

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Westlake Terrace Project

Life in Youngstown 1920's-1930's

O. H. 471

VINCE DEBUCCI

Interviewed

by

Joseph Drobney

on

October 15, 1985

## VINCE DEBUCCI

Vince DeBucci was born on February 25, 1915 in Youngstown, Ohio. Mr. DeBucci, who has been a life-long resident of Youngstown, was educated in the city's school system. He graduated from South High School in the early 1930's, then became a professional bricklayer.

Mr. DeBucci and his wife, Regina, raised three children: two sons and a daughter. Their youngest child, Vincent, died at age 25. During the late 1930's, as a bricklayer for the Heller-Murray construction firm, Vince DeBucci was directly involved in the construction of the Westlake Terrace Housing Project. Mr. DeBucci, who served in the armed forces during World War II, retired from the bricklaying trade in 1980.

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INTERVIEWEE: VINCE DEBUCCI

INTERVIEWER: Joseph Drobney

SUBJECT: Construction of Westlake Terrace, Neighborhoods,  
Life, Private trades and crafts

DATE: October 15, 1985

DR: This is an interview with Vince DeBucci for the Youngstown State University Westlake Oral History Project, by Joe Drobney, on October 15, 1985, at 745 Anawan Lane in Youngstown, Ohio, at 10:00.

Mr. DeBucci, just to get started, could you tell me a little bit about your early life in Youngstown? For example, when were you born? Where did you originally live in this area?

DE: I was born in Youngstown, Ohio on Hine Street on February 28, 1915. Then we moved to the south side and I came to South High School and graduated in 1934. It was at the height of the Depression and I did a lot of odd jobs here and there or helped my dad because he was a stone mason. Then eventually I got initiated as an apprentice. There was an apprenticeship program at the local bricklayer's union. From there on it was all bricklaying and general construction.

DR: Mr. DeBucci, you mentioned that you were born in 1915 and then you moved to the south side. Approximately, when did you move to the south side?

DE: 1927.

DR: What exactly do you remember as far as Youngstown, for example, in the late 1920's, early 1930's? What was it like when you went downtown into the city? How would you compare Youngstown then in the late 1920's and 1930's with, say if you went downtown now?

DE: I'm going to say things I hate to say, but when we used to go downtown on Saturdays that was a big day; everybody went downtown shopping for groceries and tried to meet a girlfriend and things of that sort. The sidewalks were so crowded with people that you were not able to walk unless you pushed somebody aside. Today it is all boarded up I'm sorry to say. It's a little risky down there to walk alone. It isn't like it used to be. We used to cross South Avenue Bridge and there was Republic Steel mills of Bessemer and a spike factory and rolling mills, smoke all over the place. The ladies used to hang clothes outside; in those days they didn't have washers and dryers; they went with a scrubbing board. They used to hang their clothes outside and they used to complain on account of the soot from the mill. With that soot there was plenty of money around; it was real easy to get a job in Youngstown, and a good-paying job.

DR: When do you think people around here started noticing the Depression as far as jobs drying up?

DE: You mean industry moving out of the city?

DR: I'm talking about in the 1930's. Did mills start to shut down?

DE: No. In 1931, 1932, 1933 the mills were shut down, but they were still there. They weren't dismantled. When President Roosevelt got elected he started having a lot of government programs which called for steel to make products out of steel, like steam shovels and shovel bulldozers and that. Automobiles started to move. The automobiles had more steel in them than they do today. Plastic did not exist then.

At one time we made the best iron in the world in Youngstown, qualitywise.

DR: Speaking of automobiles, did your family have a car?

DE: Yes, we had a car. The gauge of the steel was a lot thicker than the gauge of today's automobiles. Everything was steel. The dashboard was steel, the roof, the whole body of the car was steel, no plastic. Therefore, there was a bigger demand of the steel.

DR: Was the family car generally the way you got around, like when you came downtown on Saturdays?

DE: No, we walked and we used to ride a bus. It used to cost us 8¢ for a bus ride each way. When we went to school they had special coupons for the students, 3¢ apiece to

go to school on the bus.

