

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Smoky Hollow

Growing Up in Smoky Hollow
The Depression, Newsboys Club, and Recreation

O.H. 87

MICHAEL LARICCIA

Interviewed

by

Annette D. Mills

on

April 24, 1976

MICHAEL LARICCIA

Michael Lariccia assisted Curly Johnson in the Newsboys Club in the late 1920's, and took over the Newsboys Club in the early 1930's at the height of the Depression.

Wages were insignificant. Mike dealt with boys of the low income group. These boys were unable to afford a membership to any organization other than the Newsboys Club, which had a token fee of five cents a month for membership. Mike's sincere devotion and interest played a very important part in keeping the boys out of trouble.

Mike resides at 4127 Euclid Boulevard, in Youngstown, Ohio. He and his wife, Concetta, are the parents of one daughter, Dolores Ann. Mike was born in Smoky Hollow on May 22, 1910 and lived in the Hollow until the 1960's. He worked with the Newsboys until 1943 when he began work with Falcon Foundry of Lowelville, and remained with the company for 22½ years. He retired in February of 1976.

Mike is a charter member of the Golden Eagles Club, a member of Mount Carmel Church, and Financial Secretary of Union 5025 AFL-CIO.

ANNETTE MILLS
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INTERVIEWEE: MICHAEL LARICCIA

INTERVIEWER: Annette D. Mills

SUBJECT: Growing up in Smoky Hollow, the Depression, the Newsboys Club, and Recreation.

DATE: April 24, 1976

MILLS: This is an interview with Michael Lariccia for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. This interview is on the Smoky Hollow Project. We are located at 4127 Euclid Boulevard, Youngstown, Ohio, and it is April 24, 1976, at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Lariccia, would you like to begin with a little bit of your personal background, please?

LARICCIA: My dad's name was Gennaro, which in English would be James. My mother's name was Catherine. I was born on Watt Street and at one time or another moved to Rayen Avenue. I stayed there until about 1917 when my parents bought a home on Walnut Street. At one time, they stood up the store and we had several stores on Walnut Street. We had one store next door, which a cousin of mine owned. One across the street was owned by the Tucci's, and one down the street was owned by the Gagiliones. There was also one across the street from the Tucci's which some Jewish people owned. Then, they all became cooperative and it was owned by Bagnolesi people. These were a group of people from the same town in Italy called Bagnola, so this is how they got the name Bagnolesi. After that, a fellow by the name of Tom Ciarnello bought it. He ran that for a while and he put one up across the street; it was a nice big building. He had a home in back of it. He ran that for a good many years. Right now that store is still there

operated by some Arab people; I'm not sure, but I think so.

When I remember my childhood, living on Walnut Street, people were of all denominations and nationalities. I remember one time there were German people who lived across the street from us. My mom and dad had an opened oven in the back, which they could bake bread in. It was a holiday, I've forgotten which one, but these German people wanted to use the oven and my mother granted them permission. They gave us a loaf of bread; I was quite young then. That bread, I haven't tasted anything like it since. That was the most delicious bread that I could recall. In fact, if I could have some now that would be appreciated. It was really good.

My mom had boarders living at home. I remember before Lent how they used to stay up nights drinking, eating, and telling stories about their home in Italy. They used to keep me up late at night. I wasn't too good the next day at getting up.

I went to Wood Street School for a while. Then, a few of us girls and boys went to St. Joseph's for about three years. St. Joseph's School was a German nationality church. We stayed there for only three years because after three years they asked us to leave. I don't know why, but we all left. Then, I went to Central Jr. High, which now is Youngstown State University. Then from there I went to Rayen High School. I used to hang around the YMCA a lot and the YMCA started a Newsboys Club. It was a fellow by the name of Raymond Lawrence Johnson, his nickname was Curly, who started it. I thought very highly of Curly. He was one of the grandest persons I ever knew. Well, through him I became acquainted with the YMCA and I used to do a lot for him and for lots of kids at the YMCA.

In 1934 I took it over because Curly was sick. He died in 1935. From 1934 to 1946, I kept the YMCA going, called the Little Y and then the Newsboys Club. We had many boys going in and out of the YMCA, newsboys.

M: What were some of the things that the Newsboys Club did?

L: I had all the help; I didn't do this all by myself. I had a lot of help with the boys. We had baseball and basketball leagues. The baseball and basketball leagues took a lot of work because you needed umpiring and refereeing. We needed timekeepers in basketball, which took up a lot of time. It took a lot of boys to help out. They did a nice job. We only

charged a nickel a month and a lot of times they didn't even have the nickel to pay. I never worried about them paying it. We used to have movies on Saturday nights. We used to charge two cents to get into the movies, but we didn't even collect that. We didn't worry about the two cents. Most of the nights were occupied. In the winter months it was basketball.

We also had Spot Night on Wednesday nights when we had the boys acting or imitating other people that they had seen. At that time they had the Park Theatre downtown, which was a movie and vaudeville theatre, and also the Palace Theatre, I believe. The boys used to imitate the acts that they had seen down there. Then, they'd come back up to Newsboys Club on Wednesday nights and perform them. Most of the times you'd have storytelling. I tried to do that, but most of the time I had people come in and tell stories. I did that from 1934 to 1946. They asked me to keep on, but I had had enough. So, I stayed at the Falcon Bronze.

M: What age group were these boys in?

L: They were between eight and eighteen. We had older boys in there that came in after nine o'clock, like the Cy-Me Club and other clubs. The Cy-Me Club was of Slovak origin and the members went to St. Cyril and Methodius, which is still on the corner of Wood and Watt. At that time, there were clubs organized because it was during the Depression and there was no place to go. The YMCA had a gym up there which wasn't too big, but served its purpose.

I had all kinds of clubs that belong to the Federation of Clubs; the Cy-Me Club and other clubs; I can't remember the other ones. Cy-Me Clubs were popular for coming up here at least twice a week after 9:00 using the gym. These boys were over 18. They were between 18 and 25.

M: Would you please tell us about the testimonial that was given for you?

L: A testimonial was given for me on Sunday, February 2, 1964. All the people who once belonged to the Newsboys Club wanted to honor me and a committee was formed by Conzy Lucci, Charles Stevens, Tony Tucci, Tony Ditata, Angelo Pastucci, Ed Finamike, and a bunch of the others that used to come to the Newsboys Club. They had dinner at Mahoning Country Club on that day. It was a nice party. We had over six hundred people there. It was a dinner-dance.

- M: Could you tell us about the boarders your mother had?
- L: Well, boarders were people who lived in your home. Their people were across the seas over in Italy and they hadn't come over to this country yet because their families didn't send for them yet. They had to have someplace to live and my mother was willing to take them in. She used to take care of them and feed them, and of course there was a fee for this.
- M: They were like roomers. Was this quite common in Smoky Hollow during that period?
- L: At that time, yes.
- M: Can you tell us about the three years you spent in St. Joseph's School?
- L: We had boys and girls, of course. Most of them were of Italian descent. St. Joseph was of German nationality. Monsignor Kluthe was there at that time and his assistant was Father Wrieglin. We thought a lot of him, but as to why they asked to leave I don't know.
- Father Wrieglin was one of the best men I've known in my life. He used to come out and play ball with us. The ball park that we played in was the lot behind the school and it was small. He used to come out and he used to break the windows across the street, but nothing was said because he used to fix them.
- M: What were some of the movies that you showed in the Newsboys Club?
- L: Well, I can't remember the movies. One thing I do remember is that we used to have a show every week. It was a two-reeler and we'd run that continuously for about sixteen weeks. It was just excitement every week about these serials.
- M: Did this keep the boys off the street?
- L: Right. It gave them a place to go. Not only that, but we had a shower room there. It had about sixteen showers in it and that shower room was continuously being used. Every day of the week it was in use. On Saturdays from 9:00 until we were ready to close at 9:30 or 10:00 that night the boys would be using the shower room. One boy, I don't want to

mention his name, one time told me that that was the first shower he'd ever had. It was his first bath, because there were no baths at that time. Clean, they stayed, because that place really kept them clean.

M: Is there anything else that you would like to mention about the Newsboys and your involvement with the club?

L: I hope I've done a lot of good with them. Up here they say that I have. Boys I meet today thank me again and again, but that was a job that I felt I had to do. I did the best I could with it. I enjoyed it, but after so many years I just had enough of it.

M: Do you have any boys of your own?

L: No, I don't. I have one daughter, Dolores Ann.

M: Would you like to tell us a little bit about your family?

