

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Depression and Labor and Management  
in the 1930s

The Depression in Youngstown

O. H. 54

MR. CLINGAN JACKSON

Interviewed

by

Emmett Shaffer

on

April 24, 1974

## CLINGAN JACKSON

Mr. Clingan Jackson, political editor of The Youngstown Vindicator, was born on March 28, 1907, in Coitsville, Ohio, the son of John and Sarah Jackson. He attended Lowellville High School and the University of Colorado, where he received his AB in Journalism in 1929. That same year Mr. Jackson was hired by The Youngstown Vindicator and has remained there for forty-eight years. At 70 years of age he is currently the political editor of the newspaper.

As well as having taken a part in the local political scene, Mr. Jackson has served in the Ohio House of Representatives in 1935 and was elected to the Ohio State Senate from 1944 to 1950. He has served as a Pardon and Parole Commissioner from 1957 to 1959 and as Chairman of the Ohio Highway Council.

Organizations in which Mr. Jackson has been a member include the Downtown Kiwanis and the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. He is an active member of Coitsville Presbyterian Church.

In this interview Mr. Jackson speaks of the founding of the early steelworkers union locals in Youngstown and of the steel strikes, which he covered as a news reporter during the 1930s. He also speaks of the effect of the Depression on the people of Youngstown.

Presently, Mr. Jackson lives with his wife, Thelma, whom he married in 1935, at their home at 350 Jacobs Road, Youngstown, Ohio. They have two children, Mrs. Susan Jane Ehas and Mrs. Mary Ann Hall. Mr. Jackson's hobbies include reading and golf.

SILVIA PALLOTTA  
July 6, 1977

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INTERVIEWEE: MR. CLINGAN JACKSON  
INTERVIEWER: Emmett C. Shaffer  
SUBJECT: The Depression in Youngstown  
DATE: April 24, 1974.

- S: This is a taped interview with Mr. Clingan Jackson, political editor of The Youngstown Vindicator, conducted on April 24, 1974, by Emmett Shaffer. The subject is the Depression in Youngstown, 1933-1937. Mr. Jackson, would you discuss briefly how you got into the newspaper business?
- J: Well, I graduated from the University of Colorado in 1929. I went to work with the Ohio Edison Company and applied for a newspaper job. That fall, September of 1929, I went to work for The Vindicator. I've been there ever since.
- S: What has been your primary responsibility at The Vindicator?
- J: I was a general reporter, labor reporter, and a reporter during the 1937 steel strike. I became the political editor in 1937 and I've been that ever since.
- S: Do you recall what the relief setup was in Youngstown prior to when Franklin Roosevelt took office?
- J: Well, the Allied Council, an agency of the Community Corporation, handled relief and by 1933 or before, there were some fifteen thousand families in Youngstown alone, on relief. The burden became tremendously heavy for private handling and that's how the government came to get into it. The state government got into relief during the administration of Governor George White. Governor Martin Davey's administration made considerable appropriations for relief in the county. Now, the County relief setup was, of course, on a subdivision basis. Up until 1935--the Welfare Act

was passed in 1935--I was the author for the act providing for county welfare departments in Ohio. Work relief projects were devised as the number of unemployed increased. Drastic efforts were made to create employment. Many of the projects were trivial, leaf raking, et cetera. The things these workers were doing didn't seem to be too worthwhile.

S: How much did they pay?

J: Well, as I recall, they paid about fifty cents an hour, or something like that. It was a very small sum, just enough to live on. That was the idea.

S: How did the unemployables get relief if they could not find work?

J: Well, they were still handled in the same manner as they had always been handled, through the relief set-up.

S: Where did relief money come from?

J: As I remember Youngstown took some money that had been originally provided for the Erie Grade elimination and used it for relief purposes. The Ohio General Assembly took money out of the Gasoline fund for relief. Periodically during those years, the legislature was called into session. For example, in the Davey administration, we were called into special session to find money for relief, and we were asked by the governor how much money we needed. I doubled what he asked, turned it in, and we got it.

S: What did he ask for?

J: Exactly \$200,000 and I asked for \$400,000. Of course, all that was spent and had to be accounted for.

S: What year was this?

J: That would be around 1935 or 1936. This process had been going on for some time. They were having frequent sessions of the legislature and they'd find a few million and distribute it principally to the largest counties, where they had the most severe relief problems. Jisadore Feuer, who was relief head here in the 1930s and later, gave me the estimate of how much money we needed here. What I did was in line with legislative practice, and we raised that amount. We could see the situation and we got as much as we could. It did put the Mahoning County Relief Administration on a good basis and it was able to stay in the black from then on.

S: This was in 1935?

J: I think it was in 1935.

S: Did Mahoning County or Youngstown get any money from the federal government?

