

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Depression

INTERVIEWEE: JASON MOORE JR.

INTERVIEWER: Cynthia Marsh

SUBJECT: The Depression

DATE: October 4, 1995

CM: This is an interview with Jason Moore Jr. for the Youngtown State Oral History Department on the Depression by Cynthia Marsh at 4706 Nelson-Mosier Rd. on October 4, 1995 at approximately 7 o'clock p.m.

CM: Can you give me some background on where you were born and your parents?

JM: I was born in Warren, Ohio on January 25, 1917, just before America entered World War I. My father was a merchant, he had a General Store in Warren, Ohio on the west side and my mother was a housewife having been prior to her marriage an employee of her father, who published a small newspaper in Niles, Ohio. She was one of the two reporters who gathered the news throughout Niles for the daily publication of the paper called the Niles News.

CM: Can you give me a little bit of information about your father's store?

Approximately how big was it and what it sold in general?

JM: My father's store was located at the corner of Tod and Market in Warren and it was an old building even at the time that my grandfather had started the business. It was probably 40 ft in depth and 30 ft in width and consisted of only one floor, and it had a

soda fountain and tables covered with newspapers for sale. There were shelves on which were groceries, and tobacco products and clothing, and all sorts of things that a general store would sell.

CM: Did your father sell a lot of produce or was it mainly canned goods?

JM: He sold no produce but he did have barrels of things such as pickles and things like that which he would sell from a gross depository. He had a lot of ice cream sales and he had a nice soda fountain, where they made milkshakes and sodas and sundaes. He sold Eskimo pies and things of that nature. He sold pudding, ice cream drumsticks and ice cream by the pint and quart. In the beginning, it was all hand packed but later on it came in quarts and pints.

CM: About how much did it cost for say one scoop of ice cream?

JM: One scoop of ice cream was five cents in a cone and two scoops of ice cream in a cone was ten cents.

CM: Did you ever work in your father's store?

JM: I worked some in my father's store but I mostly goofed off because I didn't like to work in his store. I was too busy playing baseball and football and things like that.

CM: What is your fondest memory of the store?

JM: My fondest memory of the store? Well it was a very friendly place all of the time. People came, gathered there, and in the evening they would sit around a coal stove in the back of the store, and discuss topics of the day, such as the state of the country and the state of the economy and the advent of communism into the problems in the country. The costs of living of different groups compared to their economic power in the country, and this included the unions and the businesses and the banks and the industry of the

town. All of this was discussed and the topics in the newspaper were a very common thing to bring in to the discussion. One of the things that had a lot of discussion was Technocracy, which was a method of economy and how the economics would be run in the country. It had such provisions for a specie being used for monetary exchange instead of currency, as we know it. The specie would be determined by work-units and that would replace money to spend. Of course, that was very much subject to ridicule and dispute and it never “got off the ground” but it was very popular in the days of the Depression.

CM: Was it popular, do you think to the community of Warren or the United States in general?

JM: It became unimportant to the country because nothing was ever done about it. It captured the imagination of a lot of people who were suffering in the economy.

CM: Do you think it captured people in the unions more so than people who worked in say corporate businesses?

JM: No, it was important to all of the people. It was a communal sort of thing and it captured the imagination of a lot of people who were not very sound in their knowledge of economics.

CM: While your father was running the store did your mother have an influence in the store or did she just stay at home and take care of the house?

JM: My mother took care of the house but she also did quite a bit of work in regards to the store. She washed all of the laundry that came out of the store, which was the jackets that my father would wear behind the soda fountain and the dish towels and so on. She and my father would make the chocolate syrup that goes on the sundaes and into the

sodas. It was made from bars of solid chocolate, which were cut and boiled in a big kettle after it was all made into syrup it was poured into jars and taken to the store or just dispensed at the soda fountain. My mother worked every evening while I was growing up; I was home alone doing my homework. My mother was at the store working and my father at the counter. He had a lot of business in the evening because most of the stores closed by five or six o'clock. They, my parents, were open until eleven o'clock every night. My mother would go home before my dad. She would go home about 9:30, then my dad would close the store around eleven o'clock hoping that he would not be held-up by robbers who would come in and point a pearl-handed pistol at him demanding the money from the cash register, which he gave them. Some of those who held him up he recognized and when they were arrested later they greeted him by his name, "Hi Jason", it was one of those things.

CM: So he had been held up before?

