Depression?

R: Oh, my God, yes. I say it did.

C: You mentioned that earlier. So the farmers were really getting hurt weren't they?

R: Oh, yes, they were, but they weren't paying the money they're paying for tractors and that. I fed cattle in the 1940's. I'd buy, maybe spring of the year, now maybe buy twenty or twenty-five head and make deals with farmers to take those cattle and turn them out and feed them on pasture and guarantee them so much money in the next six or eight months. I remember one fellow I had over here on the other side of Petersburg that had a big farm there and I put twenty or twenty-five head of cattle in there in the spring of the year that I had picked up eight and nine cents a pound. And I guaranteed him twelve cents a pound on all the gain he put on them. They'd weigh maybe five or six hundred pound when I put them in and if he put three or four hundred pound on them, I payed him twelve cents a pound on all that gain he put on them. I guaranteed him twelve cents a pound for those cattle, not just the gain, I guaranteed him twelve cents a pound, that I would take them and pay him twelve cents a pound for them. And when they were ready to go, they were over sixteen. I made a little money that time, but I never made it like that before or since. It's just one of those things. I took them over here to the county home. A fellow by the name of Neal run the county home and I did the same thing with him, or my dad did, the same thing. And then when they were ready to come back, they wouldn't give them to us. They wouldn't give them to us. The county commissioners and that old fellow, they sold them to somebody else. We guaranteed them so much money but they were higher. That deal was, they payed us for the cattle and we guaranteed them so much for them when they were ready to go but then they were higher than that so they wouldn't give them back to us.

C: How about if we talk about some of your competitors in town. How many stores were there as far as the meats and groceries, that you remember at this time now? Did you have Morris'?

R: Yes, the Morris' were right here on this corner. And then we had one where the Building and Loan is now, and down where the bank parking lot is, that Spate building. Do you remember Spates being in right there where the bank has their parking lot next to Archibald's office?

C: Yes.

R: That was a market there. And then there were little stores around like Mrs. Libert down here that's working for me now down there, Martha Libert, down here on Martin Street. They had a little store here that we used to call Lautown out at the end of West Martin Street up the top of the hill. Oh, there were a lot of little stores around. Chips down here on Park Avenue. Oh, there was a mess of little stores around, gee. I don't know, eighteen or twenty.

C: Well, you were pretty successful, your store.

R: Yes.

C: What would you credit the success of your store? Since you had a lot of competition how did Rukenbrods seem to make out during the 1930's and 1940's?

R: Well, I don't know. I stayed with my dad and carried on. A family, if they didn't have anybody to carry on, a lot of times they. . . Like Harry Lawrence down there, his son died with some kind of a childhood disease, leukemia or something. He didn't have anybody to carry on. Old man Lawrence, Harry, the old man and then Pete, Pete Lawrence, but after Pete, there was nobody, he didn't have anybody to step in and take his place.

C: How about the fact that you had home delivery? Did everyone else deliver food, too?

R: Oh, yes.

C: So, it wasn't that Rukenbrods would deliver?

R: No.

C: Because everyone else did also.

R: Everybody else did. Not everybody, but Morris' did here and Spate, down there. We all did a little delivering.

C: Okay so, we can say that Rukenbrod's Market came out of the Depression pretty well and now we're heading into the 1940's.

R: I can remember when A&P, they originally used to run little grocery stores, a little hole in the wall, and they started to expand and built that building down there where the Daily Leader office is now.

C: What year was that Mr. Rukenbrod?

R: Oh my God, I don't know. I remember the Saturday they opened but I don't know just what year it was. I thought it was all over then. I thought, "Boy, we've had it. This is it." That Saturday and that next week after they opened, down there at that big market, oh geez. (Laughter) I thought we'd had it (Laughter). We're still here. We're still here but the A&P is gone. (Laughter) But today it's rough, I'll tell you.

C: But the 1940's, the war hit and what was it like operating the store during the 1940's especially during the war period? What do you remember? What stands out in your mind?

R: Well, rationing and we did our own butchering and more or less run a black market. That's what we were. Really that's what we were doing. I got arrested a couple times too. I even got hauled up to Cleveland before a Federal judge, cap and gown on. (Laughter) That takes the sap out of you when you walk into a Federal Court Room and the guy has a cap and gown on. (Laughter)

C: You had all these friends that had been good customers all those years and you just felt that you owed them something, right?

R: Well, I kept on. Yes, I had people coming from all over for meat.

C: But everyone was only allowed so much.

R: Yes. I was on a quota. I had a quota and what got me in trouble the first time was those red points. I had to make out forms and send forms, oh geez, forms. Fill them out and send those points into the office, the OPA office, those red points. And this one period, I went

over my quota. I sent the red points in over my quota. I thought . . . I'll tell you what it was: Harry Lawrence quit down there. He quit the grocery and meat business and that threw a lot more onto me. And I thought I had a leg to stand on by going over my quota, just because Harry Lawrence quit. A lot of his customers came up to me and I thought I had a leg to stand on and I sent in the points over my quota, the red points. I can remember filling out those forms. One, in particular that I filled out and I did my best to do it right and I kept getting it back and getting it back and I finally just threw it over into the waste paper basket. I didn't hear anymore about it. (Laughter)

C: What were some of the items that were rationed?

R: Oh, they were all rationed.

C: Everything?

R: Canned goods, everything. That was the blue stamps, canned goods.

C: How much meat could someone go in and get or how much sugar? Do you remember how much you were allowed? Was it per week, per month? How did it work?

R: If I could get sugar and flour and things like Crisco and stuff like that that was short, I couldn't get all I wanted, no. And if I got a mess in and I gave them to you and you went out and told somebody you got Crisco and he was a good customer of mine and I didn't save it for him, well, I was in trouble. I thought to myself, "Boy, if I ever get back to the place where I can start selling stuff instead of holding it back" . . . I was to the place where I was trying to hold stuff back for my customers. I wasn't trying to sell it. I would plaster up the window with Bon Ami and close the door and say, "Open at ten o'clock. Give me a chance to get ready." A couple times I didn't always open up when I said I was going to. I just wasn't ready. I was taking care of my customers that were calling in, my local customers. These outsiders were coming in from down Darleton and Enon and Youngstown even, I had them coming down here. I was locking them out just to take care of . . . I was delivering at that time and I had regular customers. But geeze, if I opened up the door, all these people would rush in and take everything I had and I wouldn't have anything for my customers.

- C: What item seemed to be the one item that everybody wanted?
- R: Butter. (Laughter) Butter. I had a friend that run an Isaly Store, Charlie Oltenhousen. His wife worked for me before they got married but after they got married she didn't, but they run a little Isaly Store in Waterford here and he could get a lot of butter. He used to bring me two or three cases of butter down. I'd re-wrap it, take the Isaly wrapper off and just wrap it in parchment paper. (Laughter) I can remember in my whole family, I had them out here. We had a pretty good-sized kitchen table in here at that time. We'd dump that butter out on the table and take that Isaly wrapper off and wrap it in plain parchment and put it back in the case and take it down there and I'd have butter for my customers. He had a way of getting all the butter he wanted. He didn't need it all, so he would give it to me. Butter, and Crisco and flour, and of course, I had a ceiling price on hamburger but it was such a ridiculous price that you couldn't no way go out and buy cattle and trim it out and grind it up and sell it for the ceiling price.
- C: You were going to lose money?
- R: Yes, you'd lose money hand over fist trying to meet their ceiling price.
- C: Do you remember the price during the war?
- R: Well, I think around 39 or 49 cents a pound. I think the ceiling price was 49 and you couldn't go out and buy cattle or you couldn't buy cattle from a packer and trim it out.
- C: By the 1940's, you had a lot of items now. You mentioned your dry goods and canned goods.
- R: Well, I didn't have any dry goods. Well, I had, dry beans and stuff like that, yes. But that didn't take my attention like the meat did when the rationing was on.
- C: You've got pork now and you've got beef. How about chicken? You've got chicken now?
- R: Yes.
- C: How about fish?
- R: Well, I don't remember much about fish, rationing fish.

C: Did you have fish in the 1940's in the store?

R: Oh, we had it but not in quantity.

C: Where did you used to get your fish?

R: One of those places in Youngstown like Berkowitz.

C: How about fresh fruits and vegetables?

R: Yes, I had plenty of those.

C: Any rationing on that, your fresh fruits and vegetables?

R: Not that I can remember.

C: So Rukenbrod's comes out of the 1940's in pretty good shape. The store, you've still got plenty of customers. When we get into the 1950's, anything stand out in your mind about the store in the 1950's?

R: Well, I remodeled a couple times. In 1950 and 1960 I enlarged the store. I just had a hole-in-the-wall when I was back there in the 1940's. I was just awful small. I had a lot of back room and a lot of cooler space but as far as the front, the store was concerned, oh, I had about 24 foot of refrigerated counter in there but I didn't have near as many groceries and near as many frozen foods. I had a storeroom next to me there that I took in in 1960. I think around 1960 I had a shoemaker's shop there and I took in that shoe shop and remodeled and enlarged. The frontage that I have today was originally, this part, and the other fifteen or twenty feet here was another storeroom up until 1960.

C: In the 1950's you're still delivering to people?

R: Oh, yes.

C: Were the other stores in town delivering at this time?

R: Well, I don't remember. Morris was still till they went Golden Dawn. I don't know when they went Golden Dawn.

C: Do you feel that was an important part of your business, the fact that you delivered to people?

R: Yes, yes, yes. Now, we've about give it up.

C: With the transportation and people being able to get around, would you blame that on it?

R: No, no. It was the fact that you can't hire anybody. The Government has set the wages so high you can't hire a kid to deliver. I used to give 25, 30 bucks a week, 40 bucks a week for a kid to deliver. Now, you can't.

C: And you've got your gasoline way up there.

R: Well, you've got your gasoline, you've got your equipment. Well, my God, I bought trucks for six, seven hundred dollars back in the early 1940's, and today you can't buy a Ford panel truck and deliver groceries in it. Canned beans and a half a gallon of milk and a loaf of bread and pay somebody the kind of wages that the government says you have to pay. They could employ a lot more people if they'd take that minimum wage off of three or three and a quarter an hour. I could hire a lot of people. I could give a lot of people jobs. But I'll let the job go undone rather than pay the kind of wages that the government says I have to pay. So I just don't do the job. And that's one of the reasons I think that there's a lot of unemployment just because people won't hire the job done.

C: During the 1950's, you're no longer butchering your meat?

R: Oh yes, up until 1966.

C: Oh, up until 1966. Okay, So you're not buying from any of these large meat companies yet, except some of the small prepared meats.

R: Oh, yes I was buying prepared meats, the lunch meats.

C: Armour and Swift.

R: Armour and Swift mostly. Swift mostly.

C: Did you add any new type of foods to your store or was it pretty much the same as the 1940's? Any new items?

R: Pretty much the same as the 1940's. All through the 1950's, pretty much the same as the 1940's.

C: Would you say people had plenty of money in the 1950's?

R: Yes.

C: No problem with credit. Most people were pretty good with their bills? A lot of people working?

R: A lot of people working. When did credit cards start out?

C: The 1960's probably.

R: Yes, credit cards. My God, without credit where would this country be? It would be through. You want to see things go to pot, just shut their credit off. (Laughter) How many automobiles do you suppose would be running around if they had to pay for them? How many would they be selling?

C: How about the 1960's? Pretty good?

R: That was all right.

C: A lot of prosperity in the country.

R: No sweat in the 1960's, all through the 1960's.

C: The Rukenbrods are still doing pretty well but you've got more competition now though, from some of the other local stores. Do you feel the competition more?

R: I've got competition, yes, and I've had to quit a lot of the services that I give that the bigger stores didn't give. I've had to quit that on account of how much it cost me to give those services, just like your delivery.

C: What other services did you have beside deliveries?

R: Well, credit and delivery.

C: Credit, you cut credit with a lot of people?

R: Yes.

C: In other words, if a new customer came in today, . . .

R: Well, I don't say that I would turn down a fellow like you but, by God, I'd be pretty careful about who I extended credit to today. By God, so many people are so far in the hole. If you read the magazines and the papers, the credit that people are in, oh geez, I don't know what's going to happen.

C: Do you think people payed their bills a lot better years ago than they do today or are your good old customers

still pretty good?

R: Yes. Well, they don't figure that anymore. They just want to know how much a month it is to buy this thing and if they get out a job or have sickness. . . It's all right as long as a man and woman are both working and they've got this income but let something happen that they don't have the income and this thing starts to go. You think it isn't going to snowball? Like Nash down here or Adamson, they lose their job.

C: How about the fact that you had the meat counter? I like that myself, the fact that I can go to your store and I can pick out the meat I want. It's now prepackaged. Do you think that was a plus for your store? People really like that.

R: Yes.

C: And still today you've got customers who come in just for that reason.

R: Just for that reason. But they put out such ridiculous advertising and put that stuff in there and people really go in and pick it up and they say, "Well, that ain't too bad for three or four bucks or whatever." But they, geez, they put out these ads and so much a pound and it's so far under what I'm charging per pound. You look in the case there. It's just the packages wrapped up there and maybe they got two or three, price per pound packages that say 99¢ but over here they got another one that's a lot better looking that's a dollar and a quarter a pound. But people see this 99¢ stuff that I've, well, I don't have a package in there like that. I got it marked maybe a dollar and a quarter a pound. They put out. . .

C: Did you used to advertise years ago like they do today or did you not have to advertise?

R: Oh, I used to always advertise a little bit. Not like they do today. Oh geez, I get Kroger and they're not even in town. You get them big splashes by Kroger and even get Consolidated here last Sunday. Had frozen steaks at Consolidated? Jesus,

C: There's something I'd like to ask you. We talked earlier about butchering. What do you remember about butchering animals? A lot of people really don't know much about it. Could you describe what it was like to butcher an animal?

- R: Well, it was a lot of work. (Laughter) You talk about work. You can't go out and get a young fellow today to work like that. If I hadn't had Pete in with me I would have had to quit before 1966 for he did the butchering. He and Frankie Early and another guy up until 1966.
- C: How did you butcher some of these animals? How would you describe butchering the animals?
- R: Well, you take a steer in here and you either hit him in the head, pull him down to the floor and hit him in the head or shoot him and then stick him and you've got to skin the head out. You roll him over and you've got to take the feet out and you've got to take the skin off the side, and hang him up and split him down through the middle. Work geez, that's what I say, nobody works like that today. I'll bet those fellows in those big slaughterhouses, I don't know how they pull the hide off. I don't know whether they got a way of pulling the hide off today or not.
- C: Now they have machines do all the work.
- R: Well, I don't know.
- C: How about the meat, would you say that the meat that you used to butcher yourself. . . how would you compare that with the meat that you get in? Who do you get your meat from today? You get big sides of beef from companies right?
- R: From Superior mostly.
- C: How would you compare the meat? Do you think it's pretty much the same? Do you notice any changes?
- R: I know that it's more uniformed quality today from the packer than it was for me to go out to a sale and buy cattle. I get more uniform choice cattle by buying from the packer than I did. But it was all right. Some weeks I'd have it a little better than others. I can judge pretty good. They don't label that stuff until after they get it hanging up, dressed and the fat and the fat content and the kidney and everything they. . . I know, when I was doing my own butchering I tried to buy pretty fair cattle but I noticed some weeks they were better than others.
- C: How about if we mention a price comparison? When you get your meat today from Superior, we're talking about a whole side of beef, how would you compare the price

today as opposed to . . .

R: Butchering myself?

C: Yes, how much did that side of beef cost you back in those days? Now, you mentioned some prices earlier. Today if you talk about a whole cow, you buy it from Superior, how much does that cost you as opposed to when you remember back in the 1920's, one cow maybe?

R: Oh, today? Oh gee, oh my gosh. Oh, 1920's, oh. I know in the 1940's I bought cattle for as low as eight or nine cents a pound. And today those feeding cattle that I mentioned that I put out on feed, eight and nine cents a pound are seventy-five cents, those feeding cattle today, seventy-five cents.

C: So, we're out of the 1960's and things are still going pretty well in the 1960's for Rukenbrods. How about if we go into the 1970's now? Do you see any changes in the store?

R: Well, I've had to cut out a lot of services. I've cut out delivering and I'm not as free with the credit and, naturally, I'm not doing as much business. And I don't have as much help either.

C: When you think back about the store and so on, and what life was like over the years, working there, would you prefer living back years ago again as opposed to today?

R: I sure as hell would. I sure as hell would. I hate to go to work anymore.

C: What are some reasons for your feelings? Just all the headaches and the paperwork and the laws and regulations?

R: Regulations and inspectors just drive you up a wall. And you've got so much refrigeration. Say an ice cream case goes out tonight or that frozen food case goes out tonight, to call the refrigeration man, geez oh man, Cost I just shudder to think about it sometimes. The way I operated back in those times.

C: A lot less headaches years ago.

R: Oh, my God, I say, I hate to get up in the morning and go down to work and by God, that's no good. I hate to go to work.

C: Looking back, if there were any changes you would have made regarding the store, what would you have done differently in operating your business?

R: Than I did?

C: Yes.

R: Nothing I know of.

C: Nothing?

R: I can't think of anything I'd have done. But they just changed the way of doing things today than the way we did a few years ago in the 1960's. Not just minimum wage and people demand. . .

C: To finish our little talk here Mr. Rukenbrod, how does the future look for Rukenbrod's Market?

R: Not good.

C: You can't compete with the larger stores. You have large operation costs.

R: So do they.

C: Right.

R: So do they. Okay, what happened to A&P? All right, some of these other guys got another angle and these preachers trying to take over the steel mill over there in Youngstown because the men that have been in the steel mill for years quit Sheet and Tube and then a bunch of preachers tried to raise money. We did the same thing with the pottery here when the pottery went under. This town raised \$200,000 and dumped into that pottery just to start it up again. People mortgaged their homes but buy those bonds to run that pottery for a couple years and it's all down the drain now.

C: What year was that when they had to borrow all that money to keep operating?

R: Well, that was someplace in the 1960's.

C: Well, I want to thank you for allowing me to talk to you, Mr. Rukenbrod. It was very informative.

END OF INTERVIEW