J: I think that the direct relief came through the state. The state government and the local government provided relief money. The federal government came through with money for the CWA, the Civil Works Administration. The WPA was a little more sophisticated work program and quite a few buildings were built and fixed up under WPA. I believe that the Lowellville City Hall is a WPA project. Then, PWA came along, which was still a little more sophisticated than the WPA and it involved projects that took time for planning and that sort of thing. But the CWA program was a program of projects that somebody virtually pulled out of their head and started. I remember one of the complaints was that these projects drained the ditches so much that the water all ran away instead of soaking into the ground. I've heard complaints that one reason that the water level dropped was because of CWA. It cleaned out everything so much that the water didn't soak in, it ran off.

S: Did these relief efforts assist the people in surviving?

J: Yes, the people survived very well. There was very rarely what you'd call a case of starvation. I never remember in the 1930s covering but one absolute case of starvation. It was a man, a rural man, who was too proud to accept any relief and really starved and died.

S: Are there any people that are still alive that you can recommend for other interviews on the relief efforts in Youngstown or Mahoning County?

J: Well, there were quite a number of people involved. If you catch anybody my age who lived here at the time, they probably could tell you what was going on.

S: Do you have names of the officials that administered these agencies?

J: Raymond A. Noble came in and headed the relief and the CWA. I do not know where he is now, but he had an office in the Mahoning Bank and they were up all night putting people to work, and I do know that they put people to work regardless of race, religion, or color, or political affiliation. At that time we were closer together than we are now. It was a matter of human survival and people improvised and a lot of people lived simply and there wasn't as much trouble as you think, although there was some and everybody was worried where their next meal was coming from. Somehow or another, we usually managed to eat.

S: Was there any corruption or political favoritism in the relief program whatsoever?

- J: Well, I think that it was at a minimum during the more hectic days of trouble. Sometimes people live up to their better selves when there is a real crisis. There has been some corruption in relief, I suppose. I think, generally, it came as more affluency appeared and there was really less need for relief. I think, in those days, people didn't stop to think of playing favorites or anything of that kind. There were some people who by their nature were graspiers than others and you had to watch or they got a lion's share of the relief and others didn't get any. You always had that problem.
- S: Harry Hopkins threatened to close down all federal funds to support the Mahoning County Relief program based on a statement that was allegedly made by Mr. Farrell, who was perhaps the County Democratic commissioner. Do you remember this?
- J: Yes. John J. Farrell was Democratic county chairman.
- S: Are you familiar with that case?
- J: No, I'm not familiar with that case. I don't remember that episode as having been very exciting. I remember when Governor Davey declared that if Hopkins ever came into Ohio, he'd jail him. There were some fights between the state government and Hopkins.
- S: Do you recall the details of that?
- J: Well, Hopkins came to Ohio and Davey didn't do anything about it. They worked it out. There was an argument over relief and how to handle it, I guess.
- S: Was it a political argument?
- J: No. Davey and Farrell and Hopkins were all of the same party, Democratic.
- S: What kind of documents do you think could be found on the relief program in Youngstown?
- J: I think the examination of the newspapers of the time would give you a very clear picture of what went on.
- S: Where would information about Allied Council relief be found?
- J: Reports on the Allied Council appeared in the newspapers. I suspect that the best record of what the Allied Council did is in the newspapers.
- S: Are these probably in the morgue in The Vindicator?

- J: They're in the public library and I think they may also be in the University library, on microfilm.
- S: Overall, how did the New Deal affect the relief program in Youngstown? What did it do? Was it a worthwhile effort or mistake, in your opinion? What was your judgment on that?
- J: Well, the government is never efficient in a democracy. As far as the New Deal was concerned, I think that America generally felt that Franklin Roosevelt, when he took office inspired a new confidence in government, and generally people refer to his statement, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." He went on and closed the banks, all of them, and later began to reopen them.
- S: You said that they closed the banks?
- J: Afterward they used Scrip for a while for payments. The police, the firemen, and the school teachers frequently were working without pay. They sometimes sold their pass-books in banks and savings and loan companies at a discount. As some banks were reopened, things got back on their feet and things began to move, but the economy was at a slow pace really, up until the beginning of the second world war.
- S: What do you think would happen if there was another Depression in Youngstown?
- J: Well, I don't know. People can take a lot more than you think. One thing that I do know is that in the midst of the Depression, you could walk all around the downtown streets at three or four o'clock in the morning with relative safety, where you couldn't walk today.
- S: Do you think the Depression would be accepted as it was in 1933?
- J: I'm afraid that it wouldn't, but I belong to a different generation and maybe if faced with a problem that it was faced with then, people would respond. I'm sure that a good many of them would. I can't quite imagine people accepting what they did now with the little commotion and embroiling that they did then.
- S: Was Mark Moore a mayor?
- J: Mark Moore was elected mayor in 1931, but before that there was Mayor Joseph L. Heffernan. Soup kitchens and flop houses had been opened in Youngstown. One of the real high tides of the Depression was the Decoration Day riot, I believe in 1931, in which the communists had paraded in downtown Youngstown. There was a riot along Basin Street

and Andrews Avenue. We then had police on horseback. I think some seventy-seven people were taken to hospitals. That's when the first communists came around here. After that, William Z. Foster spoke on Central Square. There was considerable communist agitation going on.

S: Was Heffernan a Democrat?

J: Yes.

S: Was Moore a Democrat?

J: Yes.

S: Who came after Moore?

J: Lionel Evans, in 1935. He was Republican. The mayors of Youngstown, however, were not elected as Democrats or Republicans at that time. From 1923 to 1943, the mayors of Youngstown were elected on non-partisan tickets under the charter. Usually there was a Republican candidate that the parties supported. The Democratic party supported Heffernan and the Republicans supported Evans.

S: Did labor unions do anything to help these laid-off workers in Youngstown?

J: At the outbreak of the Depression here, the labor unions were very weak. I think that they did what they could within the limits of their capacity. But outside of the craft unions, and such organizations and the few units of the Amalgamated Iron and Steel Workers, most of the workers of the Youngstown area were either not unionized or in company unions. Some of the company unions tried to help, too.

S: Did the companies help their unemployed workers in any way?

J: A good many of the companies did.

S: How did they do that?

J: Well, they did it by rotating work to give everyone a little bit of work. The school districts, for the most part, would not employ a married woman as a teacher, the idea being that the breadwinner only in the family had employment. That was the first consideration. The companies, on the whole, paid attention to giving some work to the breadwinner first. In a good many cases the companies helped in getting credit for a good many people. A lot of what they did you never hear about, where they guaranteed grocery bills and things like that. That varied from one company to another. Of course, the companies themselves were in bad shape financially, a good many of them at the time.



- S: The Vindicator enlargement in 1933 mentioned that Ohio Edison and City Council were arguing over a one cent reduction in electrical rates for the consumer. How was that ever resolved, if it was ever resolved?
- J: Well, the electrical power rates are regulated by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and they operate under franchises governed by the city councilmen and there were arguments between the city councilmen and the utilities every time rates were considered. How this individual one was decided, I do not know.
- S: Could you go into a little bit about the steel strike in 1937? What do you know about it?
- J: Well, the first steel unions organized here in the Depression came with the establishment of the NRA. The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel and Tin Workers sent organizers here and they set up two or three unions. They didn't really get anywhere. The company unions were operating at the time. Then in 1935, the CIO was formed and the United Mine Workers was the principal union in it and mine workers came in to organize under the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. The CIO under John Lewis hired some Communist organizers to aid in organizing the steelworkers. One of the most famous of these organizers came to Youngstown. He was Gus Hall and Steubens or Stevenson, whichever you prefer, came in here organizing. John L. Mayo, a United Mine Workers man, came here to head the SWOC effort. The Little Steel strike was called in Youngstown at Moore auditorium, which is torn down now. It was on West Boardman Street. The steelworkers unions met there and Philip Murray came to call the strike there. That was the strike in Little Steel. I was at that meeting. There were about nine hundred there at the time the strike was called, under the direction of John Mayo, a United Mine Workers man on leave to organize the United Steel Workers. Many steel locals here were being formed, among them 1330, now the Ohio Works; 1331, Republic; 1418, Campbell, and I think there's still one 2162, the Brier Hill. Many other locals were spawned later, but the 1418, 1331 and the 1330 were kind of the basic unions formed. John L. Mayo was the district head of the Steelworkers Organizing Committee during the strike here, but Philip Murray was here frequently and some other big leaders of the United Steel Workers.
- S: Were there any local members?
- J: Well, some local union presidents were. They got active during the strike period. Some of them became staff representatives of the United Steel Workers local. Most of them are gone now, but there are still some of them left, of the original ones.
- S: Do you remember Griffin's work?

J: Jim Griffin was first a teamster organizer and later joined the steelworkers. The truth was that the mine-workers in leave provided the administrative know-how to get the steelworkers organized.

S: Was there any violence involved in the organizing of the steelworkers?

J: Oh, yes. The steel strike brought some violence. Well, they went on strike, they picketed the mills and tried to prevent anybody from going in or out and there were reports that they had interfered with mail trucks and they had some shootings and deaths. Ed Salt, a Vindicator photographer was shot and wounded on Poland Avenue and I took him to the hospital through a barricade. I spent the night later at the steelworkers' hall down there. Gus Hall was there and every time you set your hand out the door, somebody shot at it. I didn't get out until the next day at about eleven o'clock. It was a pretty tough time.

On the way returning to the picket line during the riot of Poland Avenue in 1937 I went down the hill to Poland Avenue in my car and everybody was carrying clubs, crow-bars, some five feet long. I was coming down that hill, my car in the crowd of determined strikers could move only slowly.

S: Were these soldiers or were these labor people?

J: Labor people. The battle was over the right to organize, basically. The Guard was called after the disturbance.

S: Is there anything else of significance which I may pick up by contacting someone else?

J: Well, I think when you talk to a fellow like me you'll find something out, but basically, if you want to find the facts, you have to go back to the records of the time. I don't think there's a newspaper or publication that has a record of the Little Steel strike that could compare to The Vindicator. We were at the center of it and we kept a close, daily watch on it and verified our facts pretty closely.

END OF INTERVIEW