L: I married my wife in 1934. My daughter was born in 1939. She's now a graduate of Youngstown State University with her Masters Degree, and taught at McKinley School for a while. She taught there for five and a half years. Right now she has a boy, twelve, and a girl, eight. She'll be eight years old May first of this year. She's quite involved down there. She's there right now, in fact. I have a son-in-law who is an industrial engineer. He's been working for Sharon Steel, but as of the first of May he's going to work for Republic Steel.

M: Could you tell us about your own life in Smoky Hollow? Tell us how you remember it as a youngster up until the time you left Smoky Hollow.

L: Most of my time in Smoky Hollow was spent at the YMCA Newsboys Club. I lived in Smoky Hollow until 1964. During my childhood I was busy with the Newsboys Club and that kept me going all the time. I didn't have too much time to do anything else.

M: Where was the Newsboys Club?

L: Wick Avenue is the boundary line, so the time before us it was in Smoky Hollow, because the first Newsboys Club was behind the library. They had a game room and there was an upstairs where they held our club meetings. Curly Johnson had that. Then they moved the club to a barn behind Youngs-

town State University. They fixed the barn up for club rooms and they also built a gym. We had a gym, gameroom, and a shower room. That's where my time was spent.

M: At that time it wasn't a university yet, was it?

L: No, it was Youngstown College.

M: Was Jones Hall the only building standing at that time?

L: Yes.

M: Would you like to finish telling us about incidents that happened in Smoky Hollow?

L: Not really, because I was busy with Smoky Hollow. There were some softball leagues which were quite busy. They had the Youngstown Playground Association run by Mr. John Chase. The Harrison Field was owned by the City of Youngstown, the Recreation Department. I sent a lot of my boys down there and we used the Harrison Field a lot at that time. At one time football was played back there and so was baseball. But, the athletes got too great and they couldn't use Harrison Field for baseball and football; they had to move out where they had more room.

M: Would you please tell us about when you went to work at the foundry?

L: I had to go to work in the foundry because the YMCA said they couldn't keep me unless I got into some kind of defense work. So, they got me a job at Falcon Bronze Foundry. I stayed there for ten years. A fellow by the name of Mr. James L. Wick owned a good part of Falcon Bronze. I stayed there for ten years and after that a bunch of the workers at the Falcon Bronze formed a union. Mr. Wick wanted nothing to do with the union, so he sold out to a company in Meadville, another foundry. That left me out of work. The fellows that worked at Falcon Bronze wanted to start another foundry. Ralph Skerrett and John Lopatta were the lead people, and also at that time there was a fellow by the name of Mr. Nesselbush. We called him "Colonel" because he was a colonel in the Army. He was a sick man. He had hypertension, which is pretty bad. They didn't include him for a while. But there came a time that they had to because Mr. Nesselbush had all the know-how. Then he started forming the old company of which I was a part of down in Lowelville. That company is Falcon Foundry. I was employed there from 1953 until 1976.

M: Are you still employed there now?

L: No, I'm retired as of February 1, 1976.

M: Could you tell us some of the things that you made at the foundry?

L: The Falcon Foundry is a non-ferrous foundry. That means it makes things out of copper and bronze. Most of the work was for blast furnaces. It's a cooling system, they call them linings, that they use in blast furnaces. It costs quite a bit of money. This is all made out of copper, one hundred percent copper. Then they made bushings that the mills use in their repair work.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about some of the people in Smoky Hollow other than the boys you worked with?

L: There were Jewish, Italian, and German people. As a matter of fact, we had two homes on our lot and the people who lived in our back home were Russian people. They were all nice people. They were all working people and tried to do the best they could. If anybody needed help they surely got it. They were all hard workers. We never had any trouble down in Smoky Hollow, never. We could keep our doors open and walk the streets with no problems at all.

M: Can you tell us what you remember about the Depression?

L: It was tough. There was no work, no money. I remember one time when my wife and I went down to the store; Wagner's (they used to call the meat market) down on the corner of Walnut and Federal Streets. Right now I think Habers is in there. I went in there to buy a piece of meat and it was just too much for my pocket. I just couldn't buy it. That's how things were.

M: Was this pretty much the case then with everybody?

L: Everybody was trying to make a living, but they just couldn't make it. There was no work; it was tough.

M: Did the Depression have an effect on the people in Smoky Hollow as far as their attitudes? Were they depressed?

L: No, they weren't. They took life day by day, then they were never depressed. There was always a smile on their faces.

They always tried to help each other out. They just took life easy and worked hard when they had to.

M: Would you say Smoky Hollow was kind of a close community?

L: Yes, I'd say it was.

M: Is there anything else that you can recall about Smoky Hollow that is outstanding as you look back over your own life there?

L: I could say this about Smoky Hollow; the boys of the people that used to live down there all came out with flying colors. They went to school or some of them had to go to the army in 1942. They all came back, went to school and got an education. Some are doctors, lawyers, and some are recreational people, but they all made good.

M: What was a typical day like in the Hollow?

L: There wasn't too much going on during the Depression that was exciting. They did the work around the house or planted a little garden, if they had room. Like I said, I was with the boys all the time. If they weren't at the Newsboys Club, they were down running around at Harrison Field, making themselves useful. The parents wouldn't worry about it because they knew where the boys were. The parents stayed home and did their work, which was keeping house. Men didn't have anything to do so they'd help around the house.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about Harrison field? What would draw the children to there?

L: Well, they had swings, teeter-totters, and sliding boards. I worked with the softball teams too, with the men's teams. I used to be a scorekeeper for them. They used to play hardball. "Hard softball - pitching fast - pitch," they used to call it. We'd have a lot of people coming and we played every Sunday morning. We had double headers down there; one game on each end of the field. All the people from the Hollow used to come to watch these games. They were very exciting.

M: At the playground in Smoky Hollow you said they had teeter-totters. Were these under supervision?

L: Yes, they were in the summertime. The city of Youngstown had supervision there. The Park Department ran the playground; they had supervision there all the time.

M: Is there anything you remember about the WPA or CCC camps?

L: Well, WPA, I was on it for a while myself. I think they just made work for the people. I remember being up in the back of Rayen School for a while trying to make a level place; taking dirt from one place and putting it in another. I remember being in back of Andrews Avenue for a while doing about the same thing.

M: Could you describe what you did?

L: Well, I used a pick and shovel. My job was taking dirt from one place, loosening it with a pick, and then shoveling it and putting it in another place.

The CCC camp, some of my friends worked in CCC's and they did a lot of work; a lot of good work for them. It was a very good experience for them. Of course, it was a way of helping out at home because some of that money would come home. I didn't go there, but some of my friends went. It was a real experience for them.

M: Do you think that such a program would be beneficial today?

L: I think so. I really do. I think they should have it.

M: Is there any reason that you think that they should have it?

L: Both WPA and CCC if need be, but I think the youth of today don't have too many jobs to go to. I think they can use something like that to get out and see the world, to see some different places. There is a lot of construction work that I see that needs to be fixed. I think they'd get a lot of experience out of it.

M: Were older people, such as your father or an uncle, permitted to go into these programs?

L: Yes, they were, either one. They had older people going into the CCC camps.

M: Was that a voluntary thing?

L: It was voluntary; you had to ask to go, but you got paid for it. I can't remember what the wage was.

M: Did they turn anybody down?

L: No.

- M: Do you remember anything about the NRA or Prohibition, or anything of this nature that was happening during that period that you lived in Smoky Hollow?
- L: Prohibition made a lot of bootleggers out of some people. That was one way of making a dollar; it wasn't because they wanted to break the law, but they made their wine and they sold it.
- M: So, they went out of their way to survive?
- L: Right.
- M: Was it just on that level, making the wine and selling it, or was there harder liquor involved?
- L: No, the only drink that I remember them making is wine. They sold it all from their own homes; they couldn't go out soliciting. You had to go to their homes to get it.
- M: Was this pretty common?
- L: Yes, it was.
- M: So more than one person was doing this?
- L: Yes.
- M: So this provided extra money coming in?
- L: It wasn't extra money. It was probably the only money that they had.
- M: Do you have any ideas of how they made this wine?
- L: They'd go down and buy grapes and they'd have several barrels that they'd grind the grapes in, and then they would keep it for about eight days so that it was able to ferment. You'd use a wine press and press the wine and press the grapes and get the juice and put it in another barrel. Then, they would let that ferment for a while. When it'd stop fermenting they'd cork it, let that sit for a while, and then tap it to sell.
- M: Would you describe what ferment means?
- L: Well, before they were put in the wine press, the grapes would stay in a barrel for six or eight days. They'd get up during the night and then would stir it during the day and early in

the morning. They'd put them in the wine. Why they let them ferment, I can't say.

M: Would they start to boil when they fermented?

L: Right. After eight days you'd squeeze the meshed grapes. Then you'd put the juice in the barrel. Then you let that ferment for about thirty days, I think. Then when it stops fermenting or boiling they would tap it and let that sit for a while until it would settle down to the bottom of the barrel. Then they would tap it and sell it.

M: Is there anything else that you can recall about Smoky Hollow that was part of everyday life? Can you recall any gambling or any vice?

L: The only vice that a person might have was the crap games. They used to usually do this on a Sunday because they didn't have anything else to do. They'd have people come down and shoot crap. Pretty soon the law would come down and break it up.

M: What is crap?

L: That was the dice game.

M: Was this game played for money?

L: Right, for what little money there was.

M: Is Mr. Person still living today?

L: No, he's dead.

M: Do you know anything about the Mafia?

L: No.

M: Could you describe your own home in Smoky Hollow? You mentioned something about having a small store; could you describe that?

L: My mother ran the store because my dad died in 1925. She was trying to make a living. She had the store and there were so many stores around there that she never seemed to sell too much. How she did it, I don't know. I really couldn't tell you. We had a living room and a kitchen and three bedrooms upstairs. My brother and I and my sister used to help my mother. The store wasn't too prosperous. I didn't make too

much for us to live on. I remember she had tobacco in the front and that's one thing I couldn't take, the smell of tobacco; I never used anything else either, but at that time we didn't have a bath. When I was young that's probably what got me interested in being a Newsboy; to keep myself clean. Things weren't too happy in those days as far as modern living was concerned. There wasn't any.

M: Was this pretty much the way everybody lived at that time?

L: Right.

M: Was everybody in the same boat?

L: Yes, Tony Cook . . .

M: He was also a resident of Smoky Hollow?

L: Right.

M: Would you like to talk about him a little bit? How he got into business?

L: Well, I really don't know. Tony Cook worked for several Chevrolet people in town. Then he got his own franchise, his own company. He started one in Canfield. The reason we always talk about him was because I met him at one of our doings down at our church. He spoke to me and he said that the first place he had to go was to take a shower, to keep clean.

M: Was that Anthony Cook?

L: Right, we didn't have bathrooms in our own homes.

M: Did you have an outhouse or were you . . .

L: No.

M: Oh, you had an inside facility for that. There were a lot of them. I understand that Smoky Hollow did have outhouses.

L: I can't remember if they did or not. The toilets used to be in the basement of the house, but I don't remember any outhouses.

M: Not a bathroom as we know it today?

L: Right.

M: Were there two boys and one girl in your own family?

L: Yes.

M: Then, after your own marriage you had just the one daughter?

L: Yes.

M: But, you have a lot of boys; from the Newsboys?

L: Right.

M: Is there anything else that you would like to add or include before we conclude this interview?

L: No.

M: Would you like to give a brief statement on your actual experience in the Smoky Hollow, and we'll sum it up there?

L: Well, like I said I was busy at the Newsboys Club and then when I got married I had to work at the Falcon Bronze. I decided to go up to the Newsboys Club and go to work in order to make a living for my family. This was my wife, and of course, in 1939 my daughter was born. From Falcon Bronze to Falcon Foundry, I just kept working until I retired.

M: So, as far as your own recollections of your experiences, Smoky Hollow was pretty tied up with the Newsboys and your own employment.

Can you recall any time, either prior to the Depression or during or after the Depression that stands out? What did you feel about World War Two?

L: I saw the boys from the Newsboys Club go to the Army. I had a friend who is a colonel. That's Albert Tesone. He was in the Reserves in 1941 and then in the war in 1942, so he was drafted. Not only him, but a lot of other boys. In fact, for the boys of Smoky Hollow, there's a monument down there on the corner of Rayen and Walnut. A lot of my boys' names are on there . . . I didn't feel too good about wars. One especially, a boy by the name of Bill Santore. He had just gotten out of high school and he was in the Army six months and was killed. The war didn't do him any good. I saw too many of my boys go like that. I didn't care too much for war. In fact, I don't care for any war.

M: I want to thank you for permitting me to come into your home for this interview. Thank you very much.

L: You're quite welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW