

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Theatre People from Ohio

Personal Experience

O.H. 1579

JACK HYNES

Interviewed

by

Carol Shaffer Mills

on

Jan. 26, Feb. 3, and June 11, 1982

JACK HYNES

Jack Hynes may well be regarded as Youngstown's theatrical living treasure. He is the quintessential theatre person in this area, having worked since 1922 in the theatre business in the Youngstown, Ohio community. He has served as usher, front of the house, manager, chief of service, publicity and advertising supervisor, and theatre writer for the newspaper, The Youngstown Vindicator. Mr. Hynes has worked with the greats of Vaudeville, live theatre, and film. Names like George M. Cohan, Rae Samuels (the Blue Streak of Vaudeville) and Mort Shea roll off Mr. Hynes' tongue as easily as do those of lesser known theatrical personages. This year, 1982, makes 60 years in "the show business" for Mr. Hynes, and he is beloved and respected by literally thousands who have worked with him and had the privilege of experiencing his deft, gracious manner, and his total professionalism. He has worked the great old Youngstown theatres, like the Dome, the Strand, the State, the Park, the Paramount, the Palace, and of course, the hometown picture palace that the Warner Brothers built here, the Warner. The Warner is now the home of the Youngstown Symphony Society, the Powers Auditorium.

Jack Hynes evokes in the listener a sweet sense of nostalgia, a misty remembrance of more gracious times gone by. Indeed, one can almost hear the far-off mournful sound of the night train pulling into the B & O or the Erie with the theatrical sets and props, and most important, the traveling theatre troops. He recounts meetings with Ethel Barrymore, Katherine Hepburn, and

the irrepressible Warner brothers, whose family owned a butcher shop in Youngstown, Ohio before the boys forged their way into theatrical immortality.

Perhaps as delightful as his memories of show business, are the fond portraits that Jack Hynes etches of the Youngstown of his youth and early career. How vital and magnetic was this proud little city, with its Grand Opera House, its pictures palaces, and its Vaudeville houses. Jack Hynes evokes a yearning in his listener's breast for a return to those golden times, when steel meant prosperity, and prosperity meant a search for culture and enrichment. Youngstown is purportedly in its death throes now, but the indomitable Jack Hynes still goes to work daily at the Powers Auditorium, a gentle reminder of a lovelier time.

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INTERVIEWEE: JACK HYNES

INTERVIEWER: Carol Shaffer Mills

SUBJECT: Vaudeville, film houses, touring shows, famous show business personalities who came to Youngstown, the Warner Brothers, early Youngstown and its rich culture, the Grand Opera House, Mr. Hynes's jobs in theatre

DATE: January 26, February 3, and June 11, 1982

M: This is an interview with Jack Hynes for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Theatre People from Ohio, by Carol Shaffer Mills, at Powers Auditorium, on January 26, 1982, at 12:00 noon.

H: I was born in Youngstown, Ohio on July 27, 1907. My education was in the public and parochial schools of Youngstown. I graduated from South High School. During my high school years, I started as an usher in the downtown theatres, working first in the Strand Theatre located on the square or the so called "Diamond" in downtown Youngstown. The manager of that theatre was an old time baseball scout who had worked for John McGraw of the Giants. I worked in the capacity of an usher and a ticket taker.

M: How old were you then?

H: I was 15 years old at that time. I was at the Strand for three or four months. Then, I moved to the Dome Theatre, where I worked all during the remaining high school years. After I graduated from high school in January of 1925, I continued to work at the Dome Theatre. David Robbins and Joe Trunk were the

managers. Frank Savage was the assistant manager. I became their chief of service shortly after my graduation from high school, and I assisted Mr. Savage doing the publicity and advertising for the theatre. I stayed at the Dome until 1927. At that time, I was asked to join the staff of the Vindicator, and for a period of seven months, I worked at the Vindicator in the advertising department and also continued my association with the Dome Theatre. In the late fall and early winter of 1927, Mr. Joe Trunk, who was our former manager at the Dome, was to become the manager of the new State Theatre that was scheduled to open January 1, 1928. I had worked for Mr. Trunk for several years at the old Dome, and he called me up one day and said that he would like to have me come in, handle the publicity, and be the assistant manager at the State Theatre. I came in the State at the time of the opening in January 1, 1928. I was the assistant manager. I handled all the theatre's advertising and publicity. While Mr. Trunk left the management in June of that year, I then became associated with a new manager, Mr. William McConnell. I stayed at the State Theatre until April of 1930.

M: Where was the State located exactly, geographically, in Youngstown?

H: Right across the street where the Agora Club is.

M: I mean for the tape. It's Federal Street and . . . ?

H: West Federal Street, between Hazel and Chestnut. I stayed at the State Theatre until April of 1930. At that time, Mr. John Elliot, who was manager of the Palace Theatre, had a talk with me about becoming associated with him in the operation of the Palace Theatre. I went to the Palace Theatre as an assistant manager in charge of publicity. I stayed with Mr. Elliott from April of 1930 until December of the same year. At that time, I was offered a position of manager of Chay's Bradford Theatre in Bradford, Pennsylvania, by Mr. Mort Chay. I became manager of the Chay Enterprises in Bradford Pennsylvania, in December of 1930 and continued to manage and operate two theatres: the Chay Bradford Theatre and the Grand Theatre in that community, for the next eight and one half years.

M: Could you tell me something about the Chay Enterprises, where they emanated from?

H: Mark Chay was originally a man who came to Broadway as an independent Vaudeville Booker, at about the turn of the century. He later formed a partnership with a man called Harry Feiber. The forum was known for a number

of years as "Feiber and Chay." It was a partnership. Later, Mr. Chay bought out his partner and became the sole owner of the firm that he called "Chay Theatrical Enterprises." In January of 1939, Mr. Chay was very ill and had assigned Mr. Edmund Grainger to become the general manager of the theatre. At that time, Mr. Grainger came to me and asked me to become the manager of the Paramount and the Park Theatres in Youngstown, Ohio. I assumed that position in early January of 1939 and continued to work with the Chay enterprises and the Chay Theatrical Corporation until 1971.

M: Could you tell us briefly where those two theatres are located in Youngstown, Ohio?

H: The Paramount Theatre was located on the corner of Federal and Hazel Street.

M: I guess the northwest corner, that would be, right?

H: Fine. The Park Theatre was located on Champion Street, between Boardman and East Federal [Streets].

M: Mr. Hynes, you stayed at the Paramount until 1939, you said. Is that correct?

H: In 1939, I started.

M: Excuse me. Could you tell me what kind of shows they were running at the Park and the Paramount, then?

H: The Paramount, because it had no stage, was primarily a motion picture theatre, playing some of the best of the Hollywood films. The Park, however, played both films and also legitimate Broadway plays. Each season at the Park, and the season we consider from September until June, we would play four to six, possibly eight plays, depending upon what was available and what was touring in this area. During that time, from early 1939, the Chay Theatre Corporation gave up the operation of the Park Theatre in 1940. We played some of the great stars of the legitimate stages: Helen Hays, Luntun Fontain, Catherine Cornell, Katherine Hepburn.

M: Was Ethyl Barrymore there, too?

H: Yes, [and] Joe E. Lewis.

M: Could you name a few of the vehicles that they appeared in? Just [give us] a sampling of whatever comes to your mind.

H: The Lunch [Luntun Fontain] played in two things: There Shall Be No Night and Shakespeare's Taming of the

Shrew. We also had Cornelia Odis Skinner. I can't think of her vehicle right now.

M: When these companies came in on their tours, these tours were then completely set up in New York, for instance, and the minor players and the whole company was like a bus and truck? They didn't use any local people, or did they?

H: They didn't use local people. It was a complete production in those days, because we had railroads; they traveled by railroad. They didn't travel by bus and truck. The scenery came in a railroad freight car and the company traveled strictly by rail.

M: What rail company brought them in?

H: Youngstown, in those days, was served by four railroads. We had the New York Central, the Pennsylvania, the Erie, and Baltimore, Ohio [Railroads].

M: It would depend on which one they chose?

H: It would depend, basically, where they were coming from. For example, if a show was coming from Washington to Youngstown, naturally, the B & O was the direct line; they would come on the B & O. If they were coming from New York, basically they came on the Pennsylvania, because of the direct line. If they were coming from the New Jersey area, lots of times they came on the Erie, because the Erie went through New Jersey, going to New York. If the show was coming sometimes from Chicago, they would come on the New York Central. It all depended upon where and how the show was routed, where it was coming from, and from what railroad. The big question that agents with shows had those days was to try to hold on to their baggage car. Sometimes, they came into your town on the B & O, and then they had it transferred to the New York Central and to the Pennsylvania. Well, if they had a B & O baggage car and they wanted to transfer it to another railroad, that was always a difficult problem.

M: Can you tell me a little bit, if you remember, any sampling of what a relative scale pay would have been for the stars or the whole company as a package?

H: Of course, basically, the supporting players would have had to have been paid. . . .

M: The equity scale.

H: I don't know off-hand what the equity minimum was in those days. As you know, the equity minimum has changed. It is substantially higher now than it was back in those days.

M: It didn't change until very recently. (laughter)

H: It has changed. The supporting players were all paid equity minimum. If they did big parts, they got above the equity [minimum]. Now, when you are talking about stars, stars generally had, in those days, a deal that guaranteed them a set fee, such as two, three, or possibly four thousand dollars a week against ten percent of the gross, whichever was the highest. You've got to realize now, that we're talking about admission prices that were in the category of \$2 to \$3 for a straight play, and from \$3 to \$5 for a musical. So an artist, even a top artist, being guaranteed \$3,000 a week was top salary in those days. Tax rates were different; income tax was different. \$3,000 was a substantial salary. When I was in Vaudeville, our Youngstown Star, the blue streak of Vaudeville, was one of the highest-paid stars in the key circuit.

M: That was. . . .

H: Rae Samuels.

M: What did he do, the "blue streak?"

H: She was a singer.

M: Oh, it was a woman. I've heard that name.

H: She got fifteen hundred dollars a week. She was one of the top stars on the key circuit. It was a big salary in those days.

M: What was her repertoire?

H: She did popular numbers and things of that type. She was a great performer. She had a great personality.

M: She was from here?

H: She was from Youngstown.

M: Do you know what side of town?

H: No. I do not know what side of town she originally came from. She married a man by the name of Marty Forkins, who was one of the important key agents who booked the Vaudeville Shows in the Keith Theatres and other theatres that were booked by the Keith office. The Keith Office had a number of their own theatres

that they owned, and there were a number of independent theatres that booked Keith Vaudeville. Marty Forkins was one of them.

M: Why was Rae Samuels called the blue streak of Vaudeville?

H: I don't know where that title came from.

M: Did she sing blues songs at all?

H: She sang all kinds of songs. She had an electric personality.

M: Maybe that's why, Electric Blues?

H: She had an electric personality. One of important changes in motion pictures, in the early days, was the change from silent pictures to sound. It happened in the years of 1926 and 1927. The old Dome Theatre, which was located where the Revco Drugstore is on Federal Street now, was one of the first theatres in the United States that was wired to play sound pictures. One of the reasons for this was that, in 1924, the Dome was taken over by Warner Brothers, who were the innovators of the sound picture movement. It was very interesting in the early days of sound. If we were to go back and look at the newspaper advertisements, we would see that the ad said that it was 40 percent talking or 60 percent talking. Of course, the initial film that created such a sensation around the world was Al Jolson in The Jazz Singer. This was the really important start of sound and talking pictures. Jolson had been and was a great stage personality and had appeared in numerous Broadway shows and in popular concerts. He, without question, was one of the--and still remains today, even though he has passed on--giants of the industry. The public flocked to talking pictures. They were an instantaneous success. As they developed, Warner Brothers had what was called the first all talking picture. It was called The Lights of New York. It was really a group of night club acts, strung together with a not too important story, but it was the first all talking picture. Of course, it was advertised in. . . .

M: What year?

H: This was 1928.

M: A year after the advent of. . . .

