

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Irish Americans

Personal Experience

O H 1911

PAULA MCKINNEY

Interviewed

by

Rachel Welsch

on

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W This is an interview with Paula McKinney for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Irish Americans, by Regina Welsch, on February 26, 1998, at Paula McKinney's home, at 1 00 p m

Paula, we would like you to tell us your story about your maternal grandfather, John J Buckley

M Okay. Well, my grandfather passed away in 1935, but it seems like he was ever present in the house just because my mother would make reference to him so often. It was Grandpa's house, and we always thought of it as Grandpa's house for all that Grandpa was not there. He was a very remarkable man. He accomplished a lot, and he left a tremendous legacy to the kids and the grandkids. He was famine Irish, and he was born in Wales in 1857. If you could not afford to come to the States, you went to the closest place you could get. In their case, they ended up in Wales. His dad and his brother were coal miners over there. He went to school about two years.

When he was nine years old, he went down the mine. He did not talk too much about all the kind of thing, but the couple stories that survived and the one he said he went to work at night in the morning, you know, early in the winter. When you come out, it was dark. They did not see the light of day except, on Sundays. When in the attempt to go to church, the Welshmen did not accept the Irish. No way in Heaven. The Welsh kids would sit up in trees and throw stones and other unpleasanties at them as they were trying to get to church. He also mentioned coming home at night. His mother and the neighbor ladies would go out and stand at the road with the lantern to light the kids' way home. They thought they were too little to be out after dark.

Well, his oldest brother came over and got up the passage so the rest of them could come. They came over in 1871. Now, right now he was 15. They settled in Sharon, Pennsylvania, and he went to work at the Carnegie Mill where he stayed until 1900 or 1901, when the mill closed. At that point in time, this is the year before my mother was born. He was out of work a year when my mother was born. She was the fifth. The first two children died and then her brother, John, and her sister, Elizabeth, and herself. He had a sister who was married to a man in Youngstown, and they had a bar. Mr. Kearns, who was Grandpa's brother-in-law, died and left the bar and eight children.

In order to bail Aunt Nora out, he decided he might as well come to Youngstown. Sharon was down flat, and a lot of Irishmen from Sharon were moving into Youngstown because Youngstown was beginning to build up steel-wise. We got the Bessemer Converter in Youngstown roughly around 1900, 1901, and everything was going to go in Youngstown. Anyhow, he came over, and Aunt Nora sold him Boyle and Kearns. Grandpa kind of bailed the whole mess out somehow or other with patience and industry, and he went into partnership with Patrick Hogan, who was a friend of his from the mill. They

bought out Boyle and Kearns. He ran a very successful saloon and made a very nice living for them.

The family lived on North Walnut Street, 430 North Walnut, which the YSU parking deck is on that property now. About 1908, he bought a house on Lincoln Avenue, 315, and they lived there until roughly 1919. He was not a stupid man. Most people from Ireland were not stupid men, and he could read. He was smart. He had bought a house on the corner of Spring and Elm, and they were planning to move. One of the neighbors decided she was old money and this would not do. This man was undesirable. He was an Irishman. He was a Catholic. He had five children, and he was a saloon keeper. So, she sent her attorney to talk to Grandpa. Would he care to sell the property that he had bought? Grandpa jacked up the price a couple thousand and said, "Certainly." So, she bought it from him.

John Tod, who was one of the old industrialists in Youngstown, was selling his house on Arlington Street. It had been vacant for two years. Mr. Todd had built a new residence in what is now McVean's Funeral Home. He wanted to sell, but he would not rent it out. So, Grandpa bought it, and Grandpa rented it out for about ten years. They continued to live on Lincoln Avenue, and then they finally did move up to the house on Arlington, which was a very, very lovely house. He got himself a very sweet deal. Well, he stayed in business until 1920. Prohibition knocked him out, and my family lived with Grandma and Grandpa on Arlington Street. When Grandpa passed away, he left the house to my mother. Urban renewal took the whole thing in 1965, and it was razed. The house on Walnut has been razed. The house on Lincoln Avenue was razed in the 1970's. I always kidded my mother, I said, "Every house you lived in got torn down."

Grandpa was very, very active in the union. He was a dyed-in-the-wool union man. The Amalgamated, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers. This went clear back into the 1890's. He was a delegate to their conventions. I kind of used to kid people when I was working. I said, "My family belonged to the union when it was illegal." Which it was. I might add. The Amalgamated was the forerunner of the C I O. My sister always laughed when she was small. She says in the morning -- Grandpa by now was retired -- and he would take her by the hand and they would walk up to Wick Park. Up at Wick Park were all these old gentlemen that he had worked in the mill with, Pat Welsh and Barney Byrne and Pat Hogan. They would sit on benches in Wick Park and talk about the Amalgamated. My sister said, "I had no more idea what an Amalgamated was than the man in the moon." He would hold on to her by the hand for fear she was going to go get hurt, and she would listen to the Amalgamated. These men were friends of his until the day he died. When Grandpa died, they came. He was laid out at home, and they sat up the night and kept the watch with him. They were true friends from away back when in Sharon.

Grandpa was very unusual for the patriarch of the time. He listened to his wife. He respected her opinions. Grandma was American born. Her family had been from the sod, so she had been born in Cleveland. She was very wise, and he quite often took her advice. He always said, "The woman should run the money in the family. She knows what the children need."

In 1918, 1919, 1920, when Warren Harding was running for president, he would come to Youngstown to campaign and, of course, he would end up in the bar. Well, Grandpa liked him real well. Confidentially he said, "He is very likeable, but he is a weak man." He wanted Grandpa to go for Secretary of Labor under his administration. Grandma said, "Do not do it." She says, "Do not bring him to the house. I do not like him." She said, "I know he is very sociable, but he is a hail fellow well met. And there is going to be trouble down there, John. Do not do it." Well, he did not do it. Jim Davis took the position of Secretary of Labor. Jim had worked at the Carnegie Mill in Sharon with Grandpa.

Grandpa was offered the presidency at the Amalgamated, but he did refuse it. He had a soft heart. No one went hungry from his door. When we were kids during the Depression and if a man came to the back door, -- of course, he always had a lot of people coming for food -- my mother would feed them, but she would give a plate on the back porch. Grandpa brought them in and sat them at the table. He was very dignified, and he would say, "Come, come now, my good man. Do come in and sit down." No matter what state this soul was in, he would give him a good, hot meal and send him on his way. He had known hardship as a kid, and he just felt for anybody that came by. He fed everybody.

He had his principles with the bar. There were no free lunch. He said, "That is an enticement." He said, "If a man wants to come in and buy a drink, I will sell it to him, but I will not lure him in." He was a very devoutly religious man, very active at Saint Columba. When the family came to Youngstown, Saint Columba's, what was the old stone cathedral, was still under construction. They had finished the basement, and the Depression of 1896 had taken a chunk out of everything. There was like a cap on it. They were still having mass in the old church across the street, the old red brick church. I looked up in an old city directory and, in 1902 when they came to Youngstown, there were six pages of saloons in Youngstown. We were not a dry town.

Grandpa was a great one to pray. My sister said she can still remember him sitting up in his room at the upstairs window, you know, saying his beads. Religion was very private. In this day and age of audience participation and dialogue, I do not think he would have been very happy with the whole set up. He would not go to midnight mass. The rest of the family would be all excited and all the beauty and the fanfare, and it was beautiful. He went to mass at 6:00 in the morning on Christmas morning, walked down in the dark, and communicated with the Lord in quiet at the low mass. That was just the kind of a

gentleman he was

When he died, a lot of stuff had gone up to the attic, and no one had ever disturbed it. When my mother's house was to be torn down, of course, we had to clean the attic. Here was this humongous trunk full of nothing but I.R.A. material. All the dinners and the fundraisers that they had in Youngstown, you know, and sent the money over for freedom and this kind of thing. Even them that came over were very active in the cause of freedom. Well, I do not know what more I can tell you. Grandpa loved the United States. He never had any desire to go back to the old country. This did not appeal to him at all.

I am just hunting through. I have here a poem that we found in an old desk. My aunt found it at her house in a desk that had been Grandpa's, and it had been lost clear back behind some drawers. You know how you do not pull your drawers out when you clean the desk. Well, she did not. Anyhow, it was on a piece of paper, and we all liked it. So, we had a copy of it printed and passed out to the cousins. This was written by Mr. T. M. Flynn, whomever he may have been. This is A Night at Buckley's. "In a small and cozy back room of a 'bar room out of sight' / Can be found the sons of labor discussing wrongs and rights / In the mills, mines, and factories will be found these sons each day / Giving all their brains and muscles for our common weekly pay / Some have ideas of bright rainbows, others of a freer land, / But, to relieve their minds from cares, back to Buckley's room they land / All creeds and nations welcome be their teachings what they may, / This gay bunch of Bohemians in Buckley's holds full sway / There is Hogan who is backward and Buckley who is true, / And Finnerty approaching makes the place look mighty blue / Now Flynn, he is poetic; and Hogan is sedate, / And Boyle is out of money, and the hour is growing late, / And we hope to live and prosper until we see the way / When the thoughts expressed in Buckley's will be championed night and day."

Mr. Buckley raised five children here in Youngstown. As I say, Julia was my mother. Elizabeth, the oldest girl, became a sister of the Holy Humility of Mary and passed away in 1935. John, the oldest boy, became an attorney and was later judge of the municipal court and the court of appeals when he passed away in 1950. My mother was Julia. Francis, the next son, worked at Youngstown Sheet and Tube and at the Mahoning Valley Sanitary District, and he passed away in 1954. Raymond, the youngest, was an official at the A&P Company and passed away in 1957. I guess that is our story.

W So, your grandfather really stuck very close to his Irish roots. Mostly all his friends were Irish. They were very clannish.

M Oh, very definitely. Always. Yes, they were very clannish. As I say, a lot of these people had been from Sharon originally, and, of course, they were clannish over in Sharon, too. Yeah, people stuck together. He belonged to the AOH [Ancient Order of Hibernians] and the Amalgamated, of course, and a

couple of the other Catholic organizations, the men's organizations He was a councilman at Saint Columba

W You read that poem Did he call his saloon Buckley's then?

M Yeah It was Buckley and Hogan

W Oh, Buckley and Hogan, after it was Boyle and Kearn's

M It was Boyle and Kearn's, and when they bought the business out it was Buckley and Hogan

W. Okay.

M It was on East Federal Street right about where City Center One is He went out of business, as I say, in 1920 The building was leased He did not own the building. Then the Brass Rail leased the building after prohibition was over Even until the day they tore it down, I think the Brass Rail still had the old false front on it. They had not remodeled the building.

W So then when you grew up, you were really more in Sacred Heart parish

M I moved to Sacred Heart after I was married We were Saint Columba all the way down the line I was married at Saint Columba. I went to Saint Columba school My mother had gone to Saint Columba When we married, we moved out to Hubbard, and then we moved to the east side. I belonged to Sacred Heart for many, many, many years, and I think that is still my spiritual home There was no place like Sacred Heart My one daughter still belongs to Sacred Heart, and I do go back with her But, I belong to Saint Brenden's actually Sacred Heart was where the good years were when the kids were little

W Yeah Your grandfather sounds like quite an interesting man

M He was quite a man He was quite an interesting man

W. For being so young to have moved around so much because of the famine, and then they come here with no skills

M Right Well, he was a miner Of course, all those skills were learned It was funny because, as I say, his father and his oldest brother were illiterate Of course, the dad was fairly well up in years He was a laborer at Carnegie Mill The oldest brother, Uncle Pat, and he had done quite well in Sharon He bought property and this kind of thing One of my daughters said to me, "How did they

do so well if they could not read?" I said, "They could add " They were not stupid They were coal miners They had to figure their tally

W: Yeah, that is true

M I said, "For all that the old gent could not read," this is Uncle Pat, "he could add " Of course, Grandpa could read As I say, he had the chance to go to school a couple years He could read and do simple math, and he was considered one of the best read men in Youngstown In fact, there is an editorial here that was in "The Telegram" when he died Have we time? Okay, I am sorry We thought it was "The Telegram " It says here, "The Vindicator " My sister typed it up on John J Buckley. "Every iron and steel worker of mature years in the Mahoning and Shenango Valleys will note with sympathy and regret the passing of John J Buckley who is to be laid to rest in Calvary Cemetery Monday Before retiring from active work in the mills, Mr Buckley long had been a leader of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. For many years after his retirement when he was a partner in the Buckley and Hogan Cafe near Central Square, his advice and counsel were sought by both employers and employees The place for iron and steel workers and for men who had been in the mills was Buckley's Mr Buckley, in addition to his interest in the Amalgamated Association, Ancient Order or Hibernians, Robert Elliot Society, and Saint Columba's Church, found time to indulge a taste for reading which made him one of the best informed men on many subjects in the city. John J Buckley was for years a sort of Youngstown institution with a good name and a life record that was credible " Well, that was the editorial that was in the paper

W What was the date of that?

M This was 1935 April 18, 1935

W He died when you were born, right?

M He died two months before I was born Correct

W. Do you know if he ever spoke about prejudice against the Irish in Youngstown, how bad it was, or how not bad it was? Did they just accept this?

M He did not seem to say anything about it There was, of course, a bit of an anti-Catholic thing, but there were so many of us that we stuck together. Even when I was a little girl, the Catholic school children were not invited to go to the Youngstown Symphony When I was about in the fifth grade, they decided to invite the parochial children As I said, we had our own organizations, our own clubs, our own church, and it was all a parish thing We just stuck together pretty

well Really, I cannot say I ever suffered from any prejudice, as far as that goes

But, he said, of course, in Wales there was all this anti-Irish, anti-Catholic thing, as I have said before, with people throwing bricks at them and everything When they moved to Walnut Street, the neighborhood over there was mostly Welsh and Irish and Italians and Jewish people He got along very well with the Welsh people He said all that prejudice and pain had been left behind in the old country They had Welsh neighbors When Grandma would have a baby, she had a Welsh lady who would come and stay with her On Sunday, they would go to their church, and the Welsh people would go to their church They got along beautifully He said he had wonderful neighbors He said, "This is the way it is supposed to be This is America " No, I do not think I can say it was too adamant

W Right The union certainly was not all Irish.

M I was going to say no Well, pretty much (Tape stopped)

W Tell me about this and this

M Okay. I have here a souvenir program from a Labor Day celebration and parade September 1, 1902 There are many, many interesting ads in here, a lot of Youngstown names one would recognize. Anyhow, here was the ad from the bar "John J. Buckley, successor to John F. Kearns, dealer in fine wines, liquors, and cigars Union goods, union employees 16 East Federal Street Phone 321 "

Then, I have here an interview that was conducted by "The Marion Star" to my sister who lives in Mount Gilead, Ohio In Mount Gilead, Ohio, there are two Irishman, herself and another lady "The Marion Star" came out and interviewed both of them Well, I will start in the middle Let us see, I have to find which one is hers and which one is Mrs. Thomas' Long pause, sorry about that Okay Her name is Elizabeth Blankenship, by the way "Elizabeth Blankenship's great-grandparents, Owen and Elizabeth O'Callaghan Buckley, moved from County Cork in their native Ireland in the 1840's to Wales because of the potato famine The potato famine drove many from their home across the Atlantic and anywhere else they could manage, Mrs. Blankenship said 'If they had enough money, they came to the United States If they did not, they would go wherever they could, and Wales was the closest, I guess.', she said "

Incidentally, another thing with this immigrant thing, Canada and Wales were United Kingdom. So, they could not turn the boats back They had to accept these people no matter what shape they were in The States could send them back if there was contagion, but you had to take what you got if you were Canada and Wales "The man who indirectly made Youngstown Blankenship's childhood home, her Welsh-born Irish grandfather, John Buckley, immigrated



with his parents to Sharon, Pennsylvania, in 1871. He went to the coal mines when he was nine, and he worked there until he came here. By age 15 he was working in the Carnegie Mill in Sharon, later moving to Youngstown to take over the operation of his widowed sister's saloon. Mrs. Blankenship keeps a photograph of her grandfather standing in front of the Buckley and Hogan Saloon in her family room and proudly displays a painting of him done by her son Michael in the living room. That is about the extent of the piece that would be applicable here.

Well, this is on the other side, but maybe you would like this. "A good example of the Irish mind set, she said, can be seen in its observance of death with a wake. 'You just party. I think the most important thing is a sense of humor,' she said. 'There is something about the way of looking at life. I think some people are surprised at some things the Irish laugh at, that seem inappropriate. They are kind of mocking the evil. The pain of life can be laughed at.' Mrs. Blankenship saw in her great-grandmother, Julia Pentony, this would have been my grandmother's mother, "great courage. After her mother died, Miss Pentony left her County Meath home alone aboard a ship to the United States. She married Patrick Potts in old Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City." This is down in what is now China Town, incidentally. "They moved to Pittsburgh, then to Cleveland. Mrs. Blankenship misses the Saint Patrick's Days in Youngstown, where as in Cleveland, the larger Irish populations nurtured each other's cultural pride. She says, 'Growing up there was always an entertainment at church. Things were different because I think the nationalities kept more to themselves.'

"Mrs. Blankenship's family also parties in memory of Saint Patrick's Day every year in Youngstown. She says, 'Mount Gilead, Ohio, is no place to stay on Saint Patrick's Day. We get together and we eat, we drink, we sing, and there are a few that dance.' She said even if she does not go to the party this year," the party, incidentally, is always at my house, "she will remember the day which also is special to her because that is the day her husband, Fred, proposed to her. She says, 'I have got a piece of corned beef in the freezer,' and alluded to the traditional meal of corned beef and cabbage, 'and I will have some soda bread.' She marvels at the hold Saint Patrick's Day has even on the non-Irish. 'I think it is kind of neat that such a tiny country can exert such an influence,' Mrs. Blankenship said."

W. Thank you, Paula, for this interview. Your family is very interesting, and I really appreciate getting these pictures and newspaper articles. We will get them back to you in good form.

M. Thank you.

End of Interview