YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown, Westlake Terrace

Personal Experience

O.H. 860

BARRETT, THOMAS J.

Interviewed

by

Joseph C. Drobney

on

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INTERVIEWEE: THOMAS J. BARRETT

INTERVIEWER: Joseph C. Drobney

SUBJECT: Neighborhoods/ethnic groups, politics.

DATE: November 13, 1985

D: This is an interview with Tom Barrett for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program; on the Youngstown; Westlake Terrace project; by Joseph Drobney; on November 13, 1985; at the Hitchcock Square Apartments, in Boardman, Ohio; at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Barrett, just to get started, could you tell me a little bit about your early life; for example, where and when you were born, perhaps, something about your parents, how many brothers and sisters you had.

B: I was born on the lower south side of Youngstown in an area known as the Blocks. My grandfather came out through Topath, which was a canal, when there was a flood in the 1860's. The city limits of Youngstown, in those days, was Falls Avenue. The Blocks was the area where the old McKinney coal mine was, up around the area where Kenmore Avenue is. My understanding from the Wick family was that the people who lived there bought these old coal miners homes. It was a residence of possibly, Scotch, Welsh, and Irish people.

D: Do you remember much about your father, for example, what type of work he did?

B: Most of my father's life he was with the railroads. He was the General Yard Master at the Brier Hill Steel Company. Then, later in life, he was the Superintend-

ent of the Youngstown Incinerator. He worked until he was seventy-nine years of age with the city of Youngstown in the Water Department.

D: How many people were in your family? How many brothers and sisters did you have?

B: I had six sisters and three brothers.

D: Did the family, as you were growing up in this area called the Blocks, live in a house?

B: We lived in an old coal miner's house. We had additions to it.

D: About how long did you live in the Blocks? Through about what age?

B: From 1910 to 1959.

D: You lived in the Blocks for almost sixty years?

B: About sixty years.

D: I imagine you saw quite a few changes in the neighborhood.

B: I saw quite a few changes in the city of Youngstown. When I was a young lad, the end of Youngstown would be where Hilda Avenue is today. It was the last street anybody resided on.

D: How about your early schooling? Can you tell me, for example, where you went to grade school? Junior high?

B: I went to grade school at St. Patrick's Parochial School, Grant Junior High School, South High School, and Ohio Statue University.

D: What year did you graduate from high school, Mr. Barrett?

B: I graduated from high school in January 1930. The Depression came on. I, then went to Ohio State University, and I was fortunate enough to secure the Assistant Postmaster job in the State Legislature in 1835, when the opportunity arose. Then, I continued my education, and I worked in the Legislature. When I was a member of the legislature, I graduated.

D: You mentioned you lived in old coal mining houses or residences. What was the neighborhood like? For example, was it a mixture of Slavs and Italians? What was the ethnic area?

B: I would say that mostly predominant on the street that I lived was Irish and the lower part was mostly English and Welsh. Then, there were a few Italians who moved in and then the Greek. But, it was mostly a Scot, Irish, and English neighborhood.

D: During the course of your school years, up until 1930 when you graduated, was it ever necessary for you or did you ever go out to get a little job, or any of your brothers and sisters, to help out the family income? How did that work?

B: We had a large family. I had six older sisters, and they all had pretty good jobs. One was a pharmacist, and two of them are nurses. The others were trained and worked for Republic Steel Corporation, and one [worked] for the Ohio Bell Telephone Company. My two older brothers were educated in college. My youngest brother went into the . . . then went into the service. He didn't return to college afterwards, so he started working for the state, the city, and the county.

D: During the entire time you were in school, growing up until 1930, was your father, up through 1930, employed there at the Brier Hill Works?

B: All my life as a youth, he was employed at Brier Hill.

D: It seems that because of the fact that your brothers--some of them could go on to school--would it be correct to say that your family income was perhaps on par with or above the other people in the neighborhood?

B: Put it this way; we didn't know a hungry day in our life, but we couldn't say we were a family of any wealth. We had ten children. Naturally, we didn't accumulate any great wealth, but we never had any need.

D: Did your father ever discuss any of his experiences as far as the Brier Hill Works go: working over there with their conditions and who did what, the type of work that was done, wages, anything like that?

B: It was more of the railroad type of work. Mostly, I remember the wildcat strike around 1920 or 1921. It caused quite a bit of dissension. My father went with the, more or less, company men. He didn't cross the picket line. He had a rather decent job. I remember when the officials of Brier Hill called and told him to come back to work, to a bigger job, and he refused to do it.

D: Down on your end of town, did many of the people in the neighborhood work up at Brier Hill?

B: Not particularly Brier Hill, but many were. . . . We had quite a few of professional people up on our street. It was the lower south side, and the south side of Youngstown was just Youngstown. There was no Boardman, Austintown. They were just intersections and not street lights. If anyone remembers Boardman in the 1920's or the teens--there use to be a sign saying Lodi ninety miles at [Route] 224 and Route 7. Now it probably is the busiest intersection in Mahoning County.

D: I was just wondering if perhaps some of the friends you hung around with if they had fathers in the foundries or in some of the mills?

B: Everybody in Youngstown was connected with the steel mills in one or another. Those who weren't were into politics or in the professions, whether it was school teaching, doctors, lawyers, storekeepers, or painters, carpenters, whatever you were. But, most everybody had somebody in their family who was connected with the steel mill one way or another, whether you were working, like with the railroad or somebody even painting in the steel mill or an electrician in the steel mill.

Our whole life in Youngstown from the various inception when they started the mills. . . . The mills were not in Youngstown first. Of course, there was the Mary Furnace in Lowellville and the Ann Furnace in Struthers on account of the limestone and carbon. As a matter of fact, when my mother's father came over to America, he settled in Lowellville because there was no train to even come into Youngstown.

D: Up through about 1930, again that mainly stays with your growing up years, could you briefly kind of compare downtown Youngstown, the business section now with what it was in 1925, 1928, 1930? What was it like, for example, when you went into downtown Youngstown, the businesses, the activities?

B: I'll put it this way, on a Saturday after noon in Youngstown all up until recently--when I say recently, even after World War II--everybody went downtown in Youngstown. Being younger men in those days, we used to do what they called making the rounds. We always lined up at a certain hour at the Ohio Hotel Arcade for the dancing and the pleasures that you would have in those days.

D: Among the things you could do in Youngstown toward the downtown area was dancing at big hotels. How about ballrooms? I understand there were a few ballrooms.

B: Oh, yes. They had the Elms Ballroom. It was a very

popular ballroom. As a matter of fact, when they had The Mansion, that was one of the better know places in the United States of America.

D: The Mansion.

B: It was in the late 1930's.

D: Where is that?

B: That was the old Wick home on Logan Road. It was sold to the Ursuline Convent.

D: As a young fellow growing up in Youngstown, in the late 1920's, how would you get downtown? Would you take the streetcar?

B: In the late 1920's, when we went downtown, we walked.

D: That was quite a walk.

B: No, it was only a mile and a quarter. We didn't want to spend the money on a streetcar, so we could get an ice cream cone.

D: I take it that back then even though you walked, Youngstown did have a pretty extensive transportation system as far as streetcars.

B: Youngstown always had a good transportation system. The south side of Youngstown was never developed until Warren Williamson and Hamilton built the Park streetcar line. That was the developing of the south side of Youngstown.

D: About what year was that?

B: Roughly speaking, it was between 1900 and 1910.

D: Up through the turn of the century, Youngstown was mainly north of the Mahoning River.

B: The city of Youngstown would be the Brier Hill section and the east side of Youngstown.

D: And, of course, the central business district.

B: And the central business district. I remember seeing a map. I would say Belle Vista Avenue would be the extent of the west side of Youngstown, and like I said, Falls Avenue was the south side.

D: About the year you graduated from South High School in 1930, coming south, what was the real extent of the populated, built-up area of Youngstown . . . , Indiano-

la?

B: By 1930, Youngstown was coming to its peak in population. It was populated out to Midlothian Boulevard. St. Dominic's parish came in around 1923, 1924. I would say that opened up . . . Park and to the east of Market Street and Southern Boulevard, and the area around Hudson Avenue, and all the streets between the Fosterville area and to the south, and to Hillman and to Midlothian; that all was developed. I would say that was in the very late 1920's.

D: During this time again growing up in Youngstown up through 1930, was Youngstown, especially the residential areas, ethnically mixed, or was there one area that was typically one?

B: It was very obvious it was an ethnical town.

D: Was there an Italian area, an Irish area, and a black area, or was it all. . . .

B: Yes, it was very obvious. St. Patrick's Church was composed mostly of 75 percent of Irish extraction or intermarriage of Irish. St. Joseph's Church was the German church that was centrally located. There was Mount Carmel Church which was in the Hollow. St. Anne's would be a mixture of both, and then you had your ethnic churches. They were in Lansingville. St. . . . , of course, was in downtown in that area. Then, you had your Orthodox churches down around where the other people lived. The Greek, Catholic, and Orthodox churches were all centered where the ethnic groups would live.

D: Neighborhoods themselves, for example, were there any certain six or seven street areas that was just the Slovak section?

B: Youngstown is a very peculiar town. How many different sections of Youngstown can you name is a trivia question. For instance, we will take the south side of Youngstown. There would be Flint Hill, Kyle's Corners, Fosterville, Lansingville.

D: These were all like distinctive little neighborhoods.

B: Distinct neighborhoods. If you told somebody where you lived, you said you lived in Lansingville or Fosterville or Kyle's Corners. Ours was the Blocks, but you had to be very old to remember the Blocks. You had to be around close to seventy years old to remember where the Blocks were.

To continue on, we had the Monkey's Nest, Westlake

Crossing.

D: Tell me exactly about the Monkey's Nest and Westlake Crossing through the late 1920's and then in through the 1930's, up until the time in 1939 when they actually began construction of the project. What type of area was it? What was its ethnic makeup, types of homes, things like that?

B: As I remember, I used to have a relative living up in what they called Brier Hill. Brier Hill, of course, would be the whole hill. The area known as Westlake Crossing was where they built the project. That was starting to become a little run-down. I remember reading an article one time. We had so much in Youngstown; but when people would come in from Cleveland, they would come in on Route 422. They said that it wasn't a very select area to look at, when you entered the city.

D: You are talking about prior to 1939.

B: Yes, prior to 1939. When they built the project, that added to the attraction of coming into Youngstown because you came in through the steel mills out at Girard and then to downtown Youngstown.

D: Would you characterize the homes that were there in that area along Madison and Wirt and Griffith Street. . . ? How would you characterize those homes?

B: The Brier Hill section is one of the oldest sections that has been occupied. That is where the Pubb family came from in Youngstown. The people who lived there before the turn of the century were like everybody else. That was their home, and that was where they lived. If you wanted to work the mills, you had to live somewhere. If you lived in 1890 and you lived in Brier Hill, you probably lived in a real nice place, and it was. As time marches on--you can take the city of Youngstown today and take Hillman Street, for instance, and see the deterioration of those apartment houses that in 1920 when they were built, or before, that they were beautiful. People thought at the time they were getting good buys and were fortunate to live there. Now, they are unoccupied and should be torn down.

D: How about that area just immediately adjacent to Westlake, which was called the Monkey's Nest throughout the 1920's and prior to World War II? Was it a mixed area ethnically?

B: Originally it was mostly Irish coming in there; and then, particularly Ukrainians and Croatians moved in.

The Irish moved out. You will notice the Croatian church is up in that area on Covington Street. There is quite a Croatian population in that area and Ukrainians. There is a Ukrainian Church. Like I said in the beginning, find out where the churches are located and you will find out where the people lived. A lot of people may laugh at the Monkey's Nest, but when they first lived there, and their grandparents came there, it was a respectable place to live. It just deteriorated, and the people of Youngstown call it a blighted area. When the Fanny May program came in. . . .

D: The Fanny May program?

B: I call it the Fanny May.

D: Which was?

B: One of those federal programs where the bureaucracy's names are made up; those who are in the bureaucratic system with the long names that they give titles to like the Federal Home Mortgage or whatever you want to call it. It is one of these things where you like to help people who were caught and lost their homes and wished to purchase a house. They could get low interest rates.

There is an old saying that they moved the Monkey's Nest up to around Falls Avenue and that area through there in the lower part of the south side which was known as the Blocks. That used to be just a joke. That wasn't necessarily so.

D: You would say that prior to World War II, the Monkey's Nest was basically an area of eastern European origin.

B: Yes, it could have been in the 1920's, anyway. There was a mixture of people who were originally Irish. There are a lot of well-known Irish people whose grandparents lived in the Monkey's Nest when they came to America.

D: You mentioned that you graduated from high school in 1930. That was at South High School?

B: South High School.

D: That was the original South High School building there on the. . . .

B: At the . . . of Warren and Market.

D: How many public high schools were there in Youngstown in the 1930's?

B: In 1930, there were four. There were Rayen and South High School, which were in existence until about 1925 or 1926. I remember some of the boys who were in the lower part of the south side of Youngstown. They didn't want to go to Chaney, so they moved out further. It wasn't what they didn't want to go to Chaney; it was the distance involved. They didn't have buses running back and forth to take everybody to school in those days. You had to walk, and it was far enough to walk from where we walked. But, to walk over to the West-side was a long distance to walk. I think it was Falls Avenue or something that was the dividing line. It could have been Lakewood Avenue. Whatever street it was, it was on the lower south side. It was where some of the boys had to go to Chaney because their parents lived out on the south side of Youngstown.

D: Then, you had the East High School also?

B: East High came with Chaney. The first football games they had were in 1926. They probably opened up in September of 1925. That is from my recollection. From the best of my knowledge, the first year Chaney played was in 1926.

D: The year you graduated from South, there was no Wilson High School.

B: Wilson High School came later.

D: Did literally everyone who lived south of the river go to South?

B: When they built up the south side further up Euclid Boulevard, etc. and everything else, parts of Lansing-ville further out to Midlothian--that was all de-veloped--they needed another high school on the south side of Youngstown.

D: Really? When you did graduate in 1930, for all intents and purposes, did South High service the entire south of the river area?

B: Not all of the south of the river area. From Woodland Avenue, I'm positive, south of Woodland Avenue.

D: When you graduated in 1930, all the children in your family ended up graduating from high school?

B: When my oldest sister went, there was no South High School.

D: Did every child of your parents end up with a high school degree?

B: Everyone that . . . when they had the high school did. I had an older sister go to . . . Business College.

D: What I was getting at was, say in 1930, from what you can remember, especially among some of the people you might have known who's parents were first generation immigrants, steel working families, was it common practice that people finish high school?

B: No, it was not a common practice because if you could get a work permit at sixteen, you could leave school and get a job in a mill. Everybody wasn't going to college. There was no federal funding or anything like that, or a student loan. If you got a scholarship, you could go. Somebody in 1926, if the mills were working good and a father could get him a job in the mill, they went to school until they were sixteen and then got a work permit. That ended their schooling because they weren't planning on going to college. They got an opportunity to get a job. It was a matter of you would go to school, not so much to occupy a seat, but to be educated and be able to take a place in life and possibly to go and work whatever you are going to work. But generally speaking in Youngstown, you would go to work in the mill.

D: Really? At age sixteen at this time in the 1920's and 1930's, if you could get a job at age sixteen. . . .

B: When you got into the 1930's, you weren't getting a job. In the 1920's, things were going pretty good in Youngstown. There were jobs available, and the town was growing fast.

D: Let's take it from your graduation in 1930. For the first few years you mentioned that eventually, you ended up down in Columbia.

B: Yes.

D: You were the Postmaster down there.

B: Assistant Postmaster of the Legislature.

D: How did that come about from Youngstown to down there?

B: It came about because the easiest way to get a job in 1932, or 1933, with the Roosevelt administration taking office in 1933, and after the bank crash and things got going again . . . everybody wanted to get a political job. The mills hadn't started up yet. You got whatever you could get.

D: It was kind of an alternate form of employment during the Depression almost, getting a political job.

B: Most people would make a dollar here and make a dollar there. I had several jobs during the Depression, but they were not permanent jobs. Everybody wanted to go to college, and I didn't have any athletic scholarships; so I couldn't go on an athletic scholarship. I would have to pay may own way. It just wasn't possible.

D: When you graduated from your school, your alternatives as far as going to college were: A) if your folks had enough money or B) if you had. . . .

B: Go to college and find a job at Ohio State University or wherever you would go, and pay your own way. The tuitions back in those days were only thirty dollars a quarter, plus a fee for the student union and then the medical thing they had down there. It cost me thirty-four dollars a quarter. Guys would double up in the rooming house; and then, they would get jobs doing whatever they could do.

D: Of course, by this time you are now talking about we are in fact in the midst of the Depression. Give some general observations about Youngstown in the Depression. For example, did all of the mills close down one day and stay closed for eight years? How did that work?

B: No, no. There was work, but not much work. They were reorganizing the whole structure of our society socially, economically, and every other way.

D: How about things like bread lines and community relief?

B: We had bread lines and community relief, and we had everything else. Relief came in, and they had city relief which is now a center of the county and has been. That is one of the reasons the counties are going broke. People don't understand it. They put the relief of the county state legislature. They are not set up to take care of the welfare in the cities.

D: From other interviews what were through the Depressions the various. . . . We hear a lot about the soup lines and soup kitchens, and then we hear about people going on relief. Was there, through 1940, a federal form of relief like welfare, or was that state and local? How did that work?

B: No, they had some forms of relief. They had different structures put up. As a matter of fact, the first relief office was down where the Salvation Army is now in the old children's home.

D: Was that a federal government sponsor?

B: It was federal government and possibly state sponsored. I don't know how much participation came in at that time from the county or city. As it evolves like everything else, everything is revolutionized. Now, we have the structure which we have.

D: Let's say, for example, through about 1939 or 1940, when the Depression really started to dissipate, who was . . . I understand, like the WPA programs, the Works Progress Administrations, programs obviously put able bodied people to work.

B: That is correct.

D: Who were people, for example, like maybe single mothers or widows, who were eligible for federal government relief during the Depression?

B: Anybody who didn't have any income like you would today if you were unemployed. The structure has been set up differently. In the original days before we had welfare, we had soup kitchens.

D: What I mean is, after Roosevelt got in, after 1932, let's say that you were a mother with two children in Youngstown, say in 1936 for example, was there a federal program in place that would give you money or would give you food?

B: Yes, there were always the federal programs. It was run by the city and the townships. The townships had their responsibility, and the city had its responsibility. Around 1940, the county took over all of the welfare.

D: Would you mean that by take over that they took over the distribution and administration?

B: Administration. Instead of having each township and Campbell, Struthers, and Lowellville administer welfare, the country took it over.

D: It was kind of like the federal government was putting up the funds, but the local government agencies were. . . .

B: Now, we put up our share.

D: The local communities had to put up their share.

B: Yes we had to put up a share. Most of it came from the state and federal, but as the thing goes up. . . . You have, like trouble today in government. The state

legislature in the late 1960's said the county would pay 20 percent more of what the cost was the last year. It was rather a hardship. Then, they gave the permissive tax to relieve the burden. That's why such counties as Trumbull County and Columbia County are in difficulty, and Summit County. There in debt to the state and in debt to everybody else. You just can't afford to run all these different forms of government out of the county branch, if they don't have the where-with-all to do it. The legislature in their functions wanted give services to the people to which every part of government it is. It's all right to say, "You do it," but if they don't have the money to do it, you just can't do it.

D: Of course in 1935, you are in Columbus.

B: Yes.

D: During the latter part of the 1930's, this was when you were elected to state office.

B: Yes. I took office in 1939.

D: You were elected as. . . .

B: State representative.

D: From this area?

B: This area.

D: Prior to 1939, as we have already seen you were cognizant to the workings of state government.

B: Yes.

D: During this time, again we are into the Depression, and we have talked about the relief system. How about things like, in Ohio, the WPA and the CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps? Were they strictly the federal government telling the state and local [governments] "Here is what we are going to do?"

B: The CCC was strictly a federal government project. That took younger men and put them out in certain areas. They even had the programs center in Ohio.

D: How about around Youngstown? Did they ever have a CCC here?

B: Not particularly, no. We didn't have a CCC camp in Youngstown here. The boys from Youngstown, who I know personally, went out West.

D: You mean the western part of the United States.

B: Yes. Now, they were down in Shoney Forrest and that [area] down in Ohio, but I don't know anybody personally from Youngstown that went there. The ones that I knew that were in CCC were out west.

D: How about things like the WPA?

B: Everybody was on WPA, CWA--Civil Works Administration who could get on. There were all different types of WPA and CWA. A friend of mine was working at the library in WPA. Everybody wasn't out on the road. Some of the better streets in Youngstown were built under PWA.

D: Can you remember some of the things that were done around Youngstown, that still stand up today, that were done by those? I think it is covered by asphalt now.

B: South Avenue is still in good--was put in by brick. That was the last good brick in that one. That never deteriorated, through the winter or by anybody. You never see a chuckhole there.

D: Yes, that was a WPA project.

B: It was one of them. They had different . . . initials that's one thing I don't want. . . . When you get into beauracracy--I have a friend of mine George . . . , the County Commissioner, after we went down to Columbus here a number of years ago when Gilligan was governor or making a deal with the Department of Natural Resources, we had the road all greased. We had to go to the Environmental Protection Group of that department to go to their questioning. After we come though with them, George said, "I'm going to get a dictionary printed; so that, when us political office soldiers go to Columbus or Washington, we will understand the language they speak. They speak a different language than we speak."

D: At that time, we talked about the alphabet soup of agencies like the WPA, for example, was that again. . . .

B: That was the Works Progress Administration.

D: How much was the state or local community required to cooperate? Was there a cooperation to input from. . . ?

B: In the beginning, nothing because the money came in. Fifteen dollars a week was a lot of money in 1933, 1934 if you had a job.

D: That was what people were getting paid. . . .

B: That would be the minimum. If anybody made a hundred dollars a month, you were doing really good.

D: On the WPA?

B: Yes.

D: So some people could make a hundred dollars a month on that.

B: I don't know what the top scale was, but most of those who were working were making fifteen dollars a week. It was just a general area.

D: For example, do you know right off the bat if I would, say, like the local community. . . .

B: There was the National Youth Administration, and there was the PWA, Public Works Administration; and the CWA. There were so many of those.

D: I was just wondering as a general rule . . . Youngstown, for example, obviously they were provided with funds under WPA to put people to work, say, to build a road. Was it the Youngstown City Government? Was it the local city government that decided what work was to be done? Did they have that degree of control, or was everything controlled from the federal level?

B: The projects, naturally, are submitted to some kind of authority.

D: Even today, if you're going to get money, I served as county commissioner; and may I say, I was one of the very fortunate people. I always felt that my experience both as a legislator and. . . .

There's other things besides talk. You have to know these people you deal with, because, for instance, if you go to HUDD in Chicago, HUDD deals with Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit. Youngstown's just another place on the map. So, if you don't know those people--I entertained one time one of the fellows that had the. . . . During the 1968 Convention at the Hilton Hotel, a man from Youngstown . . . , so he could see what was going on, and I made a very good friend out of him. I was introduced to him by Sam Goldwyn. He was county engineer. Sam had a way about getting to know people. You have to know people in Washington, and you have to know people in Chicago. You can't put applications in. Mike . . . I say in all honesty, if he went down to Washington and saw Mrs. Mesterlee, he could get on the

phone and make a phone call for you. You'd see that person. You saw him that day.

D: Your political career--and when you were elected, you were and have always been Democrat?

B: Yes.

D: Through the Depression, especially after Franklin Roosevelt was elected and into the late 1930's into the war years, by this time is Youngstown, basically, a Democratic town?

B: Oddly enough, Mahoning County voted for Herbert Hoover.

D: In 1932?

B: In 1932. You wouldn't believe it, but we did. In 1936, though we voted for Franklin Roosevelt.

D: How about the whole structure of county government and state government by 1936.

B: In 1936, we did have a democratic governor, George White was Governor. He was elected in 1930. Martin L. Daveys was elected in 1934.

D: And both were democrats.

B: They had two year term for Governor in those days.

D: How about in the local area like in Mahoning County? We know that Kerwin was a democratic. How about people like Lionel Evans who was a mayor in the late 1930's?

B: Lionel Evans came in. They had a city charter in those days where the man who got the highest vote won.

D: I know that he was the Mayor when in fact the construction of Westlake. . . .

B: He served for four years. He succeeded Mark North.

D: And they were both democrats.

B: No, Mark North was a democrat and Lionel Evans was a republican.

D: Oh, Lionel Evans was a republican. Through the Depression then in Youngstown--we have already seen a wide variety of programs that were instituted--would you say especially in the late 1930's, did Youngstown, as far as unemployment, for example, stay in a depression really right up until World War II, or was there a time previous to that. . . .

B: Let's put it this way. Right before World War II, they must have been anticipating what would happen. I can only go with stories that I heard. They came to the steel man, and they asked them to get ready to produce so much steel. They said that if they would give them water, they would give them all the steel they needed. I'm only saying what I heard, not what I know. They were very cooperative in Washington and to the help of Mr. Kerwin, I resume. We got first the Berlin Dam, the Mosquito Dam, and the Kerwin Dam.

D: This was all about a fifteen or twenty year period.

B: It started right at the war. West Branch camé through with a levy, I think. It was a little more expensive to the taxpayers to get West Branch. With Berlin there was a deal made. I don't think there was a levy made at Berlin. They needed water for the mills for the war, and we got the dam.

D: Which dam are we talking about?

B: Berlin, the Mahoning River Dam down there. That was number one.

D: Was that done during the war?

B: It was done just when the war was on. They needed the water. It was started in time. Let's say the thinking was done. You have got to do the thinking and the planning before you do the building.

D: You feel the main reason that dam was built was in order to supply mills.

B: Because they knew something was going to happen, and they had to be ready. You're asking me, that's just rumor.

D: Throughout the 1930's in Youngstown, how about the housing situation itself? You mentioned, for example, that the area over by Westlake Crossing. . . .

B: Every area in a city goes first. It so happens that the area which we refer to as the Monkey's Nest and up through there was. . . .

D: Pretty dilapidated.

B: Was the part of Youngstown that they used to talk about as being then most dilapidated.

D: What were some other eyesores in the Youngstown area in the 1930's; areas that could have possibly used the

housing project or areas that perhaps one might say were. . . ?

B: It depends upon how you look at it. Back in 1930 a lot of the places to what standards people would have . . . By then, you had Hudson Avenue and the far south side built. Some of the parts of those streets down on the lower south side, I would say, were nice streets. Parkwood Avenue from Oak Hill to Hillman were very nice homes. They were old-fashioned, wooden homes and so forth. They have been kept up. Some of the streets do look pretty good; some don't. If a street runs down, when you talk about 1930, you are going back fifty-five years ago. If anything hadn't been done to a house in twenty years, it is not going to be in fifty-five years. I would say the whole area of Youngstown really wasn't that bad. Some of the houses were not what you would call the greatest, but there were no particular slum areas. They just jokingly called it the Monkey's nest.

D: I heard tell of a poor area during the Depression called the Flats. It was down along the river. I think it was temporary housing for unemployed people. I don't know if you heard anything about it. It almost sounds like a shanty town.

B: Yes, but you are getting to an entirely different subject there. That was down by the incinerator.

D: Tell me a little bit about those.

B: That was where the homeless lived, yes.

D: What streets are we talking about?

B: You are talking about Cedar Street by the Elephant Bridge. That was where the city incinerator was, and that was a tent city. There were migrants there.

D: People just passing through.

B: A lot of people passing through. They came, and they stayed there. To be honest with you, that is the funny thing to say. There was a fellow by the name of Jim Mularkey, who was taking the census, and he was telling me that he was being sort of a rough and tough type of a gent? He was sent down to that area to take the census to count how many were down there.

D: Was this literally a tent city with shanties?

B: It was a shanty town. Yes, it was not a credit to any city.

D: Had it been there prior to the Depression?

B: No, it was the thing that came on with the Depression.

D: The people who lived there you indicated mainly that they were passing through from outside areas.

B: One of the persons who did a little work at our house one time. . . . He was an industrious worker. My father gave him a little employment around our house at times. He lived there, and he was a hobo. It would be a hobo town if you wanted to call it that. I don't know whether there were any women living there or not. I never particularly ever, outside of seeing it. . . . It wasn't a place where you just wanted to. . . .

D: During the Depression, I just wondered if Youngstown. . . . It seems like, before the Depression with the steel mills and the foundries were really going strong, it was obviously an attractive place. I wondered if during the Depression if people were still coming into Youngstown. Was the city still growing?

B: Not particularly, I don't think. After the mills started then Youngstown. . . . By the 1930 census, we had more people in Youngstown than we do today.

D: I think it was well over 150,000 or 60,000.

B: Oh, yes. I think we had around 180,000 by estimate anyway. By 1970 we were down. I think 190 would probably be about its highest or in 1960, when things got buzzing again.

D: Of course, in 1933 the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority was established. Do you remember any of the people? Do you remember the circumstances of some of the activities of the Housing Authority prior to the construction of Westlake project?

B: I would presume--and back there, I was a younger man--mostly from hearsay, and they formed this committee to conform with the federal act and everything else. They picked an area that would be a blighted area that would beautify the city more. Like I mentioned, when you came in on [Route] 422, people from Cleveland or anybody coming in that way, they could come in and see the worst part of Youngstown.

D: You brought out an interesting point. We have to keep in mind that, at the time you are talking about, [Route] 422 was a major. . . .

B: Major thoroughfare coming in from the northwest.

D: Anybody coming in would come right by that. . . .

B: Would come right by there. There was no strip up in Warren. You would come on in through Girrard; and then, you would come in through Brier Hill. Then, you moved into Youngstown and Westlake Crossing and Monkey's Nest and everything. That was what you went through.

D: Do you recall any of the politics in locating it? Did anybody or any group or community group object to the fact that the Federal Government was going to tear down this area and build something good there?

B: There wasn't too much objection because the construction workers and everybody else was unemployed. Everybody went to work. Every time a federal dollar came in it put somebody to work. Regardless of who it is, the money dribbles down to somebody. The grocery man is going to make something, and everybody else is going to make something. Whether they pick the area here or there or anywhere else, it would still be a benefit to the community, particularly for construction. When they built the Market Street bridge, that gave a lot of construction workers who were unemployed a lot of work.

D: You, then don't recall any kind of organized opposition?

B: Not in my own memory. It was one of the first projects we were getting. Like I said, when you go to Chicago or Washington and get your hand out, you better have somebody out there to help you, because everybody else wants the money. The idea of getting it. . . . I would say they were fortunate in getting it. Whoever was grinding the wheels in those days knew how to grind the wheels.

D: What would you say the general reaction was not only of the city of Youngstown, but also down in Columbus as well? Of course, by this time in 1939, you were already in office. I just wondered if there had been any jockeying of Cleveland or Columbus or Cincinnati.

B: There is so much that Congress said that [we don't know] where we are going to have some money, building dollars, for this, that, or anything else. You can bet your last bottom dollar that somebody is going to get more of it than somebody else. Somebody is going to be left out in the cold. Everybody jockeys for money. That is the name of the game. That is the way politics is. It was and always will be.

D: Did you ever meet or know personally, Paul Strait who in fact was the first. . . ?

B: Paul Strait, yes. He was a very capable local man.

D: I think he was a lawyer.

B: Yes. Back in 1947, there was some federal money that came in for the veterans. We went through the format. Instead of putting it into a housing project. . . . There were homes down on Avondale Avenue below South Avenue that were built and then rented to veterans.

D: Yes, I heard about that before. Could you repeat those areas again? Those were Avondale. . . .

B: I couldn't tell you the streets. It was just a general area where there were vacant lots. They built. . . .

D: This was after the war.

B: This was after the war. It was the first federal money coming in. Then of course, you had a deal for that around St. Christine's for veterans.

D: Did those projects have any specific names, those veteran's projects you are talking about?

B: There were federal funds that came through. They had to make room on the state legislature for the area out on Normandy Drive. They are all nice homes out there. It was low interest rates and so forth and so on. These homes were built by the county commissioners. You probably get the exact street by going in the direction of the country commissioners if they still have them there and none up at Kent. It was a certain area. There weren't that many houses built really. It wasn't that big of an area, but they were for veterans. I knew some of the fellows who lived in them. Naturally, we lived on the south side of Youngstown, so we know people on every street.

D: Were these areas that we are talking about built specifically for veterans come under the control of administration of YMHA Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority.

B: No, they came under the control of the county commissioners. I don't know what Paul Strait wanted to do with the money. I happened to be on the finance committee at the time.

D: By this time, after World War II, you immediately became a county commissioner.

B: I quit during the war, and then, I came back and ran again and was elected.

D: You mentioned Paul Streit. Other than Westlake housing project, originally for the first five to eight years there during the 1940's, what else was the YMHA responsible for, anything at all? The first thing YMHA was responsible for was the construction of Westlake housing project. I wondered if you know prior to the construction of that housing project that they had been involved in anything else around the community, like getting into the elderly residence or anything like that?

B: No, appointments were made by Mayor Evans, and they went into business. They were very fortunate to get the first federal loan for one of those housing projects.

D: Do you recall when the projects. . . . Can you recall construction and the completion of those projects?

B: Yes.

D: From your personal memory, do you remember coming in on [Route] 422 and suddenly instead of. . . .

B: Anybody living in Youngstown saw it going up. I lived on the south side of Youngstown, but everybody was over on [Route] 422 who went to Cleveland. You went downtown. It was just about as close for me, because I lived on Carroll Street at the time, to go down Oak Hill Avenue and go out [Route] 422, which runs northwest. You could take Belmont Avenue even, where I could go to Warren almost as quick as going down Route 11 and going up to 80 from where I lived.

D: In other words you can remember when those projects were completed and their appearance in what it looked like coming in?

B: Oh, it was beautiful. It enhanced the whole area. There is no question to it. They moved part of that.

D: Yes, with the Madison Avenue expressway.

B: With the Madison Avenue expressway that was a big undertaking. They didn't want to tear it down so they moved it.

D: Were you serving as county commissioner when the Madison Avenue expressway was built? That would have been 1966.

B: I was, yes.

D: You mentioned they didn't want to tear down part of the

Westlake project.

B: Phil Richley was city engineer at the time.

D: In 1966?

B: Yes. He was an engineer, and he knew his business pretty good. Instead of going in and tearing them down, they figured that it would be a lot cheaper to move them and have those apartments for people. There was nothing wrong with them. I'm not an architect or an engineer, but things can be moved today that they could have done a hundred years ago.

D: There really was no plot to tear down the project.

B: No, they never thought to tear it down. What they did was move it. It was a very good idea. I was down with Mr. Richley, which was the first I ever heard about it.

D: You mentioned that when the projects were originally built in 1940 and 1941 that you felt it kind of enhanced the entire area.

B: It enhanced the entire area; yes, it did. They were landscaped and everything else.

D: I just wondered if you could remember or were privy to any information about how business, for example, in that area were helped by people moving in.

B: Anything where federal money is spent helps everybody. There is no question to it. Anybody benefits from three hundred people going to work. There are going to be constructions for homes; there are going to be restaurants built. If your liquor licenses come in. . . . Take Boardman for instance. You couldn't get a drink in Boardman here twenty-five years ago. There didn't happen to be a saloon in this township. Today, they have a strip.

D: Would you say. . . . Did you notice after they were being built, by now being into 1942 and 1943, if any new businesses went into that general area to service the people?

B: I would presume there would have to be. A lot of people went in there and moved in, so they have to buy groceries. They had to ride the bus downtown. They had to do this; they had to do that. I imagine quite a few of those people who went downtown walked downtown.

D: Did you ever personally know anybody who lived in the Westlake project?

B: I just called this girl's mother who was one of the original persons who moved in.

D: Again, are you under the impression that most of the original residents really thought highly of them?

B: Yes, they thought that anybody who got in there when they first opened up was very fortunate. A lot of them were elderly who went in there. I think the administrator there kind of favored. . . . It was done on the basis of income. What would be income today, of course, would be comparable to what. . . . Everything is relative to the time. Someone today with that income, I presume, would be called poor.

D: When they were finished being built, were you ever privy to exactly who were to be the desired residents of those projects? Although the official title of the project was supposedly for originally lower income. . . .

B: Lower income. You had to meet the qualifications. That was all. I presume if you met the qualifications and you knew the fellow taking the application, then you would get in. Everything else in life is the same. I don't know if anybody was favored, but I presume it would happen.

D: You don't know if originally, as they were being constructed, the city fathers and Paul Strait and YMHA were each hoping. . . .

B: If you are asking the question, if they were looked down upon, no. You were considered lucky. Rent was cheap, and it was a good place to live. It was new.

D: How many years after 1940, ten, fifteen, twenty, whatever, would you say that same attitude was kept that if you lived in Westlake project, you were lucky?

B: It is like anything else. The thing got run down, and the people moved out.

D: Are we talking, say into the 1950's? Is that basically what you could remember as far as the change when Westlake no longer looked like an attractive place to live?

B: I started reading in the paper about things happening up there and so forth and so on. People didn't want to go up there and visit. I used to campaign up there. I found no difficulty or anything in my life. At the end, I did. When I did my campaigning, I would try to get people who lived there who would be interested in, like this apartment complex I live in now.

D: During the whole time you served with the county commissioners, did the county commissioners have any input at all to the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority?

B: Not too much. They were another entity.

D: It is not like the county funds are funded through the county to YMHA. It doesn't work that way.

B: No.

D: As far as you know.

B: No. YMHA is a different branch. We have our different things that we have. We have like the Children's Services, the Mental Retarded Board, and then the Hygiene Board. Those were county wide things.

D: In other words, from what you can gather, off the top of you head, you would say the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority is really only answerable to, say, the federal agencies.

B: Federal, and I presume, to the Mayor and City Council. I think there is an appointment made by one of the judges too.

D: But, the YMHA, as far as grants and money coming in. . . .

B: It is the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority. It is not the Mahoning County Metropolitan Housing Authority. If it was Mahoning County, yes, it would be under the jurisdiction of the County Commissioners. We can't interfere. They ask for any suggestions, and possibly we could offer them some. As far as I was concerned, no one asked me. Everybody has their own thing.

Government today, it would take a good long look, as far as I'm concerned to go on record, to find out what they do in Atlanta, Indianapolis, and Toronto. They still have a . . . form of government, but they still have some kind of a regional type government. There are other problems besides--pertain to all, particularly in Mahoning County. We have our drinking water out in Meander. It has got to be piped in from Austintown. Then, they sell it to anybody, except the certain areas where there is Ohio Water services. That is one thing that is metropolitan. You don't need ten help boards. Naturally speaking, you wouldn't need ten or fifteen fire departments or police departments. You don't need ten engineering departments. Those are things that we

can discuss in the metro form of government. It seems like you still maintain the old serfdoms or squiredoms of England, Ireland, Italy or anywhere else. Where the Duke had his, and he wasn't going to combine with anybody else.

D: Just for the record, how many years total did you serve on the county commissioners?

B: Roughly speaking, from 1965 to February of 1982. I would say about sixteen years and plus.

D: Plus with your time down at the statehouse, we are talking more about. . . .

B: I worked for the state of Ohio and the city of Youngstown. I was Chairman of the Board of Review and the Bureau of Unemployment. . . .

D: So you've been in public service for. . . .

B: My life. There are three types of learning: social learning, academic learning, and motor learning. I certainly don't belong to the motor learning class, because if I had to fix a refrigerator, you might as well go and do it. If I had to figure out Einstein's Theory of Relativity, I could figure and read it all my life and not know what it is. I belong to the class of people with the actors, the politicians, the real estate men, the automobile salesmen, the insurance men, the history teachers . . . the academics.

D: Thank you very much. I deeply appreciate it, Mr. Barrett.

END OF INTERVIEW