JM: He was held up quite a few times by punks who came in, to get a little that was left in the register each day. The daily total intake was probably between \$50-\$100, a whole day of sales.

CM: Did your father try to correct this problem after it happened say the first few times? Did he start putting the money in a safe after a certain hour?

JM: No, he didn't have a safe and he didn't worry about it because there was not that much involved. He always carried the proceeds home with him every night and the money was stored at home until he made a bank deposit.

CM: I see. During the Depression how did the store do?

JM: Well, before the Depression it varied. But there had been some competition coming along, other stores across the street opened up in competition which took some of his trade and he kept an account receivable in little notebooks the size of, I'd say 3"by 4", so he had a different page for everybody who wanted to run a bill. Those customers would run a bill and he would write down how much they purchased, how much it was and the date and at the end of their pay period they would come in and pay their bill, of course for small amounts, and he would frequently get beat-out by the customer. They'd run up a bill and then they'd stop coming to see him. They'd go to the competition. So he had to write them off as bad debts. But he was very friendly with everybody, and the whole neighborhood liked him. Even today I have people my age and younger who talk about going into the store and how they liked my dad. He always had a smile and he was friendly with everybody. It was a good neighborhood store.

CM: So during the Depression you feel that the store still thrived?

JM: No, the store didn't thrive; it just barely got along, because there wasn't much money for people to spend since they weren't working and the money they did have they had to spend only for essentials but of course he sold essentials, he sold groceries and lots of bread and canned goods. At any time a customer would come in the store and ask for something, my dad would go to the shelf pull off the merchandise and put it on top of the ice cream case and when it was all done he would put it in a bag for them and add it up but he picked everything up. It's not like today where you go and pick the things off of the shelf yourself. He went all over the store picking things up for the customer and took them to a central spot and then he added them up.

CM: That's interesting. What did you think about the Depression in general?

JM: Well it was pretty tough; there was no money for unnecessary things, just for the essentials. That's all you had money for. And with those things you had to be careful that you budgeted your money very carefully down to pennies. Our entertainment was mostly reading and things like that. We went to the library and movies were cheap and we walked everywhere. We always walked into town, which is where all of the action was. I'd walk to school everyday; it was 2 miles away, rain or shine. We "got along" but it was trying and I was unsure because I didn't know what the situation was. My father didn't burden me with his problems paying the bills. He had one employee in the store and even though the wages were small it was hard for him to meet the payroll. The bank decided that the loan that had been taken out by my grandfather to purchase the store building and the real estate, the mortgage was past due on the payments. The bank had started a foreclosure but when they published a notice, the bank went out of town without giving any notice to my father. But a friend from out of town found it in his paper and called it to my father's attention. We believed that one of the local bankers in the bank where the mortgage was, was going to buy the property for very minimal payments and my family would be "out of business", without any chance to reply. So my father went to Cleveland and talked to the judge who was up there, who was a relative, and his name was Judge Roy Seth Hurd. He was in Federal Court. He was well acquainted with the law and he told my father of some recent legislation, which permitted him to get a delay on making the payments so that the property would not be sold out from under him. So my father took advantage of that with much struggling and penny-pinching he was able to get out of the situation, but it took a good number of years. When he died in 1966 there was still a mortgage on the property.

CM: Wow, that's interesting. So you recall the Depression as hard times but it seems the idea that I am getting is that it was more towards your family than other families, but it was still difficult. What did you do for dates during the Depression since you had to save your money?

JM: Dates? Well my father always had a car, but it was always an old car and it had a lot of mileage on it. But he would always give me the use of the car if I needed it. I would go and pick up my date in that car but I didn't date very much because I didn't have any money. I didn't belong to the country club group who lived on the east side of town; I lived on the west side of town. In fact we had a football team which played sandlot football. We were called the "West Side Tigers" and we called the East end guys the "East Side Sissies." We played football in Perkins Park on every Saturday after the High School game had been on the prior Friday night. We frequently had the varsity players from the Harding High School football team play with us down there on Saturday morning. Nobody had any equipment, some of us had scrounged some old used football shoes but we had no other protection, no helmet or anything. We played straight, all-out football, we did blocking and it was a lot of fun. We got beat up pretty good. We had all kinds of bruises and I had some cuts on my head, where guys' feet had kicked me and it broke the skin and it bled pretty good. But it was a lot of fun.

CM: What else did you do for fun besides football? Any other games?

JM: Games? Well, one of my friends had a set of golf clubs. They were wooden shafted clubs and his family had lost their money and he wanted to get rid of the clubs because he wasn't going to play golf and I hadn't played any golf. But he said he'd sell them to me for a "buck", the whole set of clubs and the golf bag and everything. So I dug

up a dollar and bought the set of clubs. Then I would occasionally play nine holes of golf with a friend of mine. We usually had beat-up golf clubs with lots of cuts on them. We had a lot of fun. I wasn't particularly good; I wasn't able to make the high school golf team, because there was a bunch of good players.

CM: From the west side?

JM: Well those players came from all over town. Some were from the north end; they were a bunch of tough guys too. The west side had been filled up with ethnic groups. The Italians and the Polish and some Negroes and some middle-European country people. The north end was mostly Slovak and they had a tough football team. They were really tough.

CM: Did you see any extreme poverty in Warren such as people dressed in pure rags living in something that resembled a Hoover Ville?

JM: No, I don't remember people being in rags, we had to stretch our shoes out a lot longer than they should have been used. I went to high school until I got out and got a job, I didn't have very many clothes to wear, but my mother always kept them up and sowed them and kept them going for me. So I wasn't in too bad of shape, but we didn't have any money to take girls out and spend a lot of money on them. Most of the dates were like going to the dances or the High Y Club, or the Friendship Club, and the Junior Prom and the Senior Prom. I'd go to the YMCA where I had free use of the facilities because I was at a certain age, I did a lot swimming and played handball, shot pool and we'd also go camping. There was a lot of camping on our farm at that time that is where we live now. It'd charge twenty-five cents a carload to the people who came and they'd have picnics and corn roasts and swimming in the swimming hole down on Eagle Creek

in back of our present house. My dad called it Moore's Park and we had a hired man who collected the money and entertained the people who came by playing his guitar and calling square dances which they would do out in the field.

CM: So you didn't live on the farm during the Depression?

JM: No, I didn't live here at the farm but I stayed here and camped all summer long, most of the time. I went fishing and swimming all day, and my friends and I lived in tents.

CM: Approximately how far away was the farm from where you lived in the city?

JM: About eight miles.

CM: Eight miles? And you walked?

JM: No, my dad would drop me off and he would come back a week later to see if I needed anything, canned goods or something to eat. We had a lot of sweet corn and a lot of vegetables out here on the farm that I could eat. We'd make sandwiches. We drank milk from the barn.

CM: From the barn?

JM: Yeah, we had a dairy farm out here at that time.

CM: And it was popular among the residents of Warren to come camping on the farm?

JM: This was a very popular place for them. I see people today that I know used to come out here and camp as a kid and they came out with their parents and one of them I saw Sunday. Mary what's her name, would camp out here and her parents would camp out here and they had their courtship out here, they got married and held their honeymoon here on the farm, camping. She went on to become a nurse and a schoolteacher and she taught Indians in Alaska. Way back in on the Yukon River, so far back in that the only

way they could get back there in and out was by sea plane or ski plane. Her husband, my cousin, who was ¼ Indian was a great hunter and fisher and he'd spend all of his time hunting and fishing up there in Alaska. The hunting was great. The fishing was great on the Yukon River too.

CM: What were the holidays like during the Depression?

JM: Holidays? Well Memorial Day was pretty nice; the way I wish it was today.

There was always a big parade, and the veterans from World War I and the Civil War and the Spanish-American War would march. The Civil War Veterans and later the Spanish-American war Veterans would ride in cars because they were not able to march anymore but the World War I Veterans would. We had a lot of bands and everybody would go to the cemetery and decorate the graves and paid tribute to those who had died. It was very nice. That was Memorial Day. On the Fourth of July we shot off a lot of fireworks. My dad sold fireworks in the store and frequently he had some left over every year so a week after the fourth of July we'd have a big shoot-off of fireworks up there at the farm, and it was always a lot of fun. There were roman candles and rockets and all kinds of firecrackers, cherry bombs and some pretty loud firecrackers and it was a lot of fun.

Christmas, well before the Depression I got a lot of things for Christmas; oh it was great.

But when the Depression came along, I was a little older too, the gifts were not as frequent or as big and I'd go to my grandmother's house in Niles and she had seven grandchildren and I was the oldest so I got one dollar for my Christmas present and the rest of the kids got a fifty cent piece, but I got a dollar because I was the oldest. The money hung on her little Christmas tree, which she put on her library table in the living room. That was in Niles, Ohio. Thanksgiving, we had that usually at our house or my

Aunt's house in Niles. We always had a turkey. New Year's Day was nothing. It was just another day. Memorial Day was also the day of the Indianapolis Car Races. We had a radio and I'd listen to the Indianapolis 500 on Memorial Day on the radio every year. I was really interested in that.

CM: Can you tell me a little bit more about the radio? Did you grow up with it?

JM: When I was in third grade, my first experience with the radio was at my grandparent's house. They had the battery-operated radio. I can remember hearing the inauguration of President Harding in the early 1920's. I believe that was the first inauguration that was broadcast. I always listened to the station KDKA out of Pittsburgh. The reception was pretty bad, there was a lot of static, and the sound was distorted, but if you listened carefully you could hear what they were saying. I had a little radio set, it was one that had a piece of a stone in it that had some magnetic quality, I can't think of the name of it now. We had a thing called a wirehair that we rubbed on it. It was called a crystal set that was the name of it. I could get two stations on it but the sound was unbelievably bad. It was surprising you could get anything. It was usually not as distorted as the radio wave and that didn't last very long. From that we went to a big battery powered set with a big loud speaker on it. We could hear baseball games and things like that on it.

CM: Do you recall ever hearing any of FDR's fireside chats on the radio?

JM: When FDR was president I was in high school and I don't remember; I did hear some of them but what they were I don't recall. I do remember listening to some football games on the radio and also there was music and some singers who died a few years ago who were active at that time. Roosevelt was president and he came in 1932 and I was

fifteen years old, so I was in high school while he was president. And then he was president while I went to college but I couldn't get to college until two years after my graduation from high school because I didn't have any money. And it took me ten months to find a job after I graduated from school. I did find a job in a steel fabricating plant that manufactured washing machines, dryers and steel sinks and those appliances were coded with porcelain by our company. I worked for Youngstown Pressed Steel Company, which later became Mullins Manufacturing and later what was called Youngstown Kitchens with the metal kitchen cabinets and sinks. They installed washing machines. Those were round tubs. I worked in the pickling plant; the pickling plant is where we used sulfuric acid. We also used caustic soda to remove impurities from the tubs, washing machine tubs, to remove impurities from the metal in order to put the porcelain onto the steel, it had to stick. There could be no grease or oil or anything and the tubs would come out of the big presses, which were covered with lubricants; we had to dump the tubs in a tub tank of sulfuric acid. The tanks in which the sulfuric acid was put were heated by steam pipes and the air was filled with steam. The air I was breathing was made up of sulfuric acid and water. Every sixty days I had to go to the dentist and get my teeth cleaned because they were colored with black substance that was in the sulfuric acid and the caustic soda (was just about as bad as the sulfuric acid.) I was a helper there; I loaded the baskets into which the tubs were placed to go into the acid tank. A crane operator ran the crane to put the tubs into the bath of sulfuric acid. After they took them out of the sulfuric acid, they put them into a great tank of water and then into a neutralizer bath. A lot of stuff was going up into the air and steam and I coughed a lot, my eyes got red. In one case, another fellow and I were bringing in a carboy of acid,

which weighed about 110 lbs. We had to put it on top of the edge of the tank, in order to dump it into the acid tank. When we set the carboy down, there was a little plug on the top of it. A carboy is a bottle with a little short neck on it. Acid slopped out and went up in my face and it got in my eye. I had sulfuric acid burning in my eye. Luckily the crane operator was smart enough to know what to do and he grabbed hold of my arm and took me over to the tank and turned on the hose, full pressure, and then turned that water hose up to my eye and washed the acid out. It was the best thing he could have done. It seemed terrible at the time to have that water pressure on my eye, and then I was escorted down to the plant hospital, I think there was one nurse in the whole room there and she used some neutralizer in my eye and sent me home. Then the next day I came to work with a patch on my eye and I had a patch on for two days. I was all right. Luckily, the man had put the hose on my eye to wash it out. I think later on I found some goggles there that I was supposed to wear but no one ever told me about them, I had worked there for many months by that time, and nobody used them. They had never been required to use them.

CM: What other jobs did you work before you went off to college?

JM: When they first opened the municipal swimming pool in Warren on Mahoning Avenue in Packard Park, I got a job there and on opening day I was working in the locker room. The people would take off their clothes and put their clothes in a basket, and put on their bathing suit. I would take the basket and put it over on the shelves. They had a little number, which they carried with them until they got out of swimming pool. I was there on opening day and spent the summer doing that. I didn't get very much pay. It may have been three or four dollars a day. When I worked at the Youngstown Pressed

Steel, I got 37 ½ cents an hour. We were on a six-hour shift because there were so many people out of work that they put us on four shifts a day of six hours each, to spread out what work there was. Nobody complained when we didn't make very much money for working six hours a day.

CM: Can you tell me a little bit about college?

JM: Yeah, I had saved up some money in fact I had saved up all of my money while I was working until I started college, which was about a year and a half at 37 ½ cents an hour. I decided we'd all go and sign up. There were three of us (or four of us) and we signed up for our first quarter. Our quarterly fee was, if I remember right it was either \$20 or \$25 and that was for three months. I bought books, second hand books, and rented a room. The room was ten dollars a month. We rented rooms in houses from the people who lived in the houses. Maybe there were ten students in the house to whom they rented rooms. I spent my first year using up my savings. The next year I went back and got a summer job at Youngstown Pressed Steel and worked at the same old place where I worked before. I was always on night turn, the whole time that I worked there. The pay had gone from 37 ½ cents per hour to 42 cents an hour, because the CIO had unionized the place. But being a temporary employee I was not a member of the union. The union didn't care if some temporary employee was in the union or not. Then, when I went to school that year I got a job. I forgot to mention during my first year of college, my friends and I went into a little business for our selves. We made signs to place in the store windows around campus and we would make a poster that said "Beat Illinois" or "Beat Michigan" and we made a new one for each game. The merchants would let us put the sign up in their place and they'd pay us 50 cents or \$1.00 each time for the sign. Then we

would split the profits between the three of us. Two of us were on sales and one was on production, and he was pretty smart. He knew how to do silk screening so we made good productions but the trick was to go out and sell them and deliver them. It took a lot of time when you were going to college. Then later on, I got a job; I waited tables for a couple of years at a restaurant on campus. I spent one night working for the faculty club in the dining room and I didn't like that; they had me bussing dishes. I didn't like how the faculty treated me like some peon. So, I worked one night there and I walked out on that job. I wasn't going to stand for that, I much preferred working in a public restaurant. Then my senior year, I was a lousy typist but I got a job at the restaurant typing the menus each day. So I could type those menus in about an hour and a half and make carbon copies and it was better then working for three hours for dollars worth of food, I'd rather work an hour and a half for those three dollars worth of food, which was pretty good. Then they put me on for a half an hour during the lunch hour in the restaurant in addition to that so I had to work two hours but that was a lot better then waiting tables. I had to work lunch and evenings for the meals and I also signed up for ROTC which paid me 25 cents a day. From my 25 cents a day I had to buy a uniform and books, but I always bought used books; they sold them at Long's Book Store on campus. In the summers I worked for Youngstown Pressed Steel. My senior year I worked, well I had to go to ROTC summer camp down in Fort Knox, Kentucky, but the Army paid me \$75 to do that. Another guy and I hitchhiked to Miami, Florida right direct form Fort Knox, Kentucky where we had been at ROTC camp. We hitchhiked to Miami and we spent probably five days on the beach at Miami Beach. Everything was so cheap: we got a room in a hotel right there on the beach for a dollar a day. When I hitchhiked from Fort

Knox, Kentucky to Miami Beach I had \$50 in my pocket, and we hitchhiked there and stayed probably five days on the beach. Then we hitchhiked back and when I got as far as Columbus I bought a bus ticket, I had enough money left out of that \$50 to buy a bus ticket from Columbus to home. When I was in college, I hitchhiked home all of the time. When I got home for a holiday, my parents would take me out to Ellsworth or maybe beyond Ellsworth, sometimes as far as Wooster to go back to college. I would get out of their car and then go out and stand on the highway with my suitcase and hitchhike the rest of the way back to college. But in those days you were pretty safe on the road, not like today. I wouldn't dream of doing it with today's situations.

CM: So you were going to college during the Depression and you put yourself through college. Did you see any of the government programs available to college students such as well, CCC or WPA?

JM: Those weren't for college students those were for young men and for young workers. I had some friends who worked and who belonged to the Three C's and the WPA. That was like being on Relief or Welfare. The CCC did a great job and I think the people gained a lot. I didn't get any government help at all

Note: The rest of the tape was inaudible.