H: It was a tremendous success. There were long lines in front of the theaters every place in America where it played.

Talking pictures really sort of sounded the death for Vaudeville. Vaudeville had been an important part of the American Theatre for more than fifty years. This new media captured the imagination of the people. It so, really, swamped the industry to such an extent that the old time Vaudeville theatre soon went out of existence. The theatre originally played eight acts of Vaudeville, no feature picture, just an occasional news reel and the eight acts of Vaudeville. Then, they went to five acts of Vaudeville and a motion picture. After the advent of sound, it became more and more difficult to operate a Vaudeville theatre. The public was interested in this new phenomena--sound and talking pictures. Vaudeville was sort of a thing of the past. When the Depression came on, the sound picture was the one thing that the public had that relieved them from their expression. The industry was very smart in those days. They made a lot of comedies [and] they made a lot of musicals, very few problem pictures. In other words, it was pretty light fare. That's what the public wanted in those days. They had enough troubles of their own and in their own life, and when they went out for entertainment, they wanted something that was really light entertainment. Those years were the big Busby Berkley musicals and the wonderful Ester Williams swimming shows in color and lights. It was a dazzling spectacle. It was the type of thing that the public was looking for. Theaters were affected like all other businesses, but admission prices were low.

M: What were those exactly?

H: Very rarely in those days was admission to a motion picture theatre more than 50 cents. Matinees, people could attend for 25 cents. Children were 10 cents. So, it was a very inexpensive form of entertainment for the public during those very difficult and hard years of Depression, where we had so many people unemployed.

M: In the 1920's, before the advent of sound in motion pictures, what was a typical Vaudeville ticket price?

H: Total cost?

M: Yes.

H: It would run probably--for four or five acts, it would run probably--in the average of \$1,000 each. [It would] cost about \$5,000 for the show. Now, that doesn't mean that everybody got \$1,000. Maybe the headliner got \$2,000, and some of the smaller acts got

\$500 for the week, or \$600. But that was a substantial salary.

M: What did the people have to pay to see that, then?

H: Very few Vaudeville theatres charged more than 75 cents at night. It was a combination of pictures and Vaudeville, both. It was a popular form of entertainment in this country for many years.

M: So, the volume was enough to cover it.

H: The volume was very great. In the old days of "two-a-day Vaudeville", particularly at the old Hippodome Theatre which was operated by the Miller family. . . .

M: Where was the Hippodome?

H: The Hippodome was located in the Arcade building where Higbee's now operates. The theatre was right about in the center of the arcade. In the very early days, they did "two-a-day Vaudeville". There was a performance in the afternoon and a performance at night. There were many people in Youngstown in those days that had season tickets. They attended every Tuesday night, Tuesday afternoon, or every Saturday night. They had a very large [group of] season ticket subscribers. Then, of course, there were the individual people who bought individual tickets for a particular performance that they wanted to attend. It was a very popular, very important part of the theatrical history of this era.

M: Could you tell me when you started to work in the theatre, as you said before. If we could just jump back to that a little . . . after your teenage introduction and then, you being the manager of several theatres as we've stated earlier, [tell] just a little bit about your own life, where you were living, and from your youth.

H: I was living at where I still am on the south side, on 78 East Chommers, in a home built by my father.

M: You have been there how many years?

H: Of course, I worked out of town for a number of years, but our family has owned the home there since 1902. I was away a great many years when I was managing theatres out of town, but we have continued to own the home, and it's still there. My father built it. I have great nostalgic feelings for the property, because of my great love for my parents.

M: Would you tell me a little bit about your parents?

H: Yes. My father worked for 33 years for the Dingle Die Lumber Company. When they went out of business in the middle 1920's, he then became employed and worked for the balance of his life as an engineer for the Republic Steel corporation.

M: I could see where he got the ability to build a house for himself. (laughter) And your mother, what was her background?

H: My mother was from New Castle, Pennsylvania. She was born and raised in New Castle.

M: What was her maiden name?

H: Her maiden name was Anna Genevieve Rabbit.

M: What nationality is that?

H: She was an Irish girl. She and my father married in 1898. They built the home on East Chommers and moved in 1902.

M: Had you any brothers and sisters?

H: Yes. I had two brothers: Robert, who died at child-birth and Howard, who died at the age of twenty-nine with lobar pneumonia.

M: That was a bad thing then, too.

H: My brother Howard was a very talented musician. He had popular orchestras here. His first was the Southern Six, then the Blue Ramblers. In the 1920's, they played many of the important social events and dances held by clubs in organizations.

M: How many piece band did he have?

H: Southern Six was six members, and the Blue Ramblers had eight members.

M: He played for a lot of social events then?

H: [He played for] social events and dances for clubs and organizations in the community.

M: When you were a child, had you shown any interest in music? How did you get this. . . .

M: Yes. I studied both the violin and the french horn. I studied violin for a long time. My teacher was Alberta Riordan, who was the conductor of the old Hippodome orchestra. I also studied with Herb Schroeder.

Mr. Riordan and Mr. Schroeder are both dead. Herb Schroeder was a conductor at the Dome orchestra during the silent days in the Dome Theater. He later became a member of the string section of the Youngstown Symphony. He was a very talented musician. He was a very talented violinist. I think that perhaps--an interesting story of that would be, as a young man, I went to hear a concert at the old Park Theatre played by . . . I'm going to have to pick up the name for you.

M: Okay. Just give it to me later.

H: He was one of the great master violinists of the day, I think, then I recognized that my musical talents were very inadequate from a standpoint of hoping for a professional career in music.

M: The grim face of reality? (Laughter)

H: I then decided that perhaps my future lies in the business end of the amusement industry.

M: But you did feel very interested in the business industry?

H: Oh, yes. I played violin for quite a number of years, at times, professionally with some orchestras, dance orchestras, mostly. I also played when I was in high school, with the South High School Orchestra. We had some pretty famous musicians in that orchestra . . . Glite, who became a very national figure.

M: Did he play the organ?

H: No. He played the violin. He's passed on now. We had a very fine violinist by the name of Richard Phelan who played quite a number of engagements here and around Youngstown. Our conductor was a man by the name of Mr. Monroe. He struggled with our young talents and certainly accomplished a great deal.

M: What year did you graduate?

H: I graduated from South [High] in 1925. I also played in the South High School Band. I played the french horn. I was never very good at the french horn. I sort of played at it. It was an opportunity to be at the football games and parade. Being a ham, I'm sure I enjoyed that part of my life.

M: These are the days when Rayen and South had the rivalry. Could you tell me a little bit about that?

H: Oh, yes. This was an absolute, important civic event. If you lived south of the river, you just didn't have

anything to do with people who lived north of the river. They were the enemy. Nothing was so frustrating as to lose a game to Rayen. You could lose a game to almost anybody else, but oh, to lose a game to Rayen was extremely frustrating to us in those days. I guess

when you were young, those things meant so much to you. Of course, the annual South-Rayen game was always played on Thanksgiving Day. It was a big event in the city.

M: I remember it still going on when I was in high school. Of course, there were probably more schools. . . . How many schools were open, to your memory, when you graduated in 1927?

H: East and Chaney had just been opened. I can't tell you the exact year that those two schools were opened.

M: Rayen and South were the big guys, I remember that.

H: Rayen and South, at one time, were the only high schools in the city as far as. . . . Later, of course, other schools came along. In those days, there was really only two high schools. You either went to South or you went to Rayen.

M: Now, the South Side [of Youngstown] was developed later than the North Side was.

H: Oh, yes.

M: I suppose the Rayen people considered the South people upstarts?

H: Oh, [there's] no question about it. I'm sure, and maybe, with good reason.

M: That's what I am, a South Side upstart.

H: I think the South Side developed, basically, after the Market Street bridge was built. It was sort of the "gateway" to the South Side. The real estate development of the South Side came after that time. When we think now of what a big area Boardman is . . . I remember my grandmother saying to my father, "How come you built a house that was so far out in the country," which was in those days, considered quite a ways from downtown.

M: Do you remember a little street on the South Side called Olivett Court?

H: Yes, of course.

- M: I was born on that. It's such a tiny street. I just wondered if you recalled it.
- H: Yes. I remember it very well.
- M: It's a very short street. I think it has seven houses on it. So, there weren't many house around on the South Side. It was just scattered.
- H: It was scattered, and that area was building up. Of course in the 1920's, those streets were pretty well built up. That had started, really, after the turn of the century. They were starting to build up that entire area there. My recollection is that South High opened in either 1910 or 1911, I think. There was then such an exodus of people moving to the south side and building homes and that on the streets in those areas.
- M: After you had gone to school then and realized that you were not going to be a traveling concert violinist, you gravitated to your usher job.
- H: Right, which I worked at all the years I was in high school, really. The entire time I was in high school, I worked at it.
- M: Who were some of the matinee idols that you remember you and other young people being enchanted with?
- H: In the early days, of course, Rudolph Valentino was the great heartthrob of the day. Paramount had a very important star called Thomas Meighan, Charles Ray was a country bumpkin type who has a great many of his followers. Howard Lyde was one of the great comics. And, of course, you could never forget that Chaplain dominated the comedy field of the early years.
- M: Was he loved by everybody that you knew? In later years, so many people said so many deprecating things sometimes about Charlie Chaplain, and yet, he must have won the hearts of the people.
- H: In the early years, of course, this was before Chaplain became political. It's my opinion that actors and actresses who are in the public eye should not become political.
- M: One limelight seems to be sufficient.
- H: If they want to engage in the political life--and no one says they don't have this right to do so--then they must face up to the fact that, as other people who engage in the political life, they become partisan.

They will attract their own partisans and detract those who are opposed to the type of things that they espoused. In the old days, performers were not political.

M: We are certainly living in the epitome of that right now, aren't we, in this era?

H: It's a different ball game today.

M: For those who may be reading this sometime 100 years from now, this is when Ronald Reagan is president.

H: It's a different ball game today, I think, and looking at Mr. Reagan, you have to remember that politics came into his life, not so much during his career as an entertainer, but when he had ended his career.

M: He had started doing official duties for the actor's league.

H: That's right. See, he became interested in the political life--let's say, from the standpoint of--after he had made his fortune. Perhaps, this is very noteworthy and very worthwhile, because then he found the reason for another important part of his life.

M: He didn't mingle then at all, as you say. He moved to the one area to the other area.

H: Let's face it, you can only be a leading man so long. When you get older, you're too old to be a leading man. There is somebody new coming up that the public is interested in. It's pretty hard to be a romantic idol when you are 55 or 60 years old. Maybe you were one when you were in your 20s or your early 30s, but you don't espouse to be that when you get to be 55 or 60.

M: Do you remember the . . . I'm sure you remember. I think it was a Warner Brothers film. That's why I'm going to ask you if you can remember who distributed King's Row, which was probably his best acting part? It came out in the very early 1940's? Was that a Warner Brothers?

H: Yes, it was.

M: It's considered a Landmark picture.

H: Yes, it was a landmark picture and probably, as you say, the greatest role that he had. I would say that he had two great roles. The Gipper in the story of New Brokney All American and in King's Row. Certainly, King's Row was an acting triumph for him. There is no question about it. And it's regarded today as one of the real classics. It has lasted as a real classic.

- M: When I was nine or 10 years old, I had seen it already 13 times. I was allowed to go to pictures early. I chased it all over when it went out to the neighborhoods. I kept seeing it over and over. Some parts of it I didn't understand, but it impressed me vividly as a child, and he was my favorite.
- H: I think the critics, for the first time in King's Row, started to take Ronald Reagan seriously as a really fine actor. I think he had been a fine actor before, but the type of roles that were made available to him didn't challenge his great talents. His talents were challenged in the King's Row, in which--there is no question about it--is one of the great classic films.
- M: Do you recall that there is a . . . I know this from hearing my parents talk and also from subsequent reading. Can you tell me any memories that you have of this film? It illicited criticism in some areas, because it dealt with psychological material that had not really been touched that deeply before in film, as much as they presented the daughter and the father, [the daughter] falling under her father's influence. Things that were in the novel had been rather touchy subject matter. I remember people saying. . . . It was considered scandalous by some people in those days. I can remember my parents talking about it.
- H: What was the film?
- M: King's Row.
- H: Oh, yes.
- M: Because of Dr. Tower, Claude Reins, and his daughter.
- H: Yes. That same thought was also expressed, at times, in The Barretts of Windpole Street, where the father was supposed to have had certainly not a normal relationship with his daughter. He was jealous of anyone who paid attention to her or found her desirable as a woman.
- M: I recall that I was from a rather permissive family. My playmates were not allowed to see King's Row. I think of that now and I look at Ronald Reagan. It's amusing how times have changed since then.
- H: There's no question about it. They deal with subjects that would not have even been permissible or would not have even . . . the motion picture code in the old days would not have even passed a script for them to have

been made. Even, there are many of these subjects today that are handled on television in the families' living room that really, to some extent, are astonishing. There's no question about it.

M: When you say the "movie code," I'd like you to talk a little bit about what knowledge you have of the censorship that was imposed. I remember the Hayes Office.

H: The Hayes Office was the first Motion Picture Association of America. The Motion Picture Association of America was basically members of the major motion picture companies, Paramount, Warner Brothers, United Artists, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. They all had representation on that. There was a lot of flurry from censor groups and from other groups about the subject matter of some films, not all, but some. Today, I think they would be considered extremely mild, but in those days, they were considered pretty daring. This brought on, really, the employment of Hayes, who was a national politician, a national figure. The industry hired him because they felt that. . . .

M: What was his whole name?

H: Will H. Hayes, he was an important political figure in the country, and they felt that he might be able to stem the tide of criticism of the industry, which was very great at the time. Then, they adopted this motion picture code, which provided some very strict guidelines and also provided the first attempt to--not censorship as such, but I would say--classification of films, to the extent of whether it was adult fare or whether it was family fare. This was one of the basic premises behind it.

M: More or less, [it was] an indicator of what you might want--with your own taste--to see?

H: That's right. No profanity of any nature could be used in motion pictures. The producers of the picture had to, before any part of it was filmed, have the script approved by the office. If they so much as decided to go ahead and make the picture without the script, then it was not given a code seal. Without a code seal, they would find it very difficult to get the picture booked at the theaters. Because then, the theatre owner was running the risk of public condemnation, or also the possibility that he might have a film that would be picketed. There were many things that could happen to you. Theatre owners, as a whole, were not interested in becoming involved and running pictures that didn't have a code seal.

M: It was just good business if nothing else.

H: That's right. There was no such thing as the type of pornographic films that are available in certain theatres today. This sort of thing was just not possible and would not have been possible.

M: Can you trace that a little bit for me as far as the Hayes Office. More or less, was that in response in some way to the days when the great Arbuckle was scandalous?

H: Yes. That has always been said was one of the reasons that brought this out. That, and there were some other things, you know. Washington Taylor, who was an early director, died mysteriously. There was never any explanation of what caused his death. There were a number of these events that brought it out and caused these sort of things to bring on the strong criticism of the industry.

M: That was in the 1920's. Then, when did the motion picture code really take hold?

H: I would say that the motion picture code was adopted in the very early 1930's. It was part of the work of Will Hayes, along with the presidents in the motion picture company. A great deal of the code was written by a Jesuit priest by the name of Father Daniel Lord. He was a very famous cleric, an outstanding speaker and writer. He did a great deal of the writing of the code. I'm sure he didn't do it all, but he did a lot of it. Martin Quigley was involved, who was at that time the publisher of the motion picture Harold, which was regarded as one of the leading trade journals of the industry. He was an important figure in the motion picture industry at the time. He and Lord were very personal friends. I suspect that he was the one who got Father Lord to become interested in working on this motion picture code. In lieu of what you see today on the screens, this code was very strict. The type of things which could not be produced . . . when you see what happens today on the screen, those type of films today just couldn't have got an approval to even have been filmed.

M: All I remember of it is--I was very young--some one talking about . . . As I grew and was a movie buff, you weren't allowed to photograph two people in bed at the same time.

H: Oh, no. That was absolutely. . . .

M: There was even some flurry when they showed somebody's slippers lying at the side of somebody's bed.

- H: Yes, those sort of things. . . . The very famous line from Gone with the Wind was not going to be permitted. In fact, David Selsnick was turned down. He finally paid a fine for using that line.
- M: Because he said he just couldn't relinquish that line without really. . . .
- H: He felt that the whole film at the final end had to tie into that, and there was no other language that he might use that would have been as effective in that particular scene.
- M: Because of it's position in motion picture history, I wanted to ask you that, so you've lead right into it. I want you to tell me your personal recollections and thoughts at the time that Gone with the Wind was released in 1939. I remember coming to the theatre to see it, and it was the event of my life up to that point. I was a little girl. My family waited like they were waiting for the king to come to our house. Would you tell something about that, because of how it affected the industry?
- H: Well, it was one of the first films that an entirely new sales policy was involved in the selling of the film, which had a great deal to do with the public reception to it, and also to the presentation of the film. A man by the name of William Rogers was the vice president of sales of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The picture was made by David Selsnick. There have been so many stories written about the production of Gone with the Wind. David Selsnick, of course, was one of the great producers of motion pictures. It finally came to a point. There were two things that happened. He just had to have Clark Gable for Rhett Butler. Clark Gable was under a contract to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
- M: Give a little plug for Ohio. Clark Gable was born in Cadiz, Ohio, on the river.
- H: It's down by Cambridge, Ohio, the southern part of the state. Incidentally, just as an aside, Clark Gable was also the leading man of a stock company that played at the old Colonial Theatre in Akron, Ohio. I saw in the records--the theatre is now torn down--his salary at the time was \$25 dollars a week.
- M: What year was that? He was the lead man.
- H: He was the leading man they had. They did a different play every week, and he was one of the leading men of the stock company. I would suspect that this was about 1920 to 1924. Then, either on Broadway. . . .

- M: That's a wonderful little piece of information. Excuse me, you were saying there were two things?
- H: The two things . . . David Selsnick realized that the public was only going to accept one actor as Rhett Butler, and that was Clark Gable. He was the odds on favorite. There could be nobody else, and he was under contract to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. There was no way that he was going to be able to get Clark Gable as Rhett Butler unless he agreed to Metro's terms. Metro's terms were that they would distribute and sell the picture. They also, when it came near the end, advanced the final money for the completion of the production. At the time, it cost \$6 million dollars, which was a phenomenal amount, because there were very few pictures that cost more than \$1 million dollars.
- M: Up to that point, [it was] the motion picture risk of all times.
- H: Today, you hear of budgets of \$28 million and \$40 million, but in those days, that was a phenomenal cost of making a motion picture.
- M: Mr. Selsnick also was involved with Mayer in the fact that he was married to his daughter, Irene Mayer.
- H: That's right. That was another very difficult point for him. Mayer was disturbed at him because he had been a producer on the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lot, and he decided to go out for himself and become an independent producer. Mr. Mayer, who ran the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lot with an iron hand, did not like anybody who opposed him.
- M: There are Louis B. Mayer stories all over. There has to be some credence to them, as many as they. . . .
- H: He also, on another side, was one of the great producers of the motion pictures. His detractors were a great many, but he did a lot of very wonderful things. The surprising thing about Mayer was that he had a very strict upbringing. He had a very strict mother who taught him great respect for women. He had great respect for the American family, a great respect for his wife and his two daughters. There are stories . . . when Irene, who finally married David Selsnick [after] going with him, he was crushed by this. He didn't want her to marry Selsnick.
- M: The Selsnick's were sort of considered a little heavy on the hootsbaugh side.

H: He didn't want her to marry Selsnick. At one time, she said that she was as domineering as he was, and she was not about to be backed down. She was determined that she was going to marry David Selsnick, and she did marry David Selsnick. Later, Mayer became very fond of Selsnick. Mayer was an intelligent man. He realized that David Selsnick was a great producer [and] he had a lot of talent. He had a lot of ability. He had a lot

of taste at the things that he's done. If you look at the Selsnick pictures, they are all done with taste. All the things he had done were done that way. Mayer recognized that.

M: So, he could put his personal feelings aside even in awe of the man's talent.

H: He didn't want David Selsnick to leave the Metro lot as a producer. When Dave decided to leave, there were some hard feelings about that. Mayer was a much more talented man than most of his writers give him credit for. He was difficult, there's no question about it. I'm sure he was very hard. Many of the stars had a difficult time with him, particularly John Gilbert, and many of the others. There were many stars, also on the Metro lot, that had very high regard for him.

M: That happens often in this business, doesn't it? If someone's talent is really tremendous, that generates some sort of awe, and very frequently jealousy, in other people. I've seen it happen in New York.

H: There is no question about it.

M: If you happen to have a not really umptuous personality, they are going to get on anything you do.

H: Sure. There's no question about it.

M: That will never change.

H: With Gone With the Wind, Mr. Rogers had developed this sales policy. The sales policy was simply this: In those days, 1939, the average motion picture theatre did not charge more than 50 cents admission for adults. It was decided on Gone with the Wind that they would go with the policy of 75 cents for the matinee and the evening would be a dollar, the evening performances would be all reserved seats. There would be one performance in the afternoon, unreserved at 75 cents, and the evening performances would all be reserved seats at a dollar.

M: What were children?

- H: There was no children's price for Gone With the Wind. It wasn't considered a children's attraction.
- M: In my house, it was.
- H: Basically, Mr. Rogers developed a policy with Gone With the Wind which guaranteed the theatre a 10 percent profit, which was very revolutionary in those days. In order to get them to accept this policy which required a 75 cent admission in the afternoon and a dollar admission at night with reserved seats, this was pretty nearly contrary to the policy that almost all theaters operated with in those days. So, they set up a formula in which the theatre set forth its expenses for rent, salaries and so forth. They took then, 90 percent for the film bundle. This was an unheard of amount for a film bundle in those days. But, the exhibitor was guaranteed a 10 percent profit over and above its expenses. It's expenses had to be certified by a certified public accountant. It wasn't just accepted as he sent it in. He had to have credibility by an accountant for his expenses to be accepted.
- M: Is that where the 10 percent of the gross originated?
- H: That's where it came from, and it was the first time . . . no one had ever thought of a sales policy for motion pictures of 90 percent of the gross. This was the first time that this had ever happened in the industry. Many films were sold either on a flat rental basis prior to that, or they were sold on a percentage that very rarely exceeded 35 percent, which was considered high. This was an extremely revolutionary sales policy. But the picture had such a built-in demand by the public, and there was such a tremendous response to it throughout the United States that they didn't have any difficulty selling their sales policy because of the tremendous demand by the public to see the picture. As you know, it was very successful. They brought it back every five years, really. They finally made a 70 millimeter adaption of it. They widened the screen. The picture wasn't remade. I played it at the Paramount Theatre, and we played it for 26 weeks on rerelease.
- M: That was in the early 1960's.
- H: They did what we called blowing it up into 70 millimeter.
- M: I remember, I took my children to see it.

- H: Very wide screen and stereophonic sound. It was an experience for the goers. They had seen it originally on a very normal size screen when it came out in 1939. Of course, those scenes on a big screen were fantastic, particularly, I'm sure you recall the scene with the confederate dead and wounded.
- M: The battle, wounded scene at the railroad station.
- H: The battle scene, the burning of Atlanta. These things on the big screen were absolutely fantastic. They were breathtaking. There's no question about it.
- M: You said there were two points. One was about Clark Gable. What was the other, second point that Selsnick had to adhere to?
- H: Selsnick realized when he came near the end, that he couldn't get enough finances to finish the picture. He had to give them to M.G.M. He had no other course in order to finish the picture.
- M: Would you tell me how you felt, yourself, the night Gone with the Wind opened?
- H: I have played Gone with the Wind so many times in my career--I can't even tell you how many. The one that became so important to me was the great length of the run, the 20 weeks, which was a half a year, and how many performances in that half of a year. . . .
- M: Would you describe the theater as it was at the time the picture was shown?
- H: Yes. We had recently decided to make the screen as big as the opening of the stage, what we now call the proscenium stage. As a stage person, you'd know what I'm talking about. This is the complete width of the stage. Prior to that time, we had a picture that was approximately 15 feet. This moved our picture up to about 45 feet. In other words, it was about three times as big as it was before. It was just a fantastic experience to see this picture on this large screen with this stereophonic sound. It was like a new film. It enhanced the whole process of it. The astounding thing to me was that after so many years and so many repeats with this, the coming of this 70 millimeter process, there were so many nights in that six months that we ran it that we were completely sold out. The surprising thing about it was that most of the people who came were people who saw the picture before.
- M: I've seen it 39 times. (Laughter)

H: We were considering and we ran some newspaper stories at the time of people who had seen the picture 12, 14, 15, or 20 times. We were even considering that we would run a contest in the paper. . . .

M: How would you ever check up on them?

H: We would have a prize to give to the person that's seen the picture the most number of times, but as you say, it was impossible to check on how many times. It had a marvelous number of people who saw it again and again.

M: I remember there was such a prestige involved in that. I get bonified fanatics--there's no other word fan came from--that saw the picture so many times. I was counting, because everybody counted how many times they went to see it. My last time was a year and a half ago in New York City, at the Regency Theatre. That made number 39.

H: For after 1939 and up to the time that the Metro blew it up into 70 millimeter and stereophonic sound, there was a period there of roughly 15 or 20 years when they released it every fifth year. Each year, the theory was that every five years there was a new group of 17 year olds who had never seen the picture and who were just gogged to see it, plus all of the people who wanted to see it on the repeat. It had the greatest repeat number of people of any picture that was ever released, I think.

M: When they did the promotional advances on the very first time it came out in 1939, was that in December of 1939? I know it was late.

H: It was late in the year. I can't remember the month. They had the premier, of course, in Atlanta.

M: Did they nationally release it at the same time, then?

H: Shortly after that. The Atlanta premier was first and shortly after that, they released the picture. I would say the majority of engagements--because it was late in 1939--were played in the early 1940's.

M: Do you remember when it was here in Youngstown?

H: I would suspect it was early 1940.

M: Because it would seem like it would only give you a little less than a month to hit a 1939 release nationally.

- H: Of course when they opened in Atlanta, they had all the people there. David Selsnick was there, Clark Gable was there, Vivian Leigh was there, Olivia DeHavaland was there. . . .
- M: Margaret Mitchell was there.
- H: Margaret Mitchell, who wrote it, was there, of course. The surprising thing today, only Olivia DeHavaland, of all those people, is alive. All the rest have passed on.
- M: Because you are an expert in this and because this film has been a phenomenon of the 20th century in that genre, I wonder what do you suppose--besides the subject matter of the civil war, which interests people because it's brother against brother--the whole characterization. . . . Some of the people, when you count the on-screen minutes that they're on, the Tarlton twins are only on-screen about five minutes. Anybody you would mention them to knows them vividly. The same for Aunt Pitty Pate. Every single minor character stands out. I, myself, consider that one of the brilliant strokes of genius on Selsnick's part, the way those were depicted.
- H: There is no question about it. Because Selsnick was a producer, as Sam Goldwyn was, [he] paid a great deal of attention to details. No role for him was too small. He wanted the right person for the right role. . . .
- M: He got them that time, didn't he?
- H: No question. Hatty McDaniels, who was the maid and who won an academy award in the supporting role, was one of the truly great characters.
- M: Of course, Percy Butterfly McClean is still alive and kicking in New York City.
- H: He was one of the great characters. I say, I think this shows the man's complete absorption in detail of even minor roles. That's what makes Amelia's production so great, I think.
- M: Do you still see many films today?
- H: No, basically because I don't have time, number one. Number two, there is not a great deal of films that interest me today. Maybe that's saying that you're getting old.

M: I don't know. I don't have the feeling toward any films today that I did when I was a child growing up and through my early formative years. I'm wondering about. . . . Cable television does have those movie channels, and it does give people an opportunity to see things. I have to go to a motion picture, a theatre, to see a picture that I want to see. Then, I'll watch it over again. But, I have to go. It's like a sickness.

H: I think there is something more to it than that. I think as great as television is and as great as cable television is, it is still never the live audience, which is part You can't define it. It's not something that you can define.

M: It's a feeling.

H: It's the same thing that we know with a symphony concert. Now, you can hear a symphony concert on recordings, you can hear it on television, [and] PBS has done some wonderful things. The thing that they don't have is the live audience.

M: [And] those other people feeling that same experience.

H: It's that experience that you feel when you sit in the audience, and perhaps, you can't define it and neither can I.

M: You know when it's missing, though.

H: You know when it's missing. It's not part of what the electronic media can bring to you. It's not the same thing.

M: There is a new film out by Warren Beatty who I remember in this very theatre building, the Warner Theatre. His picture, Bonnie and Clyde in 1967, I believe they ran that film. That film was the last movie shown here. He has now put out Reds, which of course deals with the progressive era.

H: I have read about it, but I haven't seen the film.

M: Of all the films that I've seen in the last several years, I think it's a magnificent film. I was thinking, I brought my children down here to the Warner theatre to see Bonnie and Clyde. It wasn't exactly child's fare, but I wanted them to come to the last movie that was ever played here. Could you tell something about when the Warner Theatre was changed over and what you know about it?

H: I can tell you a great deal about that, because I was one of the people involved with the changeover. In 1967, which was the last year that this theatre operated as a motion picture theatre, I'm sure you will remember that most of the Warner's, by this time, were dead, except Jack.

M: Would you name all of the Warner Brothers, please?

H: Yes. Harry was the president of the company. Abe, as they called him, was the treasurer. Jack was in charge of production on the post. Sam, who died at a very early age, was one of their important executives in the New York office. Actually, Sam was the Warner brother who got the other brothers interested in talking pictures. He was really the motivating force in the family that moved his brothers to go along and experiment with the talking pictures. At that time, the Bell Laboratories were making a lot of experiments out at Long Island. He had been invited to attend a number of these experiments that they were making. Bell, at that time, were interested in the communications part of it more than the picture end of it. It might be different today when they're involved with satellites, but in those days, they were interested mostly in communications. They were searching for a motion picture company who would be willing to take the gamble and participate with them in making sound and talking pictures. They knew it was feasible from their experiments and from the money they had spent on research. They knew it could be worked out. It was just a matter of who would be willing to do it. Most of the other companies turned it down. They weren't willing to take the gamble. Silent pictures were successful, pictures that were accompanied by orchestra or by an organist. Nobody wanted to take that big financial gamble of wiring studios, wiring theatres, or the tremendous cost that was going to be involved. Sam Warner had enough foresight to see that it could be very important, new, and challenging for the industry.

M: The Warner brothers were from this area. Is it New Castle that they were born in?

H: No, they were born here.

M: Someone told me that, and I said that I thought they were right from Youngstown.

H: They were from Youngstown. Their father ran a meat market here in Youngstown.

M: Do you know where?

H: Jack Warner, in his book, which was called My First Hundred Years in Hollywood, states that the meat market was in the Spring Common area. Now, there are old timers here that have told me that it was in the East Federal Street area. If you read Jack's book, this is where he indicates that it was. Now, I suspect what happened was that it was in both places. Maybe they started it on East Federal Street and then moved later.

M: I see.

H: I don't know any facts for that, but I suspect that. There are very few people alive today who knew the Warner brothers intimately when they were here.

M: Did you know them at all? Did you get to meet any of them?

H: Only Abe.

M: That was the treasurer?

H: Yes, and I met Sam before he died.

M: Where at?

H: The old Dome Theatre that they owned.

M: How wonderful.

H: This was prior to the time of the inauguration of talking pictures. I remember him saying to us that day in the office, "Oh, I'm so enthusiastic about the talking pictures and their future." I remember a very funny thing he said to us that day. He said, "If it wasn't successful, we're liable to come back to Youngstown and open Pa's Butcher Shop and start again."

M: That was a wonderful attitude, wasn't it?

H: He was extremely enthusiastic and very sure that it was going to be a great hit, which it actually was. There's no question about it.

M: Were they all born right here in Youngstown somewhere?

H: I don't know really whether they were all born here or not.

M: Maybe that's where that New Castle claim came from.

H: They never had a theater in New Castle. There were six in the family all together. There were only four boys that went into the motion picture business. There were three girls. The family was nine with the parents.

They came over from Russia. Now, how many of the boys were born in Russia, I don't know. I suspect that Harry was. He was the oldest. He was the president of the company.

M: What was their real name?

H: I never heard any name other than Warner.

M: I remember something else, but it's a vaguery from my youth.

H: I never heard any name other than Warner. Anna, who was the oldest daughter, married Dave Robins, who was the first manager of this theatre and was manager up to the time of his death, in 1942.

M: Where did they end up living?

H: They stayed here, of course, until David's death. Then, Anna went out and lived at the coast, in Hollywood.

M: Did she live here in town?

H: Oh, yes.

M: Where at?

H: They lived up on Elm Street. Dave owned the apartments up there by Elm and, I think, Bonita. There are four or five apartments up there.

M: Yes. I know that area.

H: They lived in one of those apartments. He owned the whole apartments there. I think there are four apartments there. Sadie Warner married a fellow by the name of Lou Helper, who ran some theatres in Niles, Ohio. Then, [she] later went to the coast and worked for Warners in an executive position in the theatre department. Rose, the other daughter, married a fellow by the name of Lou Charnas. He had an independent film exchange in Cleveland for many years. Short subjects, educational films and things of that sort. Both of them moved to Hollywood. Then, he later went out and became involved in some real estate properties that the Warners had on the coast. He became the head of that in that part of the country.

M: By my account, the three girls and at least four of the boys were involved in the show business.

H: They were.

M: By marriage and also by profession.

H: Yes.

M: That's amazing, isn't it?

H: Yes.

M: Do you know anything about those other two sons at all?

H: Dave Warner was very sickly. Most of his life, he was not very healthy and therefore could not become. . . . They had a younger brother whose name I can't remember at the present time, but I may think of it later. He was a star athlete at Rayen High School here after the turn of the century, before 1920. He was employed on the railroad and was killed while at work on the he railroad at a very young age, before he was twenty years of age.

M: I see. That would explain him, then. Could you explain the theatre after it was set up.

H: The symphony came.

M: Do you know when the Warner opened?

H: Yes. It opened in May of 1931.

M: It was a sumptuous theatre.

H: The theatre cost, to build and equip--equipment such as seats, projection equipment--\$1,500,000 in 1930 and 1931. It took a long time to built the building. It's a magnificent building and still is. They started building it in 1930, and they completed it in time for the opening in May of 1931.

M: How much of the original accouterments are still visible in the symphony center?

H: What the symphony society decided to do here was--when they came in--to retain as much of the original as possible, rehabilitating those things that needed to be rehabilitated, making as few major changes in the actual auditorium as they possibly could. We found, when we came in here--I came with the symphony when we came in--basically, people from the symphony board had been long time friends of mine and asked me to join them and help with the opening of this theatre. The Symphony Society had been established for many years, but it never operated a theatre.

M: What were you doing at the time they approached you?

H: I was managing the Paramount Theatre at that time. They asked for my help in getting the theatre opened, the rehabilitation of the property, and of course, I was more than happy to assist with this. When we came in here, we found a theatre that was structurally sound but in need of a great deal of rehabilitation. For example, the carpets had big holes in them. They were ripped and pulled apart. The seats were cut. The water pressure in the building was so poor that if you flushed the toilets you couldn't get a drink of water. The lighting equipment had deteriorated to such an extent that we had 10 watt bulbs in the outside marquis of the theatre, and when you put 25 watt bulbs in, the whole thing blew out. So, we were faced with a major job of rehabilitation of this property. The Symphony Society realized that, in order to make this place for the arts, that we had to come in and do a major rehabilitation. I think you have to remember that in the last nine or 10 years that this theatre operated as a motion picture theatre, it was faced with the television competition. That drastically reduced attendance in theatres. Very little money was spent on maintenance of the property, resulting in us having a structurally sound building that was greatly in need of all types of rehabilitation. It was the first thought of the Symphony Society that perhaps we could rehabilitate this property for approximately \$300,000. As it turned out, we spent between \$600,000 and \$700,000 to rehabilitate the property.

M: More than double.

H: More than double. And we have continued to improve the property in all the years that we have been here. We hope to be able to continue to do so. Structurally, this is a very fine building. They don't build theatres like this anymore.

M: Who was the architect of this building?

H: I don't know, because it was an out-of-town architectural firm that Warner Brothers selected at that time.

M: I'm sure if I checked through . . . maybe there would be some records I could look through to find it.

H: I may be able to find that for you. I don't know the name of the architectural firm. They were determined that it would be one of the finest theatres in the country. . . .

M: Because it was their home town.

H: Right. It was built as a memorial to their parents. The theatre has priceless things in it. It has

imported wood from Germany. It has imported tile from Italy. It has beautiful things that could not be replaced. There is no way that a theatre like this could be built today.

M: Anywhere?

H: No. In the first place, the craftsmen are not available, nor is the material available.

M: You said from roughly 1957 to 1967, that last 10 years, television cut down on attendance, which cut down on maintenance monies. Did you happen to notice that in this new era that is so pronounced now, there are more people that destroy more property, also. You said "cut seats" and things. I don't think people did that when movies first. . . .

H: No.

M: You would have been ostracized if you had done that.

H: That's right. This sort of thing happened, I would say, after World War II. We never had this sort of thing prior to that time. But after that time, it became very predominant in motion picture theatres that there was a great deal of that type of thing, seats cut. . . .

M: Just wanton destruction.

H: Yes. Just wanton destruction. It was a factor that every theatre faced, no matter where it was.

M: Then it spread into the neighborhoods, the homes, the buildings, the businesses, and it's still marching today.

H: Yes. The late Prud Childres, who was such a wonderful dramatic critic of the Vindicator for so many years, loved to rib me. One of his favorite expressions were that nothing happened in the show business before my time. That, of course, was a great joke between us. One of the other things was that he said, "I stood on the corner of Federal and Hazel, and Chris Didivel built the Paramount Theatre around there." This was the theatre that I managed for 32 years, in downtown Youngstown. The Paramount had many great hits during those years. Probably the highlights--and to point out the highlights, of course, was the 70 millimeter presentation of Gone with the Wind that played for six solid months.

M: Was that not 1961 when that happened? I figured maybe it must be

- H: I can't remember the year.
- M: I think it was 1960 or 1961 that I put my children in it all day to watch that.
- H: Possibly around then. I can't remember the exact year. There are other truly important hits. There were many. Those that established long runs in the theatre were the Robe, the story of The Life of Christ with Richard Burton and Gene Simmons, and of course, that wonderful screen adaptation of the famous stage play, My Fair Lady.
- M: The Youngstown players just did a redo of that here, a few weeks ago.
- H: Ever since its first presentation on the stage in New York, I think that it's been almost in continuous production by some group throughout the United States, because it is one of the truly fine classics of the American theatre.
- M: Would you tell what you remember about it beginning in New York [City] with Julie Andrews? I know the flurry of people would sell their souls to get in to see it.
- H: There was an original story by George Bernard Shaw called Pygmalion. It played as a play with rather indifferent success until the musical adaptation came as a musical. Of course, it was and is one of the great stage musicals. It had been presented with such great success in practically every place in the United States. There was a lot of controversy about it when Jack Warner made the picture. Julie Andrews had been such a fantastic success in the leading role in New York, with Rex Harrison. Of course when they cast the movie, they did not use her. Jack Warner had been subject to a lot of criticism, because she had been so well established in the role of Eliza Doolittle, and to have place another person in it was thought to be practically sacrilegious. The film was also a great success.
- M: Dare I ask you to name that other person? Audrey Hepburn?
- H: Audrey Hepburn was her, and I thought she did a fantastic job.
- M: She did a very nice job. I think Julie Andrews--probably because she was a young British girl and so just captivated the imagination of America. . . . That was in 1956?

H: Yes. Also, I think because of the love of her English background, the Cockney came probably more natural to her than it would to an American actress who would have to do a lot of study to come up with that type of an accent. But it was truly one of the great successes. I think that maybe we ought to move on to some of the outstanding theatres in Youngstown that operated during the "glory days."

M: Yes, I'd like you to talk about that, and any participation you had, as well as any of your friends that you remember, what they did.

H: Well, of course, we'll start up at the head of the street in what is now Higbee's Parkade.

M: We're on West Federal Street.

H: On West Federal Street, we had the old Hippodome Theater. The Hippodome was run by the Miller family. Tip Miller, as he was known, was an exciting showman. He had exciting ideas. The original background of the theatre was that it played two-a-day Vaudeville [with] reserved seats. This was even prior to the time of the Nickelodeon, as far as motion pictures were concerned.

M: Would this have been prior to 1900, when he opened it?

H: It was some time around the turn of the century. Of course, they had an established clientele that had their regular seats. This was reserved-seat Vaudeville. People dressed up. It became an occasion to go. There were no films in the early days. The man who I worked for later had become the house manager. He was Jack Elliott. He worked for the Millers.

M: Why don't you tell a little bit about him, because he pops up again later in some other history.

H: I will talk about him when we talk about the Palace [Theatre]. The Millers ran the theatre for many years. It had some distinguished musical conductors. The late Harry Warner, who ran a music store in the arcade and other locations in Youngstown, was one. The late Alberto Riordan was a long time musical conductor of the Hippodome Orchestra. After the coming of films, they added to the program a newsreal. The newsreal was shown right at the start of the program. Later, there were eight acts of Vaudeville. This was an institution in the community. Many of our old-time people had seats. They came every week. They had their season tickets. They came on Tuesday night or Wednesday night or Thursday night. The theatre played to capacity most of the time. There were a great many people interested in a variety theatre, which Vaudeville represented.

Coming down the street from the Hippodome was the Dome Theatre.

M: Which direction would that be?

H: Coming down towards Hazel Street was the Dome Theatre. The Dome Theatre was one of the real show places of the community. In the silent picture days, it had a great orchestra. Many fine, old-time musicians who have now passed on--Herb Schroeder was the conductor. Herb later played with the Youngstown Symphony. He was the long time conductor of the Dome Orchestra.

M: Didn't Herb Schroeder teach you music?

H: He also taught music in the community. John IteI was the pianist. John, after the advent of talking pictures when the orchestra was discontinued, went to New York and for a long time was a featured musician on the NBC. Joe Maze had the contract. He was the contracting musician for all the musicians. There was some very wonderful musical players in that orchestra. It was known as one of the finest orchestras in the community at that time.

M: You had previously played in . . . as you said, when you saw that concert at the park one time, did you ever think that perhaps your future lie on the the other side?

H: I definitely thought so. I heard a concert by Fritz Chrysler, one of the great, great concert violinists. I was convinced after hearing that concert that I was never going to be a concert violinist.

M: But you had a good interest in music, obviously.

H: I always had that. My talents, if any, lie in another direction.

M: Your brother, though, had his own orchestra. We talked about that. He was quite successful in music.

H: Yes. He had both the Southern Six and the Blue Ramblers, both of which were very popular orchestras in Youngstown in the 1920's and played at a lot of the dances at organizations and clubs, in many different locations in the city.

To continue with the Dome, the Dome was one of the first houses also, because Warner Brothers took the theatre over in 1924. It was one of the first theatres in the whole United States to be wired for sound pictures, because the Warners were the pioneers in sound

pictures. We opened the original program of sound pictures in the Dome Theatre in 1927. This consisted basically of short subjects. We had an address by Will H. Hayes, who was the former postmaster general and had then become the executive of the Motion Picture Producers Association. There were popular acts by popular stars of the day. There still was, at that time, at the beginning, only what we called sound pictures. There was no talking. They had a sound track. One of the early pictures was Don Juan with John Barrymore. It had a musical accompaniment soundtrack by the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Later, we started to get pictures with part time talking and singing. One of the great classics was The Jazz Singer, with Al Jolson.

M: When asked the question, most people refer to that as the first. But you are saying, prior to that, there were these other ones.

H: Yes. The Jazz Singer was undoubtedly the first. Then, Warners had what was known as the first all talking picture. It was called the Lights of New York. Basically, it was a series of short stories put together with a thread of a very small story, but talking pictures were such a great novelty at the time that it attracted tremendous audiences. There were no questions about it.

M: Was The Lights of New York like a documentary, or was it a regular photoplay?

H: It was a photoplay, and then they tied a very small story into it just to keep the action together.

M: Who played in it?

H: I'm trying to remember, but I can't remember who played in it. Probably Monte Blue, who was a great star of Warners in the early days--I don't remember the cast, to be truthful.

M: I don't know either. I've heard of the film, though.

H: Then, there were a number of films that came out that were part talking and part with a soundtrack. One of the interesting things about that was that we used to advertise "30 percent talking" or "40 percent talking."

M: So actually, they took a count.

H: That's right. Part of the film was in dialogue, and the other part of the film was silent with a soundtrack. . . .

M: Which made it more desirable? The more talking.

- H: That's right. Of course, it was a tremendous novelty for people in those days. They flocked to the theatres to see it. The Dome had a great success, because it was the first in the field in Youngstown with talking pictures, because of the fact that Warners were the company that backed the original talking picture experiments in the United States.
- M: When you knew the Warners, they took one of the Chagrin brothers and let him work with them out on the West Coast. Did they ever try to lure you to the West Coast?
- H: No. I guess, we were so sold on Youngstown. I worked for a long time with David Robins, who was a brother-in-law of the Warners. He had married the oldest Warner girl, Anna Warner. David was the first manager of the Dome theatre after the Warners bought the theatre in 1924. He was not a showman. He had a lot of common sense. He was a good businessman, but he had not come up in the show business.
- M: He wasn't bitten by the bug either.
- H: No. I would say later he was, but not originally.
- M: He just wasn't infected at first. (Laughter)
- H: He had come to this country from Russia. He had worked very hard. [He] had really no formal education. He could not write, other than his own name. He read with difficulty but had great endurance, a lot of intelligence, and he constantly tried to better himself in learning how to read. I don't know what his education was in Russia, probably not long. But he, like so many of the immigrants that came to this country, worked very hard, and he made a great success of his life because he was willing to work that hard.
- M: Was the Robins Theatre in Niles or Girard named for him?
- H: They were his brothers, both in Niles and in Warren. [They were] mostly in Warren.
- M: It's amazing. This is a very important theatre town, Youngstown, Ohio.
- H: Moving down the street--talking about the old theatres--was the Liberty Theatre, which later became the Paramount. The Liberty Theatre was built by one of Youngstown's great old time showmen, Chris Didivel and some Youngstown people.

M: Tell me about him. He's the one that built the theatre around you, right?

H: That was an expression of Fred Childress, which of course, was a great story, but not true.

M: Was the Liberty always at the corner of Hazel?

H: Yes. The Liberty was always at the corner of Hazel. It was built and opened in 1917. Chris Didivel was a good showman. He was knowledgeable. He understood the value of film. He knew what to do. He was a great gambler when it came to buying film. He would pay top price to get the picture he wanted. If you will remember in those days, which were the great silent days, he had stars like Harold Loid, Thomas Meyan, Gloria Swanson, the glamour people of the late 1900's and the early 1920's. In 1929, they made a deal with the Paramount Publix Corporation, who came in and took over the operation of the theatre. They changed the name from the Liberty to the Paramount.

M: Were they out of New York?

H: This was a New York Corporation. Of course, they installed talking pictures for a period of three or four years. Until the time of the Great Depression, they had a lot of success in the theatre.

M: They retained Didivel, I assume?

H: No. Chris Didivel left at that time, at the time of the take over by Paramount. He did not stay.

M: Where did he go? What did he do?

H: They had interest in real estate and in other businesses in the community. That was, really, his final tie up with the theatres, at the time that the Paramount Publix take over of the theatre.

As you went down the street and came to Central Square, you had two theatres in Central Square: The Strand, which was built originally by Youngstown people. . . .

M: You worked there. You got your fingers in that pie.

H: That's right. When I worked there--an interesting story--it was being operated by the Harris Amusement Company of Pittsburgh.

M: Is that in relation to Sam Harris out of New York?

H: No. Harris Amusement Company of Pittsburgh. Senator John Harris, the president of the company, had been a

respected figure in Pennsylvania politics for years. He was a state senator.

M: I assume that Harris . . . was named after them somehow, or that family?

H: No.

M: Okay.

H: His son, John, Jr., was the general manager of the circuit. The father was the president of the circuit. John later became the founder of the famous ice capades.

M: Isn't that wonderful.

H: Yes. The manager at that time was William Murray, who we called Billy. Billy was a distinguished, white-haired, handsome gentleman of the old school. He was a delightful man to work for. His career had been in big league baseball. He had been a scout and a coach for John Mugsy McGraw, of the Giants. He idolized McGraw. He thought McGraw was the greatest baseball man of all time.

M: He talked about him a lot?

H: He talked about him. He grudgingly admitted that old Connie Mac was also an important figure in the baseball world. That's about as far as he went. McGraw and Mac were . . . the rest were all amateurs. To Billy, there was nobody like John McGraw.

M: Where was Billy from originally?

H: I'm sure he had lived in many towns, because he had worked with the Giants for years as a scout and as a coach. His background was in baseball. He had wonderful baseball stories. As a young man, he told us [these stories], and we were bug-eyed listening to him.

M: You were one of the baseball nuts at the time?

H: That's right. He was a delightful man to work for.

M: How old would he have been. . . ? You were quite young.

H: I was probably 14 or 15 years old.

M: How old would he have been?

H: He was probably in his late 60s.

M: He must have been like an oracle, then?

H: We looked up to him with great respect. As I said, he was a delightful man to work for.

M: The Strand was on the southeast corner of the Square?

H: Yes. It was right next to the old Tod House, which is also now torn down.

M: P. Ross Berry helped build that, too?

H: Yes. The Strand had a policy of second-run pictures. That is, they played pictures 30 days after their run in the downtown theatres, the first run theatres downtown.

M: Not B movies, but second run. They didn't get to distribute them first, then?

H: That's right. They changed programs everyday. They had seven new shows a week. At the time I worked for them, they had a very modest admission price. It was 25 cents in the afternoon and 35 cents at night.

M: What year would that be?

H: 1922.

M: That gave the masses of the public a real chance to catch them when they didn't have the money.

H: Yes. If they missed the picture first run or if it was something they heard about after it had ended its first run engagement, there was the opportunity to catch the picture again. The Strand had a very good regular business. People who wanted to catch the film . . . sometimes they had seen it first run. They wanted to see it again.

M: That would have been me.

H: They came back, so they got a lot of repeat business, also. It was an interesting theatre, and I enjoyed my experience there.

M: How long were you there?

H: I was in the Strand about. . . .

M: You were only 15 years old here, right?

H: [I was] 16 to 18 year old. Six to eight months, [I was there].

M: You surely got your feet wet early. I wish I could have done that. Please go on. I guess, most of the delight at the time that you worked there was Billy Murray, for you?

H: Yes, that's right. Then, on the Central Square also, we had the Palace Theatre. The Palace Theatre was built by local people.

M: Give me the exact locations of the streets, would you please?

H: The Palace Theatre was on Central Square, right opposite the Dollar Savings and Trust Company. It was built by local money, and local people invested. . . .

M: Were they any notables you can think of?

H: Yes. Jack Elliott Spear headed the venture. Men from the Realty & Trust. . . .

M: They had the reality building there on the other corner?

H: They had the reality building, Reality Guarantee and Trust. They were a firm interested in commercial buildings in the community. Many of the men in that corporation were also involved in the original building of the Palace Theatre from a financial standpoint. They were backers of the corporation.

M: Did they subscript the money together? How was it done? Do you know?

H: I don't know. I would presume that the money was generally raised for projects of that nature by getting a cost figure on the land, a cost figure on the building, and then selling stock in the holding company that would hold the property as a lease to a theater operating company. They did have an arrangement through Jack Elliott that if the theatre was built, the Keith Alby circuit would lease the theatre. It was very important in those days, because the Keith Alby circuit was the major Vaudeville circuit in the United States.

M: When you hit those, you're in the big time, right?

H: Of course, they had contracts with the most important acts in Vaudeville business. The building was built in according to specifications of Keith Alby theatres. You could always tell a Keith Alby theatre because, when you entered the foyer on the lower floor, there was always the grand staircase.

M: I just saw nine beautiful pictures of this.

H: This was one of Mr. Alby's ideas. He loved grand staircases in theatres. You could almost always tell when you went into a Keith theatre, because the first thing that greeted you was the grand staircase going up to the mezzanine or the balcony. They were all alike, The Palace Theatre, Cleveland was that way, the Alby in Cincinnati [was that way]. There were so many theatres that were built with the same idea.

M: The Palace in Cleveland and the Alby in Cincinnati, right?

H: Yes.

M: In other words, when you raised money in those days to back a theatre, a theatre was considered a really good business risk, right?

H: Oh, yes. It was an excellent business.

M: I wish it was like that today.

H: It was an excellent business risk in those days. Elliott established a policy when the theatre opened in 1926, Vaudeville and pictures. It was still the day of the silent picture, because sound was just invented in the summer of 1926, and there were not many theatres wired for sound in those early days. It took two or three years after the advent of sound for a great many theatres to be wired and be available to play talking pictures. So, the early programs in the Palace Theatre were silent pictures and five acts of Vaudeville. They played three shows a day. It started originally with two shows a day--a matinee and an evening performance--and then, very soon after the opening, it went to three shows a day.

M: Seven days a week?

H: Seven days a week. There was a matinee performance and an evening performance about dinner time, and the final performance [was] about nine o'clock in the evening.

M: I sure was born in the wrong time.

H: Elliott had been very successful with Vaudeville.

M: Jack Elliott creeps in the history I've been doing on old opera house in the Park [Theatre], and he. . . .

H: He was one of the original managers of the Park Theatre.

M: That's right. They say he did something at the opera house.

H: He was also involved in the opera house.

M: You don't know what years.

H: I don't know what years. The long time manager of the opera house was Eugene Rook, who was the father of William Rook, who was a long time Vindicator theater editor.

M: He had a brother named T.T.

H: Yes. Jack Elliott was involved in the old opera house. I don't know his capacity. He might have been one of the treasurers, ticket sellers, or he might have done some publicity in the early days. He was involved both with the opera house and also the Old Park Theater.

M: How old was he when you met him? I know you were just a callow youth in those days.

H: When I went to work for Jack Elliott, which was 1930, [and] the Palace had been open four years then. It opened in 1926.

M: You were 23?

H: I was about 23 years old at the time. Jack Elliott was a man in his late 50s or very early 60s. Jack was an interesting character. He had no formal education as such. Many of the old time showmen did not. They came up the hard way. Jack was very knowledgeable about Vaudeville. He hated motion pictures.

M: Oh, he did? He considered them they enemy, then?

H: He just hated motion pictures. He hated the fact that he had to include them on his programs. He used to lecture to me about the fact that I was a young man and he was too old, but I would see the day when Vaudeville would be back bigger than ever, and there would be no motion pictures.

M: What did you say at the time? I suppose you believed him.

H: No. Fortunately, as a young man, I could see what was happening.

M: You were hanging around some pretty heavy company, too, the Warner brothers. (Laughter)

H: It was obvious. Vaudeville was Jack's love. He knew it, [and] he loved it. He had personal acquaintance with many acts over many for many years.

M: Was he from here? Was he born in Youngstown?

H: Yes.

M: Did he ever go away to New York or New Jersey?

H: Jack has been all over the country, but basically, he operated in Youngstown.

M: What side of town was he from? Do you remember?

H: Oh, yes. Jack was from the North Side. He had lived there for years.

M: Do you know where, roughly?

H: No. I don't know the street off hand. He was a North Side resident all his life.

M: And, you were a South Side resident all your life.

H: Yes. He knew a great deal about Vaudeville. I had worked with a lot of managers, and I don't think any of them had the Vaudeville background Jack had.

M: Did he act at all?

H: No. He was not an actor. He was a tough disciplinarian. He would lay out the law to the acts. He gave them so much time to appear, 15 minutes [or] 20 minutes. If they stayed longer than that, he warned them once. The second time, he put the lights out and pulled the curtain. He broke no interference with his operation of the theatre.

M: I've come to have a real respect for that, people that know what they're doing in the theatre. I worked in New York a few years back. When people, I thought, should have been running a checkout counter somewhere . . . no, not even that. I don't know what these people do. They were running shows in New York. They didn't have any sense at all, [and] no discipline. Did he just have an eye, some people have an eye to see what is good and what sells?

H: When it came to Vaudeville, Jack just knew. He had an uncanny knowledge of Vaudeville talent.

M: Who were some of the headliners that he booked?

H: He had York and King. He had Bert Litel. He had Owen McGibbney. We had so many acts, and it's so hard to remember them all. He had Blossom Sealy and Benny Fields. An interesting story: Blossom Sealy and Benny Fields had been a headline Keith act for many years. The billing for the shows always came in from the Keith Alby office in New York. No manager was permitted to change the billing once it was sent from the Keith office in New York. I remember a particular week when we were playing Blossom Sealy and Benny Fields. The billing that came in from New York was that they were not to be the headliner on the show. When Jack saw the billing, he was devastated. They had been friends for 30 years.

M: In other words, they had been downrated?

H: They had been downgraded to the second position.

M: Why? Were they getting on in years? Was their act not fresh?

H: These are sometimes things that you find very difficult to understand. It was a decision made by the Keith office in New York.

M: And sometimes, the reasons are not what they appear to be, too.

H: That's right. Jack was devastated by that. When he got that, he called me in the office, and he said--and, I was a young man--[he said], "You're going to have to handle this. I just cannot tell old time friends like Blossom Sealy and Benny Fields that they're not the headliner in my theatre. I can't do it. I just can't do it." It was the policy in those days that the headliner's name was put in the top line of the marquis. The next acts were put down below. I'm trying to think who the headliner was in that show. Maybe [it was] York & King. I can't remember the old family tin types.

M: They did "Tin Types?"

H: "The Old Family Tin Types" was the name of that act.

M: I see.

H: It was a devastatingly funny act, one of the great acts of Vaudeville. You have to understand that they were so prominent in the Vaudeville theater. At one time, they had from 10 to 14 acts, just booking acts in theatres in the United States.

M: In the one corporation?

H: In the one corporation. Keith not only booked acts in their own theatres that they either owned or leased, but they also had contracts with a number of independent theatres for whom they supplied Vaudeville. The Keith Theatre had so many houses that they bought that they could give an act 40 weeks of work, playing time, in the eastern part of the United States, from New York to Chicago. They also had a tie out with the Orpheum circuit, which was the predominant circuit on the west coast. They could give an act another 40 weeks from Chicago to Los Angeles on the second year. So many times, the way the acts were routed, they would play one season in the east, 40 weeks working from New York to Chicago. Then the second season, they would play on the Orpheum circuit, from Chicago to the coast.

M: That would be a 40 week season, too?

H: That would also be 40 weeks.

M: They got a break in between, I hope. (Laughter)

H: Sure. Many times in the early days, the stage shows particularly did not play during the summer months. They would play from. . . . The season was generally considered to start at Labor Day, and it went through to Declaration Day. That, in the old days, was considered the season that you worked during that period of time.

M: It's peculiar now that most of the actors in New York go running, like myself, up to auditions in February and March, hoping to get work in the various summer seasons.

H: Of course, the whole picture has changed. The Keith was a successful theatre and operated successfully until the Great Depression hit, in 1932 and 1933. At that time, the Keith Corporation, which was then known as the Radio Keith Orpheum Circuit, went bankrupt, and they turned the theatre back to the local people who owned the property.

M: Is that R.K.O.?

H: Yes.

M: It never occurred to me until this very second that R.K.O. is Radio Keith Orpheum. How did that pass my attention?

H: Then, we'll move down the street to the old Park Theatre.

M: Okay. This is one of my pet projects here.

H: The Park had a very colorful career. It was built about the turn of the century. The motivating local force was a man by the name of Willace H. Park.

M: It was built in February of 1901.

H: Yes. He interested local investors in the building. When it opened, it was operated by the People's Amusement Company. Basically in the early days, the Park had two types of programs. Mostly, [the] legitimate traveling shows operated on a basis of one program, [on] Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, [with] a matinee on Wednesday, and evening performances on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. The second show would come in for the end of the week [on] Thursday, Friday, with a matinee on Saturdays, and also [on] Saturday evening. On Sunday, the policy of the theatre was to play Vaudeville and Western Pictures. It was a very popular policy. Joe Chagrin, one of the early and long time managers of the Youngstown community, was the manager of the theatre. Joe was at the Park a great many years.

M: You worked with him, didn't you?

H: I worked with Joe in the Paramount for awhile, and then he built the Foster Theatre and went out there.

M: The Foster Theatre on Glennwood Avenue, which featured art films.

H: It featured art films, and that was his policy when he opened the theatre.

M: I loved that movie place.

H: Joe was an old time showman. His background, basically, was in the legitimate theatre.

M: Can I ask you just a few questions about him, and then you can go on?

H: Sure.

M: This is about as remote as you knowing where Santa Claus lives, but do you happen to remember his birthday? It's not listed anywhere. I thought maybe you had been at a party or something, that it would stand out in your mind.

H: I know Joe was over 80 when he died.

M: He died April 1, 1974. I have searched and searched, and I can't find his birthday, because he was born in Austria, Hungary.

H: I'm not surprised at that.

M: Even Rodef Sholem Temple. . . . I can't get his son on the phone. I have to get a number from you later.

H: His son would probably be able to tell you more than I could. Joe had a twin. Max and Joe Chagrin were both interested. . . . Joe was primarily the manager of the Park [Theater]. Max assisted him at times. Then later, Max went to Hollywood as an agent, as an artist agent. He represented artists and had contracts for them to appear in pictures. One of his biggest artists was Jane Withers, a child star. He had a number of other people, featured players, whom he represented. He was an agent in Hollywood until his death. Joe came to the Park about 1917 or 1918.

M: Now, the Grand Opera House apparently played its last show in 1918. Joe is listed, with no date, as a manager for seven years. Would he have been a manager when it closed?

H: No. He was the treasurer of the Old Opera House, I know. He told me that.

M: [He was] not the manager?

H: No.

M: They have him listed even in his obituary as that.

H: It's possible.

M: Do you think he stayed with them until it closed then, in 1918?

H: I'm sure he did. I'm sure he did, because when he came to the Park in 1917, Feiber and Chay had then taken over the operation of the theatre.

M: The Park [Theater]?

H: Yes, The Park. Joe, for the year prior to that, had worked for Feiber and Chay in Brunswick, New Jersey.

M: Is that where they hail from?

H: No. They were from New England, but they had a theatre in Brunswick, New Jersey.

M: Feiber--you told me at one time, I believe--came from Belgium.

H: Feiber was a Belgium Vaudeville agent. He came to New York and formed a partnership with Chay.

M: What are their first names, just for the tape?

H: Harry Feiber and Mortimer Chay, who was known as Mort Chay or "Mot."

M: They hired Chagrin?

H: They hired Chagrin. Chagrin worked for them. Joe worked for the Chay circuit for a long time, from about 1916 until about 1939. He operated the Park Theatre during many of its glory years back in 1922--glory years of legitimate stage plays and things like Blossom Time, Student Prince, and The Desert Song, [and with] great stars like Joe Jefferson, Eileen Terry, and George M. Cohen.

M: George M. Cohen had a piece of the Park, didn't he?

H: Yes, he did.

M: How did he get that connection for the Park Theatre? Did he make it through Chay or Feiber?

H: I don't rightfully know. What I think happened was that the firm of Cohen and Harris. . . .

M: Sam Harris and George M. Cohen. . . .

H: [They] took the lease on the theatre at one time.

M: When he died, he still had a mortgage on it. At least, that's what is says in one of the mini reviews that I've looked in.

H: I think it was something that just wasn't cleared. I don't think he had a mortgage.

M: I suppose what it meant was that he maybe didn't even care anymore.

H: I think it wasn't clear, because Feiber and Chay had the theatre from about 1917 until 1948. I came to the Park in 1939.

M: You were there when it closed. I saw a quote from you in the paper.

H: In 1948, we had an experience during the early part of that year when we were playing the stage show production of Oklahoma.

M: What happened?

H: On the Thursday night of the performance, we cracked the main grid of the stage.

M: How did that happen? Does anyone know?

H: It happened because of the very heavy weight of the scenery, particularly the drape that was used for the ballet number.

M: Would you please--because this tape will be heard by people, eventually, in the Library of Congress and things that might not know a thing about theater--tell them how tragic that is in terms of putting a show on with that grid? Or, [tell] about the grid and how it works.

H: The danger is, if you have a crack in the grid, the entire stage structure of lines can completely deteriorate and fall to the stage. What we did was, the very next morning--this happened on a Thursday night performance--we made a repair and a support of the broken tress. But, the contractors warned us that we would have to change the whole superstructure of the grid if we wanted to continue to play legitimate stage attractions.

M: What would that have involved, roughly, in money?

H: We got an estimate of the cost at the time, and it was \$50,000 to put in a new superstructure in the grid area. This was the basic determination of the closing of the theatre.

M: Isn't that tragic? I suppose there were other factors, apparently.

H: There were other factors, but the basic determination of the closing of that theatre was caused by the damage to the superstructure of the grid.

M: I know I saw in a newspaper article, which I have in my file here somewhere, that you said you were playing a Hutton picture. It was Robert Hutton. That was the last picture that was playing in the summer, is that right?

H: Yes.

M: And you said that they were closing for the summer and will reopen in the fall. In the fall, the next article is an interview with somebody trying to get you to say something, "Is it going to reopen?" And, you say, "No comment." Then, the next thing is an announcement that it has been leased.

H: At that time, we were in negotiations between real estate people, by the people that wanted to lease the theatre. Of course, I was in no position to make any comments on what was going on, because the arrangements at that time hadn't been completed, and we were negotiating. It looked like it was going to complete, but the best thing to do is to make sure it's complete before you make an announcement.

M: Oh, sure.

H: We leased the theatre to the late Jack Kane, who had been a burlesque operator.

M: How did you feel about it changing into burlesque? Just personally?

H: I suppose I regarded it as a tragedy.

M: Of course, burlesque, at one time, was sort of an off-shoot step-child of Vaudeville, wasn't it?

H: Burlesque originally was where most of your great Vaudeville stars came from. But, it had changed drastically through the years.

M: It lost its level of class.

H: It lost its level of class, and it had gone from being a form of entertainment, a form of variety entertainment of all-time comedians and dancing girls, to strippers and baggy pants comedians.

M: Now, it has gone even beyond that, hasn't it?

H: I don't think there is any more [burlesque].

M: They call it [in] some places. . . .

H: I don't think it exists anymore as a form of. . . .

M: An art form in any way.

H: I don't think it exists. However, we really had no choice at the time, except of leasing the theatre to the burlesque operator. It was just not possible for us to continue on the policy that had, for us, been successful.

M: Were you still playing to full houses in 1948 when that happened?

H: The big thing for us was not the motion pictures that we were playing, because they were second and third run. The big thing that we wanted the theatre for was for playing legitimate stage attractions. When that became not feasible, because of the damage to the superstructure, our reason for operating the theatre had come to an end.

M: There was Oklahoma, the all time musical phenomenal smash to success, right?

H: Yes.

M: What an irony.

H: Of course, it played to standing-room audiences for the eighth performance. It played the entire week and played for standing-room audiences for the entire eight performances.

M: You made due with this broken tress and support repair for Friday, the Saturday two shows, and through Sunday, right?

H: Friday and Saturday.

M: No Sunday?

H: No.

M: You just limped through that? Were you apprehensive at the time?

H: No, because after we made the repair in the morning, I felt that would carry it. Had there been any possible danger. . . .

M: Of course, it couldn't stay that way for future productions?

H: Had there been any possible danger, we would not have attempted the Friday and Saturday performances and would have refunded the money. We would not endanger either the cast or the public. The public would not have been in danger, but the cast would have been, the people performing on the stage.

M: Who was in that production?

H: Charlie Jones, I believe, who was not a star at the time. There were really no stars of Oklahoma. In

fact, Rogers and Hammerstein made that a policy for years, that there would be no featured players or no stars with Oklahoma. Part of the New York engagement was part of all of the engagements, so there were no stars or, what you would call, featured players. They were all members of the cast of Oklahoma.

M: That's wonderful. In that show, you need everybody. All the people are very important pieces. That's wonderful. It's so sad, but I guess it couldn't be helped.

How did you feel at the time? There you were, 41 years old. You had to do something else.

H: Of course, I was also operating the Paramount at the same time. The Paramount was a very successful operation for very many years. I was very fortunate in the operation of the Paramount. I had a great many years of a lot of success in the operation of the theatre. Of course, I continued to operate the Paramount.

M: You had more spare time.

H: Absolutely.

M: How did you use it? Did you go on trips? What did you do for fun in your spare time, outside of having the fun of working what you liked?

H: You know, it's a surprising thing. I think many people in the theatrical profession will tell you that it sort of "gets in the blood." Your profession becomes a great portion of your life. You don't seem to need what, maybe, other people need.

M: I know I call it a terminal illness. (Laughter)

H: Maybe the glamour of the theatre or maybe a lot of things that you can't define in words or expressions. . . .

M: I know that it has fascinated me enough that I've worked in it for free for 25 years, with a few notable exceptions, or [in] something involved with it, even in New York.

H: It's a surprising thing. If you tend to spend all your time on the thing that you are personally working on. . . . My efforts with the Park finished, at least to the burlesque operator, as far as operational problems were concerned, I had problems that a landlord has with maintaining the roof, maintaining the outside of the building, [and] things of this nature. But I didn't have any operational problems in the Park after

that time. I seem to have devoted most of my time to the operation of the Paramount. It presented maybe more problems, or else, I found more problems that arose.

M: I see. Would you pick a favorite between the two?

H: No. I was always very interested in the legitimate theatre, as I was in movies.

M: Did you want to be an actor, ever?

H: No.

M: After you gave up your french horn and violin career?

H: No. I didn't feel that my talents lie in that direction at all. I felt that they were strictly in the business end of the business. I never thought that I had artistic talent.

M: I wish that a lot of people that I have met in the last few years could be that honest with themselves. I've worked on stage with some people that never said that to themselves.

H: Well, the Screen Actor's Guild has about 8,000 members. The big stars make fabulous money. I saw a story not long ago where 85 percent of the membership made less than \$2,000 last year.

M: I was one of those.

H: This is. . . .

M: And Actor's equity, I still am. . . .

H: Actor's Equity is the same thing.

M: I hold a union card to Actor's Equity.

H: This is the same thing. In other words, these people must have some other type of an occupation in order to live. They would like to have their main occupation be the theatre, the movies, or perhaps television, but it doesn't present that opportunity for everybody.

M: If we can talk about that a second . . . it's so ingrained in me that I went back to school to get a master's [degree], and I'm working on a project in history, and I picked theatre. That's where my interest goes. So then, it just feeds it more. I'm fascinated to find this all out. I can't be the participant, but I'm fascinated to put all the history down. I care very much about what happened.

H: Oh, sure. This is what keeps these people always hoping that around the corner there is going to be that big break. You know, it's happened to so many that it has happened that way. I think that's the eternal hope of those who are trying. To the great majority it will not happen, but you have to have a dream, and that's your dream, that that's going to happen to you if you are a performer. That's what you have to hold on to. That has to be your primary motive, otherwise you would give the whole thing up.

M: I remember last spring . . . I want your comments on this at another time, too, unless you want to do them today. I know you have a time limit.

The Morosco, a wonderful theatre on 45th Street in New York and the Helen Hayes on 46th Street were both torn down this spring. [It] was a major theatrical tragedy that occurred in March of 1982. I went up to interview the people participating in that actual, whole incident--no, it's much more important than an incident. I talked to Joseph Pap, the producer. I talked to Raul Julia, Colling Duher, some of the major stars that, to the last second when the ball hit the building, were standing there trying to stop them. It was a tragic day. Behind it all is some kind of a money fight, as usual. There is a man named Eric Portman that is trying to buy, what looks like, half of Broadway. He is also trying to move Father Duffy and George M. Cohen's statues, to rip them out and move them into a little mall, where he encases that as the front of his big hotel, called the Eric Portman Hotel, very modestly. So, this man is literally trying to establish an empire right on Broadway. He's already got those, and he's going the rest of the way. It's being litigated in court. I interviewed Mr. Pap for a few minutes in the middle of the street watching a wrecking ball. You can't take an interview there, but he promised to talk to me. Then, he called back in Youngstown and said that he wouldn't interview, because he was too deeply involved--there was some kind of a big court money fight in the vying interests. It's really bad. He went down to try and stop them from taking any more by having them declare national landmarks of all the theatres. What are your feelings on that? Do you have any knowledge or anything? The Schubert's and the Nearlander's are fighting the other guys. There is Pap and those guys, and the Nearlander's and the Schubert's. . . .

H: I don't have any inside knowledge of it at all, except that when any property becomes more valuable for the big dollars than nostalgia, some of it goes out the window, I'm afraid, in America. It's too bad to some

extent, because there are priceless buildings. Every community has them.

M: We're sitting in one.

H: Yes. If the community loses them, there is no replacement. Unfortunately, the dollar in America has talked louder than anything else.

M: I always wonder. . . . You said you've lived in your house since you were born, in 1907. Your Dad built it around 1902. A building takes on a personality of its own--I study architecture and buildings--and, they become very real personalities to you.

H: They certainly do.

M: A house or a favorite place. . . . I know you can understand that from the love you have for your home on Chommers. I felt that way about the Morosco Theatre. I was heartbroken.

H: I found it very difficult, because of my long time in the Palace Theatre, when they were selling the furniture and the fixtures of the theatre at the auction. I attended the auction, and then I couldn't stand it.

M: It's literally not bearable.

H: Then, I couldn't stay outside, and I had to go back in. Some of the things that happened at that auction. . . .

M: What year was that?

H: Sometime in the 1960s. I don't know just exactly what year it was.

M: You made yourself leave, and then you made yourself go back in?

H: Yes.

M: It's horrible isn't it?

H: There were some amusing things and some tragic things. One of the amusing things was that . . . when I was at the Palace, Jack Elliott said to me one day, "The actors are always complaining that they can't get close enough to the mirrors to see their make up when they put their make up on. The arms of the chairs don't let them get close enough to the mirrors. Go out and buy some cheap stools so that they can pull the stools over and get closer to the mirrors, so that they can see their make up when they're putting it on." Well, I went out and bought about six or eight stools,

which in those days, were very reasonable. I think I paid about \$2.00 or \$2.50 a piece, for them. When they were doing the auctioning of the furniture and the fixtures, Mr. Bernson, who was one of the late managers of the Palace Theatre, had some beautiful chairs on the mezzanine floor, needle point chairs that he had spent from \$150 to \$200 for. They went for \$5 each at the auction. Then, they brought out these stools that I had bought some 30 or 35 years before, and there were these dealers. They had found out that they were furniture dealers, maybe antique dealers. While some of the things that they offered would get only one or two bids or maybe not many more than that, there was spirited bidding for these old stools that I had bought. I found it very unusual. There were three or four dealers who were bidding each other. Finally, they sold them for \$185.

M: The stools?

H: These stools that I bought for \$2.50 a piece, about 30 years before.

M: Now, you mean each one sold for that, or the group?

H: The group.

M: How many were there in the group?

H: Either six or eight.

M: You know, people like to put them in their dens and patios and bars.

H: It was surprising.

M: It's also very sickening. It makes me feel real bad. I don't know about stuff like that, but I know that you can't stop it. As I said, when a major producer like Joe Pap--he's not just nobody--and Colling Duher go and lean on a building to stop people from knocking it down. . . . They wouldn't move their bodies. The police hauled them off. What more can you do? They filed suits. This was a case that interested me, because Joe Pap is no poor person. But, he started out poor, he worked his way up, and he helped the theatre immensely. I think it is disgraceful of what's happened with his involvement, the way that they have treated him. He established Shakespeare in the Park, as you know. He also is married to--there are very good traces to prove that he is married to--John Wilkes Booth's great, great granddaughter, Gail Maryfield. So, they have a lot of theatre interests. They had people there that are major forces in the theatre, standing out in front of the show. As the building was

crashing to the ground, they were reading from plays. It was a very touching moment. Celeste Holm, and people like that, were reading into the microphone as the ball hit. Now, this became one of the sad things today . . . where we are now fighting millionaires, he is a millionaire. This is millionaires fighting zillionaires, petro dollars I call them, mega bucks. All those people have no effect, but the money behind the other man must be really awesome, and in more big interests than just theatre. Yet, it goes on. They weren't able to stop them.

Can you tell me what the Park looked like inside when you were there? Did you ever see any pictures of it? I have found more pictures of the old opera house sitting down there in the diamond than I have been able to find of that Park Theatre.

H: You know, when the Park first opened, its entrance was on Champion Street. Then later, they leased and built an entrance on East Federal Street.

M: Yes. I have a picture of that.

H: The theatre operated on that East Federal Street entrance, which had a very long lobby before you entered into the main auditorium of the theatre. Then, sometime during the Depression, because the lobby was not owned by the Chay interest, but was leased from some local real estate company, they remodeled the theatre and went back to the original entrance on Champion Street. This was sometime during the Depression in the 1930s.

M: I see. So, In the 1930s, they started to use the 25 S. Champion Street entrance again. Did they board up that back [entrance]?

H: No. That was at that time--of course it isn't now, because that whole East Federal thing has been changed. There was a building with offices in there, in that front part of the building. It was remodeled, and there were offices put in there. It was rented out on the real estate venture.

M: Did they even tear the sign down on Federal Street?

H: They had taken off the marquis and everything else that was part of the theatre then. They built a completely new marquis on the Champion Street side when they revamped it again.

M: Architecturally, save all the details on it, it was a long, narrow theatre wasn't it?

H: Yes.

M: It appears to be, from what I can see in my pictures.

H: Yes. It was a long, marrow theatre. It had approximately 900 seats on the lower floor.

M: [There was] no curve or horseshoe, just straight on?

H: No, it wasn't a horseshoe.

M: It wasn't a horseshoe, like the old opera house?

H: Then, it had a mezzanine that had about 113 or 115 seats. It had a balcony of about 250 or 300 seats. As I recall the theatre, it had a total of. . . .

M: Someone said 1,800 [seats]. Is that right?

H: No. It didn't have that many seats. The theatre had between 1,300 or 1,400 seats, total.

M: When you worked there, what did it look like? They had faces--in this old picture I'm staring at through a magnifying glass--it looks like classic faces around the preceidum arch.

H: They were decorated. It was a painting decoration. It was a percenium which had marble work and so forth, and plaster work. It was what I would call a decorated percenium.

M: Were any of those faces of notable people?

H: No.

M: They were classic figures.

H: They were classic figures. The theatre also had two boxes, but they were not as they were in the Palace. They were not seating boxes. They were what you called decorator boxes. They were for decorative purposes only. There were drapes. These boxes were draped in the background. It was basically a decoration for the theatre, rather than a seating box.

M: What was the depth of the stage, roughly?

H: The depth of the Park stage was 38 feet. I remember it very well.

M: What was the width?

H: The width of the stage was about 50 feet at the preceidum.

M: What were the seats, carpeting, and drapes like when you were there, in 1939?

H: When I came in and took over, they had recently reupholstered the seats. We had what we called a Chay pattern carpet, because Chay used it in a lot of his theatres.

M: What was it like?

H: It was a red background with blue trimming. As Alby had his grand staircase, Chay had his red and blue carpet, blue figurines in the red carpet.

M: Flowers?

H: Yes. It was very attractive. When I took over, the theatre was in very good shape. It had recently been remodeled. The lobby had been painted. They had put a new lobby floor in.

M: Something else that was in the paper: one group of citizens in Youngstown was bugging them about, in the 1930s, they didn't want them to get a building permit. But the Park Theatre people won.

H: That was prior to the time when I took over, but I knew about it.

M: I figured you would know something.

H: This was ridiculous!

M: It sounded like agitators to me, the way I read it.

H: The theatre was completely safe. There was no question about it.

M: Why was that group agitating like that?

H: I have no idea.

M: It even appears to be agitators in the paper that I can't find all the information. Somebody finally said, "Well, we're just going ahead with this."

H: It was completely safe. I could have passed all kinds of architectural tests. There was no question about it.

M: Maybe somebody wanted that property.

H: Structurally, it was a fine building; it was well constructed.

M: I'm going to ask you about a mystery man, then I'll finish for today, because I know it's near noon. Did you ever hear of this man's name: W.S. Lougee, that built the Park?

H: No.

M: He was the architect of the Park [Theatre]. Willace H. Park hired him in 1901 to build that place. Obviously, he had to hire him in 1900, at least. He lived next door to Willace H. Park at 123 North Phelps. All of a sudden, he just disappeared in every record in the town. I know that Willace H. Park was a developer, but Lougee, I figured, was called a prominent architect of theatres and performing halls. So, I just thought you might have heard some gossip or some rumors about him.

H: No. I did not. My knowledge of Willace H. Park was . . . at the time we sold the Park Theatre and we were attempting to clear the title on the real estate, I found his name, of course, in the original documents of the theatre as a man who had formed the company that had built the property. Because it was necessary to check out some information about him, I found information in the public library about him. He obviously was a very leading citizen in the community.

M: Isn't that amazing that they don't have any now information now, Mr. Hynes. They don't have any information on Willace H. Park in the library.

H: This was a long time ago.

M: Not a trace. I said to them, "Surely you must have," because you had given me his name.

H: Yes.

M: I have exhausted. . . . I found you a picture that I showed you today in an old book box of unindexed pamphlets, just by luck, saying, "They town of Youngstown." They showed the Park Theatre and him, because it was built that year. Tell me again some of the things that he helped found.

H: He, of course, was also involved--not only with the real estate on Willace Avenue, which you found out--with the Park and Falls Railway, which carried his name.

M: The railroad that ran by Phelps Street by his house . . . he lived there.

H: I know he did.

M: Where would that be? What railroad was that?

H: It must have been the Area or the PL & E. It would have to be either one or the other.

M: Did you see his house?

H: No.

M: You never saw his house, or remember seeing it?

H: No. My knowledge of him was when I was searching to clear the title for the sale of the Park real estate.

M: You went and read yourself that he. . . . What could he have done to those records?

H: I don't know. That's where I got the information about him. I had known previously that he was the motivating spirit of the group that built the Park Theatre, but I didn't know much about him.

M: Can you tell me. . . . One of his partners was a Harry G. Hamilton who had a showplace up by South High School.

H: Yes. [It was] on Warren Avenue.

M: Can you describe that to me? I found a picture of that.

H: No, but I do remember the old Hamilton residence on Warren Avenue.

M: Can you tell me about that.

H: It was one of the showplaces of the South Side.

M: It must have been. It's beautiful in the picture. Did it sit on the left hand going south of South High School?

H: I think so.

M: I've imagined that it must.

H: I think so.

M: Thank you.

H: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW