

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Lowellville Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 714

ORVILLE STONER

Interviewed

by

Thomas Kirker

on

August 12, 1985

ORVILLE STONER

Orville Wilson Stoner was born November 16, 1907 in Struthers, Ohio. During his childhood he spent many summers with his aunt in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. Throughout his teen-age years he and his friends often rode the streetcar to New Castle and Youngstown. In 1925 he went to work at Mary Furnace, Lowellville, Ohio, a hand-filled blast furnace. Orville started as a laborer, shoveling ore, and worked his way up to turn shift foreman in 1941. Along the road to turn shift foreman he worked in the boiler room and maintenance department. When the furnace closed in 1960, Orville retired to his home on 6935 Pittsburgh Road, Poland, Ohio.

He and his wife Dessie J. Harmon Stoner, daughter of a Sharon Steel employee, were married December 7, 1931. They have one son, Charles W. Stoner, age 40. Orville enjoys his retirement by gardening and working in his well-equipped home shop. A member of the Poland United Presbyterian Church, Orville Stoner typifies the Presbyterian lifestyle, hard work and simple living.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Lowellville Project

INTERVIEWEE: ORVILLE STONER

INTEVIEWER: Thomas Kirker

SUBJECT: blast furnaces, iron, steel, Quakertown,
coal mines, Mary Furnace, Arrel Quarry

DATE: August 12, 1985

K: This is an interview with Orville Stoner for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the history of Lowellville, Ohio. The interview is being done by Tom Kirker. It is August 12, 1985. The time is 8:53 in the morning.

Mr. Stoner will be talking about Mary Furnace and coal mining in Lowellville. When and where were you born?

S: I was born in Struthers in 1907 on November 16th.

K: How did you come to Lowellville?

S: My people originated in Lowellville.

K: What kind of work was your father in?

S: My father was in the sheet mill and in iron making.

K: In Lowellville?

S: That's right.

K: He worked at Mary Furance ?

S: That's right.

K: That's where you worked.

S: I started there in 1925 and stayed there until 1963.

K: What jobs did you do?

- S: Everything from labor to the top job of blast furnace turn foreman.
- K: When did you become turn foreman?
- S: In 1941.
- K: During the Second World War, World War II, you were the turn foreman.
- S: Yes, sir.
- K: How many men worked there?
- S: In the neighborhood of 200.
- K: You were in charge of . . .
- S: I was in charge of twenty-two every day.
- K: What shift did you work?
- S: I worked three shifts.
- K: When you first started in 1925, what was an average day like? What time did you go to work? When did you have lunch? What did you do in the early days at the mill?
- S: Ten to twelve hours, 7:00 to 5:30. The pay was 44¢ an hour.
- K: How many men worked with you?
- S: In the labor gang you had about forty men.
- K: What were some of the things you did?
- S: Unload ore.
- K: That was mostly . . .
- S: Mostly unload ore, clean the stove, anything that would pertain to labor, built track.
- K: How many cars were coming in every day with ore? How many ore cars were coming to the furnace?
- S: The big ore would come in the summertime. You stocked ore all summer. In the wintertime the lakes closed. You had maybe ten cars a day coming from Cleveland, but you had a big supply of ore all the time.
- K: Was there any time the furnace was shut down or did it run

- constantly?
- S: It ran constantly until a slow time or something.
- K: When were those? Do you remember any slow times?
- S: Yes, the Depression. It was shut down seven years.
- K: During the Depression did you work at all?
- S: Yes, I worked at the open-hearth at the other plant.
- K: That was for Sharon?
- S: Sharon Steel. This furnace at Lowellville was a blast furnace. It made foundry iron. From 1913 to 1916 they built the Lowellville plant of Sharon Steel. The furnace was owned by the Ohio Iron & Steel, Youngstown people, and it was a blast furnace. When they built the open-hearths, the new plant, they bought iron for the open-hearths. Sharon Steel bought the iron from the Ohio Iron & Steel and had it delivered to the open-hearths up until 1923. In 1923 Sharon Steel bought the Ohio Iron & Steel. They owned the furnace from that time on.
- K: Did you know any difference in the way it was run?
- S: It was run with the same people. Sharon Steel took everybody in. Sharon Steel took all of the old people in.
- K: In the 1920's when you worked at the furnace, where did you live?
- S: I lived in Struthers.
- K: Do you know the address?
- S: 17 Sells Avenue.
- K: Is the house still there?
- S: Yes, sir.
- K: When did you leave that house? When did you move from there?
- S: I lived with my people. I lived there up until 1931 when I got married.
- K: Then where did you move to?
- S: Poland.
- K: To this house?

- S: No, I lived in two other places. I lived next door here in 1934.
- K: I noticed this is Stoner Road right here. Is that for your people?
- S: That's right. I dedicated this street here in 1946 or something like that.
- K: Right after the war?
- S: They put the street in in 1946 or something like that. I owned two to three acres up here, five blocks.
- K: Along Stoner Road?
- S: That's right. On one side.
- K: When you worked in Lowellville, did you go home every day?
- S: That's right
- K: Did you take the streetcar or did you walk?
- S: No, I drove. When I first started in 1925, I took the New Castle car to Lowellville. The New Castle car ran back and forth. You could get a car there every ten minutes.
- K: Where did it drop you off?
- S: Right there by the Lowellville bank.
- K: Then you walked up the hill?
- S: I walked across the bridge.
- K: When you got paid on payday, did you stay in Lowellville?
- S: No, I came home on the streetcar. I traveled the streetcar from November until March 1st. Then I bought a car and I drove back and forth. I worked my way up from the labor gang to the boilers, from the boilers to the engine room, from the engine room to the machine shop, to the maintenance shop, and from the maintenance shop I went to the machine shop and worked the machinist's trade in 1937. I stayed at the machinist's trade until 1947. In 1947 I went into supervision.
- K: As a foreman?
- S: That's right
- K: When you were in the boiler room, what did you do, what kind of jobs?

S: Fired boilers.

K: You just kept them at a constant temperature?

S: Yes. You had to carry a certain amount of steam. You weren't in there by yourself. You were in there with another man. There were two men.

I worked on the locomotives. I fired locomotives. I worked all of those jobs.

K: Compared to the other mills in the area, other furnaces, was that a big furnace?

S: That was not a big furnace. That was a hand-filled furnace. That was the last hand-filled furnace in this part of the country. When it shut down, it shut down in 1960. It was a 350 ton furnace, but it held an average around 400 tons. It made 514 tons of iron in twenty-four hours once.

K: Do you know what year that was when it made that much iron?

S: In the 1950's.

K: Since ironmaking and steelmaking are a lost art in this area, what were some of the things you did to make iron and steel? What went into the process? What physical labor did you perform to make iron or steel, whichever?

S: You governed the furnace.

K: You just kept it at a constant temperature and control.

S: That's right. When you ran the furnace, you would run the furnace just like you would run a clock.

K: You kept it at a steady temperature all the time?

S: That was up to you.

K: I also heard that you had worked in the coal mines.

S: No, I never worked in a coal mine, but I knew all about the coal mines.

K: In this area?

S: That's right.

K: What can you tell me about those?

S: You had a coal mine down in Lowellville with a better grade of coal than anyplace in the district.

K: Did you get coal from them?

S: No. This coal mine was owned by people from Youngstown. Did you ever hear of Stambaugh and Thompson?

K: Yes.

S: Stambaugh people had money to spend. They and . . . Did you ever hear of Clingan Jackson?

K: Yes.

S: Clingan Jackson's mother's people's name was Clingan. Stambaugh and Clingan owned this coal mine. They sunk a shaft down there in Lowellville ninety-some feet. The guy who came here dug that coal to put this elevator in. When they dug that coal, you couldn't buy that coal in Lowellville. You couldn't buy it because it was a good grade of coal and it was a block coal. It was not chemical coal. It was shipped to New York, and they used it in passenger trains. It was an awfully good coal. The only coal that you could get from that mine would be slack coal from the cutting machines. They used mules in the bottom to handle that coal in the cars to the elevator.

As you went down that Lowellville hill where the track is you would go up there about one-eighth of a mile. There were two tracks. There was another sidetrack up there. They had that tipple where they raised this coal up ninety feet. They had the same kind of hoist in there that they had at this furnace. That coal was raised ninety feet. It went into this loading . . . They could load these cars. Down below at the bottom of the shaft they had a slope that came out to the street on Jackson Street. Do you know where Jackson Street is?

K: Yes.

S: Down Jackson Street one block and a half they had a slope in there that you could go in under the railroad track. They used to bring the coal out there with the mules. They had a gate on there.

Up on top of the hill they had a crusher, the Arrel Quarry. I played around that. The Arrel Crusher was continuously grinding everything. They caved the entries in down there, and the crusher was not on good foundation. They lose a bunch of cars and a lot of pumps back where the Lowellville Rod and Gun Club is. That was how far back they were, and they lost the pumps and cars back in there. This happened in 1913, 1914. I was about six years old.

K: Were any men killed?

S: No, not that I know of. My stepfather worked in that plant. Another guy doesn't remember anything about it. His father was superintendent, but he lives down in Lowellville. He doesn't know too much about the mine because he is four or five years younger than me. I have pictures of the man who was superintendent of the mine and the man who came here to run the cutting machine. These guys came from Pennsylvania.

K: Just to run the mine and just to run the cutting mill?

S: No, the guy was superintendent over there. His name was Roger Horn. His boy lives down there in Lowellville. There aren't many people I know around Lowellville who worked in the mine.

In 1803 the Western Reserve came through here. They came through here and they bought a lot of ground. When they went to settle Lowellville, they didn't have anyplace across the river. There were two towns down there. One town was Lowell; that was on this side of the river. The name of the town on the other side of the river was McGillsville. People by the name of McGillis came here and settled on the north side. I don't know how Lowell got its name. My grandfather never said Lowellville. He said that he was going to Lowell. They came here and they settled that place down there.

My great-grandfather came here from the Shenango Valley to dig coal for this blast furnace. That was another different mine.

K: What mine was that?

S: That was anyplace where they could get it like at Struthers. Do you know where the Hollow is down by the sewage plant in Struthers?

K: No, I don't know anything about Struthers.

S: They dug coal in Nebo Hollow in Struthers in the Lowellville Hollow, not this mine that I was telling you about. They dug coal there for this little furnace when it first started in 1846. They dug ore out of the hill down there. They called it a kidney ore.

I worked with a man who was a sawmill man and a steam man. They sawed wood around the mill with the steam. When they put this hoist engine in there to hoist this coal up, this man from the sawmill got a job running the hoist engine, the steam hoist engine. When the mill went down, he went

to the furnace to work. He was an engineer running the engine.

When they started to make ore, they couldn't handle that river. They could handle this creek down here.

K: What do you mean they couldn't handle it?

S: The water was too swift for the pumps and the water-wheels and stuff. They went to this creek down here. They had one furnace here, and then they moved the furnace down there by Lake Hamilton. Then they moved it down to the banks of the Mahoning River. When they couldn't make it down there, then they shoved out and went to Lowellville.

The Lowellville furnace was shut down seven years during the Depression. When it started up, there was a wonderful magazine that came out with all of the history in it. I saved that.

K: When that furnace was shut down for seven years, how did you make ends meet?

S: I went to Sharon Steel. I went to the upper mill. I was transferred to the upper mill.

K: How many days a week did you work?

S: I couldn't tell you that. You worked whenever they had it.

K: Maybe one or two days?

S: Yes, one or two days; sometimes you were off just like the Depression. You took what you could get. You worked outside; you worked anyplace you could make a few dollars.

K: Were people leaving the area at that time?

S: No. How could you leave when you didn't have any money to go anyplace? There wasn't anything anyplace else. The mills were here. It wasn't like before. The mills aren't here now; they are gone.

K: When you had time off from the mill what were some of the things you did?

S: I never had too many days off. I always worked.

K: You never took days off.

S: I had vacation. We went fishing. We used our vacation since 1950 to go to Canada two to three times a year.

I have people who worked for me, eighty years old, who talk to me three to four times a week. I have one man, eighty years old, who worked for me since the 1940's. I talk to him two or three times a week.

K: Did you spend much time in Lowellville when you weren't working? Did you go in to have a drink or have something to eat on the way home?

S: No, I never monkeyed around with that. I had lots of friends down there. I went to church down there once in awhile. I had lots of friends down there.

K: Is your wife from Lowellville?

S: No, my wife is from Middletown.

You ran a furnace by what you saw. That is why a lot of these places went broke today because they were run from the office.

K: I believe it because evidently there are no mills here. You had to see how that steel looked before you made it.

S: That's right. You looked into the furnace. You didn't know what that furnace was doing. That guy in the office telling you what to do . . . what in the hell does he know about the furnace?

K: When you first started . . .

S: I learned from guys who actually put their whole life in learning. I never went to school for this. The only thing I did was that I bought some books. I got some pretty good books.

Look at how many families the blast furnaces have had today. A little furnace like that you can tell what is going on. You can see what is going on by what you put in there and everything like that. You know when you make a change or something. It is just like a woman making a batch of cookies. She knows what she has there. If she doubles things, she might make four or five bunches more.

K: Who were some of those men who you learned from?

S: Bob Know, Fred Young, George Mehler. In the machine shop I learned off of six guys, Anthony Watson and Charlie Rolandson. Charlie learned his machinist trade over in Butler shops over there where they built railroad pullmans.

K: Where they built the railroad pullmans?

S: That's right; he learned his trade over there. He was a smart man.

My people originated from New Castle.

K: Where at? I'm from New Castle.

S: Rose Point.

K: On the Slippery Rock River?

S: That's right.

K: There used to be a blast furnace at the Point.

S: That's right. I was over there in McConnell's Mill. My grandfather was born over there. My great-grandfather came over and bought ground off of the Quakers.

K: Down here at Quakertown?

S: That's right. On this farm that my grandfather bought, the Quakers had a little mill and the dam to run this mill grinding grain. The stones that were in there that they ground the grain on . . . In about 1927, 1928, Carbon bought this farm. I had an uncle who worked for Carbon. Clingan Jackson's cousin, Joe Jackson, was superintendent. Joe Jackson was building a home here in Poland, right down the road here. After they bought the farm on the Stoner's side of the family . . . On my mother's side of the family, my uncle was a teamster for Carbon. He took Joe Jackson up to the property to show him something. They went up there and the stones were all buried. He told Joe Jackson that he should get them out of there. They took those big stones out of there. They put them right down here on North Lima Road, one on each side of the driveway. Joe Jackson lived down there. I have taken different ones down there to show them. I told them that those stones belonged to the Quakers and that they were taken off of my grandmother's farm and Joe Jackson brought them up here.

When they had two towns in Lowellville, the first bridge that was put across the river is right down here at the cemetery.

K: Right down here at the cemetery?

S: That's right. That was the bridge that was first put across the Mahoning River. My grandmother used to cross that bridge.

Your cattle and stuff didn't come through here by train. They were drove through.

K: They drove them right through the middle of town?

- S: They drove them along the railroad. They had a path along where the railroad went. There wasn't any railroad here, maybe a single train.
- K: When your grandparents lived in Quakertown, did you visit them very much?
- S: Yes.
- K: What can you recall about Quakertown? When you were younger, did you play with the kids?
- S: There weren't any Quakers left down there. There was only one Quaker left down there. He ran a store down in there when the Quakers were there. His name was Paul Dean Lewis. His father before him ran a store down there. He left there and came to Lowellville and had a store in Lowellville. We used to go in there and buy candy off of him. In this store he used to have a lot of stuff that was left over from the Quakers. We used to go in there and get candy and stuff like that. We used to buy candy off of him.

I lived in Quakertown at my grandmother's out there when I was four years old. I went to Sunday school at Hilltown. I went to the church in Hilltown.

I saw the powder mill. My father worked there in his young days and my uncle worked there practically all of his life. I almost went to work there. They made black powder there. People from New Castle owned it. The house is down there yet. You go right through the powder mill.

When you cross the railroad track down there, you look and there is a lane that runs down along the river. Lewis had a store down along that lane there. There were a lot of company houses down in there.

People from New Castle came in there and built the first park down there. They called it the Burton Powder Co. They sold that place out to the Grisselli Company, bought it back, and then Grisselli owned it at last. The Burton brothers sold it to Grisselli. Grisselli sold it out to Dupont in 1929 or 1930 or something like that, and Dupont scrapped it.

You had a streetcar running from New Castle to Youngstown. You could get a streetcar every ten minutes. You could get a New Castle car every fifteen minutes, and you could get a Youngstown car about every seven minutes because the Youngstown car would only come to Lowellville down there where the firehouse was and then go back.

I saw the coal bank go out. Ohio Edison came in and built that plant down there. At the same time, they were building

Sharon Steel.

You had twenty-three saloons in Lowellville at one time.

K: During the 1920's, during prohibition?

S: Before. You had a wholesale brewery down there that furnished all of the beer for Bessemer and Hilltown and all of those quarries up there.

You had a Gittnay bus in Lowellville that ran up to Hilltown and Bessemer. You could go in and get a Gittnay bus to Bessemer. People may be coming from Bessemer to Lowellville to get a streetcar to go to Youngstown or go to New Castle. Lowellville was on the map.

Beer wagons were running up to Bessemer, Hilltown. All of that produce and stuff would come into Lowellville on the streetcar and be hauled up there by wagon. Watermelons and stuff would go by the wagon.

When you saw those people coming home from the quarries after work, it was just like kids coming home from school.

When you go to New Castle, you can see how much ground has been turned over and mined.

K: Right, quite a bit.

Did you know many men who worked in those quarries?

S: Yes. They are all gone now. A lot of people were killed in the quarries too, run over with engines and stuff like that.

K: When you were at the furnace, was anyone killed?

S: Yes, sure. A lot of people were hurt down there. We didn't have a lot, but maybe there were one or two a year or something like that.

K: What was the most common accident?

S: I don't really know.

K: Did people get hit by a train or run over?

S: No. The most common would be getting your eyes hurt.

K: When they blew that iron . . .

S: No, just by not taking care. That was the most common now. Once in awhile you had a guy who was knocked off of the cars or run over or got his leg cut off. There were a couple of

guys who got their legs cut off. There weren't too many killed. Over a period of twenty years or something, you had a lot of people who were killed. There were all different kinds of accidents. Overall, we had it pretty well.

I was practically raised in Lowellville. I was born in Struthers and I lived out there in Quakertown in my real young days because that was my father's home out there. Then I lived in Lowellville up on top of Poland Hill right across to the Arrel Quarry and to this coal mine. When my father was killed, I lived right next door to the furnace. My uncle was labor boss down there, and I used to play around this furnace. I would go up there and meet those guys coming home. I would go up there and watch them. I used to go up there with older people.

K: Was your father killed at the powder mill?

S: No, my father was killed on the railroad riding a train.

K: What year did you live up by Arrel Quarry? Do you know how old you were?

S: Yes. I lived right next to the Arrel Quarry when the Arrel Quarry was running. The coal bank was running. My stepfather worked in the coal bank. The Arrel Quarry was running in 1913. I don't know what year it shutdown. Bessemer bought it and he shut it down. Right now Bessemer is coming over in there and lining the stone that they had bought when they bought the Arrel Quarry in 1914. Bessemer bought the quarry in 1914 and then shut it down.

K: You said they shut that down in 1914?

S: In that neighborhood.

K: During the First World War?

S: No, they shut it down before the First World War. They had to shut down, but they had a good grade of coal down there.

K: The coal that you used at Mary Furnace and at Sharon, where did it come from?

S: We got that coal from Pennsylvania someplace, but our coke came from different palces. It came from McConnelsville, Coitsville, Pittsburgh, West Virginia, Carpentertown. I think Carpentertown was in West Virginia. We used to use twelve to fourteen cars of coke every twelve hours.

K: How much ore did you go through?

S: I don't know. We would have it down there in mounds.

K: How many brothers and sister did you have?

S: I had five half-brothers and one full-brother and one sister.

K: When you first started, did you work a ten hour day?

S: At the furnace?

K: Yes.

S: We worked ten and twelve.

K: Ten and twelve. Then it went to eight?

S: Yes, it went to eight.

K: Were there any young kids working there?

S: You could get a job in those days. People would come from Italy. "When is your cousin coming? You better tell him to hurry up because we have a job for him." It was the same way up at Carbon.

I don't know what this is coming to. Every place you look, they are putting people out of work.

END OF INTERVIEW