DR: This Saturday of going downtown, was this kind of a big family outing?

DE: All the kids went downtown.

DR: You mentioned briefly that you had gone and graduated from South High School. Can you tell me a little bit about going to school, about South High School itself? Did you like school?

DE: My favorite subject was math, trigonometry. Then I liked English and history. In those days, we had to study; there was no let-up by the teachers. The women teachers in those days were not married; they were more strict than they are today.

DR: You mentioned briefly about your father. What type of work did he do?

DE: He was a stone mason and a bricklayer by trade.

DR: With a name like DeBucci, can I assume that he was first generation?

DE: He was first generation from Italy. I am second.

DR: Around the home or neighborhood did you mainly speak Italian?

DE: Yes. We spoke Italian and my dad spoke English pretty fluently. Another thing that was funny about those days was that we were the only ones that had a telephone on the block. When somebody called in for a neighbor we had to go get the neighbor and bring over to the house to answer the phone. Everybody didn't have a phone in those days because they were not affordable.

DR: When did you live on the south side?

DE: About 1927.

DR: Was that mainly an Italian ethnic neighborhood?

DE: No, it was Polish and Italian. It was right by St. Stanislaus Church.

DR: Were you raised Catholic Mr. DeBucci?

DE: Yes.

DR: In other words, the whole block was ethnic, Polish and

Italian, and everybody was Catholic?

DE: That's right.

DR: Were all the kids in the neighborhood in tight cliques?

DE: Yes. Every corner had their own particular gang, five or six guys.

DR: What are some of the other things that an Italian kid growing up in Youngstown in the late 1920's and early 1930's might have done for recreation besides going to the movies?

DE: We went to the ball parks and played softball. Some played hardball. The fortunate ones had a bicycle or roller skates, but there wasn't much more.

DR: Were you one of those fortunate ones?

DE: I had roller skates.

DR: You mentioned the fact that you had a car and you had roller skates, this leads me to a question about your family. How many brothers and sisters were growing up in this house along with you?

DE: Two sisters and a brother.

DR: So you were a family of four?

DE: Yes. I'm the last one. The other three are deceased.

DR: Let's get into the early 1930's. Were your brothers and sisters out on their own when you went to high school?

DE: Yes, they were out on their own.

DR: Did they go to work or college?

DE: My brother was a civil engineer. My two sisters married.

DR: Where did your brother go to school?

DE: Philadelphia, and he stayed there.

DR: What is the name of the institution?

DE: I think it was the University of Pennsylvania. He stayed there because Philadelphia was more diversified than Youngstown. Youngstown was called a one-industry town.

DR: He wanted to get out in the world.

DE: Yes.

DR: He must have studied really hard to get a scholarship or else your father must have really saved up money?

DE: He worked himself too; he helped to pay his own way. In those days you could go to college for about \$300 or \$400 a year. It isn't like now; you need a fortune to go through school.

DR: Your brother was going off to college then when you were in high school?

DE: Yes. He was gone; he was off on his own already. He was about twenty years older than me, something like that.

DR: In your neighborhood was it unusual that a kid went off to college?

DE: It was very unusual. A high school degree then was equivalent to a college degree of today. Very few kids graduated high school.

DR: Was it unusual for your brother to go off to Philadelphia?

DE: This was very unusual. We had relatives in Philadelphia and that is why he went.

DR: Were there any main events that occurred in Youngstown at that time that stick out in your mind? For example, the arrival of the Depression, did all the mills begin to shut down and lay off?

DE: Yes. They stayed open intermittently. That happened up until 1934. There were people maintaining these mills during that course of time because they were expecting to light up again and produce steel.

DR: Was your father independently employed?

DE: He owned his own business.

DR: How did the Depression itself affect your family?

DE: We were fortunate, dad had a few dollars. He used to go out and work for the farmers. He used to build smoke-houses for the farmers, little ovens there in exchange for food. Instead of loafing that is what they did; they bartered in other words. My mother used to can all the food in jars. They didn't have freezers then; they didn't exist. Even a refrigerator didn't exist; it was a wooden icebox. Those conveniences did not exist in those days. Then he had some deals, he built homes, where money was

involved. He did some work on Meander Dam, some stone-work there, and that helped him out a lot. I know, I labored for him; I never got paid.

DR: Since your father was in business for himself, how did he go about getting contracts?

DE: Word of mouth. Also, by telephone; we were the only ones on the block that had a telephone. People used to walk great distances to communicate. Few people had a car, but those who did went by automobile.

DR: Your father must have gotten pretty well-known as far as doing good work. Do you recall how he got involved with the Meander project?

DE: Word of mouth. They would look for stone masons and bricklayers and they would screen them. Then they would select the ones they liked the best.

DR: As a stone mason, did your father have to carry a lot of tools around?

DE: Yes, a lot of chisels.

DR: Did he use a truck for that, or have a car?

DE: He used the streetcar. I would carry some and he would carry some and we would make two or three trips.

DR: That streetcar system was so extensive that you could go almost anyplace?

DE: Yes.

DR: He just had his tools and box and everything?

DE: Yes. We used to get a couple of other kids to ride the streetcar and they used to enjoy the ride and they would carry some tools to help us out.

DR: How much did a streetcar ride cost?

DE: Eight cents. You could go all over. Then you got a transfer for a penny to the other side of town.

DR: At home did your father keep his tools down the cellar or in the garage?

DE: In a little shanty outside. There were very few garages in those days around the homes. The automobile was a scarcity.



DR: Did your father learn his trade back in the old country?

DE: Yes, he did.

DR: When he came over did he already know some people who could get him work?

DE: Yes. The first few people that came over in those days had it the toughest. They were the ones who made the connections. They used to write back to the old country and tell their buddies that they left behind to come to Youngstown and that there was a lot of work here, and that they knew the contractors. They met their buddies and they didn't have to seek work; it wasn't too difficult to find them work.

DR: Would you say that a lot of individual construction workers seemed to be all Italian? Was it an ethnic job?

DE: Yes.

DR: How about some of the other trades, say the Polish?

DE: They were not in the building trades; they were mostly in the mills. The Swedes were the carpenters. The Germans were the machinists.

DR: What was the closest big foundry to you?

DE: It was Youngstown Foundry by United Engineering alongside Market Street Bridge.

DR: What do you remember specifically about Youngstown in the late 1920's and 1930's when all the mills were here? Was it a smoky town?

DE: Yes. The ladies would hang their clothes on the clothesline and they would get all sooty from the mills. The south side was the cleanest side of town on account of the wind. The winds would blow the smoke towards the north side and the west side had the Ohio Works and the smoke took care of the west side. The name of Campbell used to be East Youngstown at one time. They changed their name to Campbell on account of Jim Campbell; he was the founder of Youngstown Sheet & Tube. That place was loaded with smoke more than any area. Down around Center Street Bridge was all loaded with smoke; that is where Republic Steel was.

DR: From the people that you knew, generally did somebody that worked on the south side of Youngstown work in the closest foundry to them?

DE: The streetcar was the mode of transportation and then they went to buses. They would travel using these.

- DR: Before the war, if your family had an automobile in Youngstown that was a sign.
- DE: You were a big shot; you were doing pretty good.
- DR: In your neighborhood would you say more Italians owned cars than other ethnic folk because they had these side jobs?
- DE: Oh yes.
- DR: Did any of your Polish friends talk about a buddy system where a guy would get hired in a foundry?
- DE: Oh yes. When the mills started to pick up the old-timers got called back during the Depression. When things started to pick up they started to hire young blood. The parents used to talk to the foremen and they would say they have a son that is loafing. They would get a slip off the foreman and that was an automatic job. I could never get that slip.
- DR: Because you were Italian?
- DE: Not because they were discriminating, but because it was a different clique. They could never come to construction either, so it worked both ways. It was a trend.
- DR: You said you graduated in 1934?
- DE: Yes, in January. Back then they had two graduating classes, one in January and one in June.
- DR: Was this just at South?
- DE: No, the whole Youngstown system was that way.
- DR: Did you go to school over the summer at all?
- DE: No.
- DR: When you graduated in 1934, you went to work for your dad full-time?
- DE: No, that was winter time. Then I went to Youngstown College and I took an extension course in engineering. That is what I used to do in the winter; instead of loafing, I used to go to college and take certain courses.
- DR: When you got out of high school, for the first few years after that you worked for your dad and went to college. How many years did you come to the college?
- DE: Four of five years.

DR: Tell me a little about what you remember about the college?

DE: My instructor in engineering was a man named Mr. Nickels. He worked for U.S. Steel and used to teach on the side. It was a small school then. Most of the teachers worked part-time. It was steady employment like you have today.

DR: Did they have night classes?

DE: Yes, that is where I went, night classes. Sometimes I went in the afternoon.

DR: About how many classes did you take?

DE: I took all engineering classes. Then I took a business course in bookkeeping to help my dad. In the 1930's my dad didn't have any bookkeeping.

DR: You kept your own books.

DE: That's right. All he had was a time book. He used to go buy them downtown at Woolworth's; they were 10¢ apiece. They would write down how many hours each person worked. There was no social security, no unemployment insurance, no state tax or city tax. He paid them off in cash and whatever was left over he got to keep.

DR: When your dad went out on a job was he paid by the day?

DE: By contract. If the job was worth \$500 he would say, "I want \$500." Whatever he made, he made. He bought the materials and then he paid his laborers.

DR: It was up to him then if he was going to bring on one helper or five.

DE: That's right.

DR: When you went to college were any of your friends going at the same time?

DE: No. It was pretty tough to go to school.

DR: I don't suppose you can remember the tuition at all?

DE: Sometimes we didn't even pay. If we were broke they let us stay in the classroom anyway. That is how tough it was. They had to have a few students in there.

DR: A lot of new buildings have gone up at the university, but the original building is still there. It is called Jones Hall.

DE: My dad laid stone on that building. Parish Brothers built that building.

DR: Is that where your classes were?

DE: Yes. That's is all they had; that was the only building except for a couple of old houses.

DR: So there was one old building, Jones Hall, and a couple of houses around it?

DE: Yes.

DR: How did you get up from the south side to college?

DE: Walked.

DR: Between 1934 and the time you got involved with Westlake, can you remember some of the jobs that your worked on with your father?

DE: Then I got on an apprenticeship program and in those days when you were an apprentice you were not allowed to work for your dad. You had to work for somebody else. They figured with your dad there was favoritism. You had to pass exams every six months.

DR: Tell me about the way that system worked.

DE: He would get somebody else's kid.

DR: Was he part of a guild or union?

DE: Yes, a union.

DR: What union was he a part of?

DE: The Bricklayers Local #8.

DR: Do you remember where their union hall was?

DE: I can't remember the street. It was downtown.

DR: Did most of the individual craftsmen have a carpenter's union?

DE: Yes.

DR: In other words, Youngstown was a union town even for the individual . . .

DE: Before the steel mills got unionized, the building trade always had a union, all building trades. I remember my

dad talking about the building trades having a strike in 1920.

DR: Was it a big one?

DE: No, they striked a week or two.

DR: What was the advantage for an individual businessman in building or construction to belong to the union? What was the union all about?

DE: It protected your wages, that's all. They established a rate of \$1 an hour, \$1.25 an hour, and that's it; that's what you worked for. Then there was no hospitalization, no pension plans, no Medicare, no Medicaid, nothing like that. The doctors charged according to what the traffic could bear.

DR: What the union basically did for the building trades around was to establish that wage. What was the going rate in 1936, 1937?

DE: \$1.50 an hour.

DR: That would be for a tradesman, like for a stonemason?

DE: Yes.

DR: From what you knew of your friends' fathers working in the mill, what was the going rate then?

DE: About 75¢ an hour. But they worked all year round. The weather came into the picture in regard to \$1.50 an hour. You worked eight months a year. The carpenters worked better and electricians because their work was inside. It was the same thing with the plaster men and plumbers.

DR: All these people that you just mentioned had their individual unions?

DE: Yes.

DR: They all set standard wages?

DE: Yes. This way you were able to calculate a job.

DR: How did your family get through the winter?

DE: We saved our money during the summers to take care of ourselves. There was no unemployment insurance, no relief, no food stamps.

DR: What else did mill workers get besides that 75¢ an hour? Was there any health insurance?

- DE: Nothing. The only thing you had was state compensation in case you got hurt on the job. When my mother died in 1938 the hospital room was \$5 a day. She was in the hospital ten days and the bill came to \$160.
- DR: You're saying that these guys had to pay their own hospitalization?
- DE: They didn't have hospitalization; it didn't exist. The word didn't exist.
- DR: When you went to the hospital did you have to pay it right out of your pocket?
- DE: Right out of your pocket. If you didn't have it you paid them a little bit at a time.
- DR: Was that common around Youngstown?
- DE: That was standard, all over the United States.
- DR: How about vacations for mill workers?
- DE: There were no vacations. If you took a day off you didn't get paid.
- DR: Explain how your apprenticeship worked. Did this have to go through the union?
- DE: You filed an application and they gave you an examination. There was a lot of mathematics in the exam. There was a little bit of favoritism on account of your dad already being there. When I got accepted there were three others who got accepted. That lasted for four years. Every six months you got a raise if you passed the test. Every six months they gave you a test.
- DR: Who did you work for?
- DE: Heller-Murray Company on 222 West Rayen Avenue.
- DR: The time that you worked for Heller-Murray Company, is that how you first got involved with Westlake?
- DE: Yes. He became one of the contractors that was involved with the Westlake crossing project.
- DR: What were some of the other projects you worked on via the Murray Company?
- DE: I worked for United Engineering, G. N. McKelvey store; we built the truck garage. We did a lot of work around General Electric. Republic Steel we did as contracotrs; we built

a building for Republic Steel. We worked for Heller-Murray not for the mill.

DR: While you were working on these projects was this the type of deal where it was from sunup to sundown?

DE: 8:00 to 4:30.

DR: Was this agreed on by the union also?

DE: Yes. There was no Saturday work. You got double time if you worked. The reason for the double time was that nobody wanted to work on Saturday. Sunday was the same thing.

DR: The union set a wage rate for the whole city and controlled the hours?

DE: That's right.

DR: Did they have a list downtown whenever there was a job opening?

DE: Yes, that was common.

DR: They were also like an employment agency in a way?

DE: Yes.

DR: Did a lot of people have to stand in line every day at the union hall looking for a job?

DE: No.

DR: Do you remember during the 1930's what type of labor environment there was around Youngstown?

DE: In 1937 they had like a war on Poland Avenue. They had the National Guard down there. They were shooting at each other just like a war. The National Guard was protecting the company's interest.

DR: Were you ever down in that area to see any of the guardsmen?

DE: Yes, I saw them one time and I never went back.

DR: How long did those problems last, that particular strike?

DE: That lasted quite a while.

DR: Did any of the kids' fathers in your neighborhood work down there?

DE: Yes, a lot of them.

DR: Did you think that strike was about wages or hours?

DE: It was about everything. When you went to work in the mill before the foreman used to line up all the employees and he would select the people that would work. There were a lot of cliques. They broke that up with the union. That was the first thing the union broke up. They didn't post a schedule on the wall. You had to appear on the line-up to get a turn and might have had to wait three shifts. If the foreman didn't like you you wouldn't get as many days a week as someone else.

DR: Did any of your friends' fathers talk about the actual conditions? I know they didn't have too many regulations about safety.

DE: Safety regulations were bad.

DR: Did you ever know anybody that got hurt in the mill?

DE: Yes, but I can't recall the details.

After World War II, everything was frozen; no wages went up and no wages went down. You couldn't buy cigarettes, gasoline, tires, or a car. Sugar was hard to buy, olive oil, shoes. Everything was rationed; they gave you a rationing book with coupons.

DR: Was Heller-Murray Company general contractors?

DE: Yes, they were the biggest in the area.

DR: Can you remember some of the big contractors in the Youngstown area?

DE: Heller-Murray, Heller Brothers, Joseph Bucheit & Sons.

DR: Had the Bucheits been in business a long time?

DE: A long time. Felix Pesa & Sons, Mike DeBartolo; he was a big road contractor. He paved Market Street before World War II, Andrews Avenue from Oak Street to Logan Avenue. Then he paved South Avenue with paving bricks. He was awarded the garbage collecting contracts for the city of Youngstown.

DR: Did you ever do work for the DeBartolo's?

DE: We used to do curb work and I helped them lay bricks on South Avenue. Those bricks are still there.



- DR: Could any of these companies pay more than the going rate?
- DE: They could pay more, but not less. But they didn't pay more.
- DR: Were you responsible for your own tools?
- DE: Yes, you bought your own tools. I think it is still the same way today.
- DR: When you went out on a job were you out there along with three or four other types of workers? Obviously electricians didn't come in until later.
- DE: Carpenters were with us, cement finishers, and three or four other bricklayers.
- DR: Now we're up to about 1938 or 1939. Did you move again shortly after your mother died?
- DE: We went down to Smoky Hollow.
- DR: Were you living down in Smoky Holow when you first got involved with Westlake?
- DE: Yes.
- DR: Did word go around that there was a big government contract going in? When was the first time you heard about it?
- DE: There were rumors, but we didn't know how big it was going to be moneywise or anything. We didn't even know the location of the project. All at once they bid the job and then we knew.
- DR: Murray Contractors, what all were they responsible for when they bid?
- DE: That was a federal job; that was about a three million dollar job. The plumbing was separate. I don't remember what the plumbing figure was or the electrical figure. There were three separate figures. Morris Scheibel was the architect. The electrical was Carlson Electric. Scholl & Choffin was the plumbing and heating. The building syndicate came into action then; they were the general contractor. These jobs all had to be bonded and you had to have a certain amount of assets to be able to meet the bond requirement. The bond requirements were so great that any one of the following three general contractors that I'm going to name weren't capable of bonding this job. So they formed what they called the builders syndicate. The builders syndicate was comprised of Felix Pesa & Sons Contracting Company, Joseph Bucheit & Sons Contracting Company, and Heller-Murray. They combined their assets in order to meet the bond requirement. They

were successful low bidders; they had a bid, and they built it under the Builders Syndicate Corporation; they formed a separate corporation. Morris Scheibel was the architect. P. L. Strait was the housing administrator. The jobs were bid and they started to build.

DR: Was this building syndicate responsible for the brick-laying?

DE: They were responsible for the excavation and the landscaping, the bricklaying, the concrete work, carpentry work, everything. They were responsible for all but the electrical and heating, plumbing and ventilating.

DR: While you worked on the project you got your paycheck from Heller-Murray or the building syndicate?

DE: The building syndicate. Nick Titangos was the head book-keeper of the project.

DR: These companies that were in the syndicate, they would have formed even before any excavation was done?

DE: Yes. The paper work of the corporation was in motion. They were registered with the state of Ohio and everything.

DR: Just to give me an idea as to how many people were actually employed on the project, how many people that had been with Heller-Murray ended up working in some way, shape, or form on that Westlake project?

DE: Each contractor had key men. Heller-Murray had two bricklayer foremen. The Bucheit bricklayer foreman they didn't use because he had something going on on the side where he didn't have to be bonded. There were about sixty bricklayers on the job for nine months.

DR: So they not only got a hold of the bricklayers and also the carpenters that were already working for Pesa & Sons, but they also went down to the union halls and put up notices?

DE: Yes. Then they had a carpenter foreman that built basements and concrete walls. He was in charge of forming up the forms and pouring concrete into the walls. Another one was in charge of partitions. Another man would be in charge of the roof. They broke it up into an organization and everybody had their own little department.

DR: Was most of the bricklaying done by Italians at Westlake?

DE: Yes.

- DR: Were you paid every week?
- DE: Every Friday. You got paid for the actual time you worked; if it rained for one hour on a given day, you didn't get paid for that one hour.
- DR: Were you still working 8:00 to 4:30 on this project?
- DE: Yes. If it rained one hour or two hours you were docked from your pay.
- DR: Do you remember the going rate on that project?
- DE: \$1.50 an hour for the bricklayers. The laborers got 75¢ an hour.
- DR: How about somebody like an electrician?
- DE: \$1.25 an hour. The same for a plumber.
- DR: It seems the bricklayers got the most.
- DE: Yes because when it rained you went home, whereas the other trades stayed inside and worked. In those buildings the floors were all concrete, no wood. The walls were all masonry, brick and block backup. The partitions inside were all made of clay tile. The only wood was the rafters of the roof. The roofs were all slate roofs. The bricks at that time cost \$15 a thousand.
- DR: Speaking of the bricks, who supplied the materials?
- DE: The bricks, I don't know who supplied them, but they were made in Bessemer, Pennsylvania. The haydite block was an insulation block similar to a cement block.
- DR: It seems all local people ended up getting the contracts. Were there any outside bidders?
- DE: Yes, there were a lot of outside bidders.
- DR: Do you remember any?
- DE: No.
- DR: When the government awarded this contract did they award it strictly on bid or do you think there was something behind the scenes that influenced it?
- DE: I don't know about it. They made their own concrete on the job and delivered it to different locations of the buildings.
- DR: Where did this concrete come in from?

- DE: They made it themselves. They bought the sand, gravel, and cement and made it themselves. Towards Evans Field they built a community house, Katzman Company built that. While all this was going on they built Covington School. The builders' company got the contract for Covington School.
- DR: Did they build Covington strictly because they were putting in this new . . .
- DE: Yes, because the school population in that area was going to grow on account of this rental bit that was going to occur.
- DR: When you first got down there and began to work . . . How long did you work?
- DE: Nine months.
- DR: What was down there on Westlake Crossing?
- DE: All old shacks and stuff that they demolished. They cleared the whole site. That was all done prior to letting the contracts.
- DR: Who demolished them?
- DE: I don't know. The land was bare when we went there.
- DR: Where did the common labor come from?
- DE: Word of mouth again.
- DR: The building syndicate people decided who they would hire as common laborers?
- DE: Yes.
- DR: This 75¢ common laborer, was this union determined too?
- DE: No, they didn't have a union then.
- DR: Who established the 75¢ an hour?
- DE: I don't know.
- DR: You don't know if it was the government?
- DE: No, the government didn't control any rates then. When you got paid then the only thing they took off of you was one penny on the dollar for social security, one percent and that was it.

DR: Did you just work in a particular area of that project, like along Madison?

DE: No, all over. They had the bricklaying department broken up into about three crews. I was in the foundation department. We brought everything up out of the ground to the first floor level. Then we had two crews picking up from the first floor level to the height of the roof. When we got through with all the foundation we went inside and built all the partitions out of this terra cotta four-inch tile. All the frames inside were metal. I think they were made by Truscon Steel; that used to be a subsidiary of Republic Steel.

DR: So you had a hand in almost all the buildings?

DE: Yes.

DR: About how many bricklayers plus common workers were there in each crew?

DE: Our crew was about ten or twelve bricklayers, plus the same amount of laborers.

DR: What time of year was it when you started?

DE: Spring, about March. We went all the way to December.

DR: You mentioned that when bad weather came you didn't work.

DE: Yes, but I worked. We had inside work, the partitions. That was a soundproof building. I think every three or four buildings there was a basement. In this basement they would have a schedule for when you could go down and wash your clothes. Not every building had a basement.

DR: Do you remember the weather causing any major difficulties? Were there any major difficulties on the job as far as you were concerned?

DE: No.

DR: Tell me about that time of no strikes. It seemed like most people were happy to have that work so they didn't cause any problems.

DE: That was the idea. If you had seven or eight months of steady work you had a good year.

DR: You mentioned there was a type of relief system, a dole. Tell me what you remember.

DE: They gave you a slip to get a certain amount of groceries, but you had to go to work. They had you go work someplace

before you got the slip. You would plant bushes in Mill Creek Park or put new sewers in with the water department.

DR: Since these contractors were working in the late 1930's, would you say it was the mill workers that ended up going on relief?

DE: No, it was everybody. I remember there were 20,000 families in Youngstown on relief.

DR: Was there any time from 1934 until you worked on Westlake that you couldn't find work?

DE: There were streaks. These people who were on relief had kids sixteen or seventeen that had to go to CC camp, Civilian Conservation Camps. They were all over the United States; they went and planted trees in California and did other things. They got \$1 a day. The kids didn't get anything.

DR: Just about everybody that was a working man in Youngstown was affected by the Depression?

DE: Yes. The banks were closed then and you couldn't get any money out of the bank if you had some. The banks used to have different agents and they used to try to buy you out for forty or fifty cents on the dollar on your passbook. That was tough. The banks didn't have any insurance like they have today either.

DR: Did the churches try to take care of people during the Depression?

DE: Yes. They had soup lines at the churches. They helped a lot. You used to buy six loaves of bread for a quarter.

DR: At the time you were working on Westlake you were living at Smoky Hollow. How did you get to work?

DE: I bought a car, a model A Roadster for \$25.

DR: Would you say that you were special since you were one of the few people working on that project that had a car?

DE: The older people had them. I was one of the few younger ones.

DR: When you worked did you work on the project at your own pace or were there specific times when you took breaks?

DE: There were no breaks; you worked steady, right through. There were no coffee breaks or anything.

DR: Did you notice government inspectors on the job?

DE: Yes.

DR: What were they doing?

DE: Checking the workmanship. The architect had an inspector to check that the brickwork was going okay. There was a federal inspector over him checking all phases of the work.

DR: Were you told that you were on some type of a time schedule?

DE: Yes. At the end of one year the project was all completed.

DR: Were your bosses emphasizing that you had to keep work going?

DE: Yes, because things were rough.

DR: Maybe that was part of their contract with the government that they would get his work done by a certain time?

DE: I've had a lot of other experiences with government work; all government work has a stipulation of a time limit, especially schoolwork too.

DR: They first started putting people into that Westlake Housing Terrace in 1940. From what you remember how about that Covington School that they were working on, was that finished also?

DE: Yes. They were all on schedule. Things were so slow, there was scarcity of work, that all these prime people were available. It was easy to organize. Everybody was glad to go to work and it was easy, they made money.

DR: You probably knew a lot of the fellows that were working for Bucheit?

DE: Yes.

DR: It was that clique where everybody knew everybody else.

DE: Yes, it was friendly.

DR: Because of this cooperation was easier?

DE: Yes, there was no dissention on the job.

DR: How long did the builders syndicate last?

DE: After Covington School and the housing project that was the end of it.

DR: What did being a part of Westlake do for Heller-Murray?  
Did it lead to other contracts down the road?

DE: Heller-Murray went on functioning as Heller-Murray and Joseph Bucheit went on functioning as Joseph Bucheit and Felix Pesa went on functioning as Felix Pesa; everything stayed the same.

DR: How about some of the other companies, did being a part of Westlake lead to bigger things?

DE: Yes, then they started hitting bigger jobs in the mills. They started to do a lot of work in the mills.

DR: When did you go in the Army?

DE: February 1942.

DR: When you came back did you get rehired at Heller-Murray?

DE: I went on my own.

DR: Would you say then that Youngstown was coming out of the Depression in the 1940's?

DE: Yes. That project came out smelling like a rose financially for the Metropolitan Housing Program because they got a cheap rate, two or three percent on their money. They had a sixty year mortgage. They started with a low rent and then the rents went up because of inflation. The mortgage stayed the same though with that low interest rate.

DR: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

DE: No, I don't think so.

DR: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW