

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Mecca, Ohio

Township History

O. H. 112

RALPH CALVIN DONEGAN

Interviewed

by

Beth Hanuschak

on

April 24, 1979

RALPH CALVIN DONEGAN

Ralph Donegan was born in 1906 in Burghill, Ohio. His father, Charles, died when he was eight and his mother, Rose, died when he was eleven. The four children, including himself, were all split up. None of the children were adopted. Mr. Donegan went to live with a family in Howland Corners. His brothers and sisters finally got together twenty years after they all had separated.

Mr. Donegan entered Howland Centralized School and graduated in 1924 in a class of sixteen. He began work as a farmer immediately after high school. He moved to Mecca in 1927 when he became acquainted with Frank Graham. They became partners and began a sheet metal business. His business is very successful with clients being mostly farmers. He retired April 1, 1968. In 1949, Mr. Donegan was elected Trustee of Mecca and served for the next twenty years.

Mr. Donegan married Doris M. Graham in 1936. They have no children. Mrs. Donegan's mother, Nellie Graham, lives with them.

Mr. Donegan's interests include hunting, flower gardening and reading. He presently is a member of the Ohio State and Trumbull County Trustees Association and the Northeastern Ohio Beef and Improvement Committee.

Beth Hanuschak

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INTERVIEWEE: RALPH CALVIN DONEGAN

INTERVIEWER: Beth Hanuschak

SUBJECT: Township History

DATE: April 24, 1979

H: This is an interview with Mr. Ralph Calvin Donegan for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Beth Hanuschak on April 24, 1979. The subject is the history of Mecca, Ohio.

Mr. Donegan, I understand that you were born in Burghill, Ohio. Tell me a little bit about Burghill before moving to Mecca.

D: Well, I went to Vernon School. Burghill is in Vernon Township and I went to Vernon schools for five years and my father died when I was eight years old and my mother when I was eleven. I wasn't ever adopted; I just went to live with a family named Ewalt at Howland Corners, and I started to Howland School when I was in the sixth grade and graduated from Howland in 1924.

H: Okay, what was your father's name?

D: Charles Eugene Donegan.

H: And your mother's name?

D: Rose.

H: I'm sorry to hear that they had died so early. Why? What happened?

D: Well, my father more or less had a heart attack and my mother died from an appendix operation.

H: Is that right?

D: Yes.

H: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

D: I have two sisters and two brothers. One sister lives in Florida, one brother in Warren, and one sister is dead and one brother is dead.

H: Are you the oldest or the youngest?

D: Second in the family. The sister in Florida is older than I am.

H: That must have been a very traumatic experience for you. Was your whole family split up?

D: We were all split up and none of us were adopted. We were just farmed out, and we never all got together again, all four of us children, until I had an aunt in Braceville [that] died and we all went to the funeral, and that was probably twenty years after we had separated. Now, we'd seen each one individually but we had never all been together at one time.

H: You keep saying "farmed out"; what does that exactly mean? I never heard that expression before.

D: Well, I never knew this family. Never heard of them or seen them before I went there, and they took me in. They had a farm and they had about a dozen cows and I had to milk cows and we had a cream separator and I separated the milk, and twice a week I churned the butter before I went to school. And, that's how I earned my board and clothes.

H: Oh boy, you had to go to work at a very early age. So then you were farmed out and you went to Howland. Right?

D: Yes.

H: And you lived with these people. What was it like? Was it hard for you to get adjusted? All of a sudden you have a new family.

D: Well, yes, it was but I don't know. It didn't seem so hard for me because there was quite a lot of other kids around there my age, and they all just took to

me and I took to them and I'd say within six months or a year that I was pretty well established after I moved down there.

H: I see. So then you started school, elementary school. Was it called Howland at the time?

D: Yes.

H: Was that a centralized school, a district school? How was that?

D: No. It was a centralized school but Howland had had district schools up until 1917. That was the first year they had a centralized school. When I graduated in 1924 there were sixteen in the class, twelve boys and four girls. That's a little unusual! And then, after I graduated, I worked on a farm for two years and then I started to fire a steam boiler in a sawmill and that's how I got to Mecca. A fellow I worked for bought a piece of timber north of West Mecca and I went up there and fired the boiler until, well, that was in January and the mill shut down in July, we had too much lumber ahead. So, then I met my future father-in-law and he was a sheet metal man and I went into the sheet metal business with him.

H: Let's go back a little bit and take a step at a time. What can you remember about elementary school? What was it like in the teen's [of the] 1900s to go to school? What was it like? What were your friends like? Do you remember any of them? Do you remember any names?

D: Oh yes. Some of the boys' names in my class, Edward Swager was in my class, Charles Swager and the girls' name was Nellie Close and Emma Heckathorn and Mabel Clark, Thelma Boyd was all the girls that was in there. But basketball was just starting more or less then and we had a pretty fair basketball team. We never won a tournament. We got as far as the semi-finals a couple of times but . . .

H: Did you play?

D: Yes, I played guard. But the schools were different then than they were today.

H: How?

D: Well, I think there was more discipline in the schools then, and of course, I don't think your classes were

so large and your teachers had a little more time to spend with the pupils. I don't think when I was in high school that we had a class that had over fifteen in it, eighteen in it at the most. We didn't have too many teachers in high school. We had a superintendent.

H: His name was?

D: Edgar Crawford and the principal was Marcus McEvoy. Maybe you've heard of McEvoy. He was from Niles. He was superintendent of Howland after Crawford quit. And then I think we had three lady teachers, a Miss Richardson and a Miss McGee and I can't tell you what the other lady teacher's name was, it was a funny name. Five teachers is all we had.

H: Is that right?

D: There probably wasn't over sixty in the whole high school at that time. So it didn't need over five teachers.

H: Is there any particular incident that stands out in your mind about high school or elementary? Were you bad? Were you a problem child?

D: No, no. I was a good kid in school.

H: Good kid?

D: I never had to stand in the corner, never got a licking in school. I was a littly shy in school. I wasn't afraid of the teachers but I respected them.

H: So you graduated in 1924. Did you want to go on to college or did you go on to college?

D: No, I didn't go on to College. I could have, I guess, because there was a fellow [that] interviewed me one day to go to college but I don't know. At that time I didn't want to go to college. I didn't know what I wanted to be and so I just wasn't too interested in it.

H: You graduated during what is called, supposedly, the Roaring Twenties.

D: Yes!

H: Did that phase you at all? I hear people talking about speakeasies and gambling and liquor and the

flappers. Did that affect you out here because Howland is just a couple communities over?

D: No, no it didn't . . . of course we were close to Niles and close to Warren but there were speakeasies in Warren but not so many right at that time because, well, I guess there was too when I was in high school. When I first started down there things were, of course, awful quiet. People didn't have automobiles. They couldn't go very far. Automobiles were just coming into being and you couldn't get away from home. The only way you had to go was a horse and buggy or else walk. But by the time I got into high school why, there was a few automobiles around and of course, then, we could get to Warren. But the one year we had a basketball tournament and our superintendent took us to Warren in an old Buick touring car and we got in a streetcar in Warren and rode to Leavittsburg to play basketball and when the games was over, we got on the streetcar and come back to Warren and the superintendent picked us up and brought us back to school.

H: Did you work immediately? Right after high school you went right to work?

D: Oh, yes. Yes. Well, I worked all through high school.

H: Right.

D: In fact, I stayed on the farm where I was for two years after I got out of high school and then I got this job in the sawmill.

H: What were your social events? During high school say your senior year then right after, what did you do socially? Dances?

D: Well, not too many dances. There was a dance hall at Howland Springs but the kids didn't go too much. But of course, we played basketball and us boys, we'd go over and do a lot of fishing and swimming.

H: Where at?

D: In Mosquito Creek.

H: Yes.

D: Down where Durig's Garden Center is, the Creek right there's where we used to swim.

H: Right.

D: Yes, and we used to do a lot of fishing in there and our Sunday School teacher used to take us up to Milton Dam once a year. That had just been built during the war and it was quite a site at that time and we used to go up there about once a summer. And as far as excitement, you just had to create your own because you couldn't get away to find any excitement.

H: So you worked on the farm two years after high school. Now that was still in Howland, is that correct?

D: Yes.

H: Okay, then you decided to move out here to Mecca, right?

D: Well, I got a job in this sawmill.

H: Where is the sawmill at?

D: Was north of West Mecca and I didn't want to drive from Howland. By that time I had an automobile, a Model T. But I had to drive. I was boarding in Howland and it was a long drive up there because 88 was a mud road across the lake at that time. In fact, they were building--the first county hard-top road--they were building it at that time. So we had to go to Cortland and go across to Bazetta Road and of course, at that time it seemed a long way so I got boarded up there. Then after I started to board there, I never left Mecca again.

H: How much did you pay to board?

D: I remember it was eight dollars a week!

H: Eight dollars a week?

D: Yes!

H: Was it a house?

D: Yes.

H: Was that kind of fun?

D: Yes.

H: Was it?

- D: Yes. Well, we boarded around quite a few different places. Oh, I guess we were on about four different jobs when I was firing that boiler but we always boarded where we could, right close to the mill.
- H: Yes. That's very interesting. So you stayed up there and boarded up there. When did you decide to buy permanently or to make--"This is going to be my home from now on"--when did you make that move?
- D: Well, I got married in 1936, in May, and we bought this place here in April of 1937.
- H: How much did you pay for it, if you don't mind me asking?
- D: (laughter)
- H: Do you remember what it was because the property you have out here today is just unbelievable.
- D: Oh, I don't know. I think it was around forty-six hundred dollars. Of course, the house isn't what it is now and that shop wasn't out there and the garage wasn't there. But, no, the property was cheap then to what it is now.
- H: Sure is.
- D: And then the lake came along in 1944 and took three acres off of me.
- H: How many acres did you have here when you bought it in 1937?
- D: Eight.
- H: Oh, you had eight. Eight acres.
- D: Yes. Then the lake came along and took three acres off of the back.
- H: Now, this house was not here. You built this home?
- D: This was here but it was just one floor and I put the top on it.
- H: What can you tell me about the house? Is there a little history to the house?
- D: Well, this house was built across the road and it was moved over here.

H: Really?

D: Yes.

H: Who originally owned it then?

D: Bert Baldwin. The reason it was moved here, our well out here was drilled for an oil well.

H: Mercy Oil here in Mecca.

D: And they didn't hit oil so the well was there. These old people knew the well was there, well, their son lived [in] the next house, Mays. So they bought this house from Bert Baldwin and moved it across the road because the well was right here.

H: Did you ever find oil?

D: There's oil here, yes, but Mecca Oil's not too valuable. (laughter)

H: Right, right. It was good for lubricants and that nature.

D: Oh, yes. Yes.

H: Right. You moved here in 1937. How did you afford forty-six hundred during the Depression? How did that bother you? Here in this area, how did the Depression hit Mecca?

D: Well, it hit but of course, I was self-employed. Well, with my father-in-law and I were in the sheet metal business together and we managed to get enough work to keep both our families. And of course, I had to borrow a little money to buy the place but we eventually paid it off.

H: Did you have to go without?

D: No.

H: No?

D: No. Well, I think we were rather fortunate because we were self-employed and we did a lot, most of our work was for farmers and, of course, the farmers had a little income all the time. Not too much but it wasn't like people that worked in town. They had no work at all. So most of our sheet metal work we did was for farmers.

H: What did you do for them?

D: Well, we put in furnaces; we put on spouting, put on metal roofs. Anything you wanted made out of sheet metal, we would make it in our shop. At that time we, oh, we had to make coal buckets and washtubs and milk pails. There was a lot of wood stoves and coal stoves, heating stoves then. There wasn't too many furnaces around at that time and they all had to have a new smoke pipe about every two years so we made smoke pipes and anything you wanted, we made out of sheet metal.

H: What did you charge for things, do you remember? What were your prices at that time, in the 1930s? For example, you said a milk bucket?

D: Oh, I imagine we'd make a milk bucket probably for \$1.25.

H: Is that right?

D: Yes.

H: My goodness.

D: After I retired we cleaned the shop out there and there was a lot of old invoices in there and I found one where I had bought a thousand feet of five inch half round eave trough for fifty-five dollars. I bought a thousand feet of Youngstown Furnace Company, wholesale, for fifty-five dollars.

H: Fifty-five dollars! Unbelievable.

D: For a thousand feet and then we hung it for twenty-two cents a foot, soldered it together and hung it for twenty-two cents a foot. And today it's around a \$1.50 a foot.

H: How long were you in this business?

D: Well, I started in 1927.

H: Here in Mecca, that's where you started.

D: Yes.

H: Okay.

D: And I've been retired eleven years. I quit in 1968. So how many years you got there? About forty-one years I was in this.

H: Now, where was your shop located? Is it this building right here?

D: This building right here. We had one in Cortland for a while until the war. Then we had to close it up during the war and then I come up there and built this one. I built this one in 1954, I built this shop out here.

H: Is it still operating?

D: No.

H: No. The business is now just closed down.

D: Yes. I sold the tools and we just use it, well, as a garage and [for] storage.

H: What can you remember about, for example, delivering milk buckets or putting up spouting. Are there any amusing stories that had taken place from the people you sold to? I was talking to Bill Falkner and he was telling me that--his father owned the store up there--and the one time this lady, they were exchanging goods and she gives him a rock instead of . . .it was wrapped in a piece of bread.

D: (laughter)

H: Were there any things like that that happened to you? Did you have to barter with people at all?

D: Well, yes. A lot of times we would go out and maybe a person would have a sugar camp. . . In the spring of the year, we made a lot of sap equipment. You gather sap and make maple syrup. Pans and gathering tanks and lids to put over the buckets and we would make a sap pan or a gathering tank and then maybe we would take, oh, two or three gallons of syrup for pay. We never had anything too exciting happen. One day we was putting in a furnace and we was cutting holes in the floor in the house. We told this woman, "We're going to cut some holes in the floor so you be careful!" First thing we heard a racket and wham, her one foot comes down in one of them holes!

H: Oh, my goodness. Is that right?

D: Yes. I guess that was about the most exciting thing that ever happened.

H: How many people did you have working for you?

- D: Oh, I think the most we ever had at one time was probably four, maybe five, that is, with the two of us. About five.
- H: In other words, you paid the people that worked for you? Did you pay them hourly?
- D: Yes. Oh, gee, I don't know. I think, we started in and we paid around ninety cents an hour. That is, I'd say maybe after the 1940s, 1945 and on in there. And then it just kept going up and up and up until I don't know just exactly what we did pay at the tail end but I think the first help that we hired was around ninety cents an hour.
- H: What did Mecca look like then? When you started to open up your business, which there's not that many businesses in this area. What did Mecca look like? Was it still all just farmland?
- D: Well, at that time, it was all farmland and every farm here had dairy cows and they milked.
- H: Then that was a good portion of your business?
- D: Oh, our business was practically all farmers. Then they had a milk check coming in every week and so they did have a little money coming in and that's the way we got paid.
- H: So when we look at the 1930s then for you, nothing really major. You had to suffer along with others.
- D: With all the rest.
- H: Rationing. Gas rationing and maybe some food coupons and had to go without sugar for a little bit or what have you. Did your business pick up with the beginning of World War II? Did your business pick up at all? Were you involved? Did you have to do anything?
- D: Well, see we were in Cortland, had a shop in Cortland and we had to close it in 1941 on account of the war.
- H: Why would you have to close it on account of the war?
- D: Well, I went down to Warren and made Sherman army tanks during the war. I worked three years and made army tanks.
- H: So you didn't have to fight?

- D: No, I was a little too old to go to the Army. I was thirty-seven years old. I think if the war would have lasted longer I probably would have gone but I went down there and worked at Federal Machine and Welder and made those tanks. Of course there was probably six hundred men working there, but I worked and made Army tanks and then my father-in-law, we were together down there and he went to work at American Welder and then he went to work at Packard. Then after the war, he kept on at Packard and then I took the business over by myself and that's when I built this shop out here.
- H: What were your views on the war? How did it affect you, when you were living here? Did your neighbors fight?
- D: No.
- H: Did you know anybody personally that went?
- D: Well, yes. When we were in Cortland, the draft was on and we had two young boys working for us. Well, they was eighteen, nineteen years old and the one boy--well, they both enlisted--and the one boy got in the Air Force and they were hauling freight with planes over the "Hump." Do you remember what they called the "Hump?" And they had taken a load over and they were coming back and they just got in the air and the enemy shot the plane down and killed him. That was one of the boys that worked for us. His name was Delmar Workman.
- H: Was Mecca involved in the war effort? Did they realize, because being out here in strictly their own community, strictly a little farm community, did they have a concept of what was going on? Were they very much into the war? Everyone knew that this war was going on.
- D: Oh, yes. I think they did because the schoolhouse was over in where the lake is now and everybody I think up to the age of maybe about sixty had to go over to the schoolhouse and register. They set up a registration there and every man, I think up to the age of sixty, had to register. So, they knew the war was on. And then I think the worst thing probably was the shortage of gasoline when the war was on because there was rations and you had coupons and when you used your coupons you was out of gas. That's all.

- H: I would think that would really affect them out here.
- D: Oh, it would.
- H: The tractors and so much farming.
- D: Well, there weren't too many tractors then.
- H: Is that right?
- D: There weren't too many tractors on the farms then. Very, very few tractors. One night it was about nine o'clock, ten o'clock; it was cold in the wintertime. A fellow come to the door here and rapped. I went to the door and I knew him. He lived up Colebrook and he had run out of gas right down the road here, I guess he'd run out of tickets and he was on his way home. So he wanted to know if I had any gas. All I had was what was in the car so I siphoned him out two gallons of gas and put it in his car and away he went. But I think that was the worst thing that we had to put up during the war, was the gas shortage. But it really never affected us because we had all we wanted as far as that goes.
- H: Did you farm at all out here?
- D: Yes.
- H: You farmed?
- D: You see, my mother-in-law owns the adjoining place, so I used to always keep cattle here and farm both places, beef cattle. I kept about ten head there until the last two years, I haven't had any cattle.
- H: Right. Then in the 1940s, the government, state takes away Mosquito Creek and builds the Mosquito Reservoir. What were your feelings on that? Were you glad to see that happen?
- D: Oh, I don't know whether I was or not. They took three acres of this place. I hated to lose that.
- H: They paid you for it?
- D: Yes, they paid me seventy-five dollars an acre, at that time, but a lot of them wouldn't settle with them.
- H: Why?

D: They wouldn't pay enough. I think there was seventy-five around the lake that wouldn't settle. So, they had a Federal Court in Cleveland. One day they called in about six of them to go up to have a trial, to see whether the government would pay them more or whether they would pay them less or take what they had. So this one fellow owned a hundred acres up here.

H: What was his name?

D: Joe Gleeton and they offered him eighteen hundred dollars for a hundred acres of ground and Joe wouldn't settle, so they tried his case and he wanted me to go up as a witness. So I went up to Cleveland with him and he would settle for twenty-six hundred. And they tried one case--a fellow by the name of Jess Green, had a farm over on the other side of the lake--and they tried one case, it was before a jury and they lost it. The government lost it. So they called everybody in to settle with them, but they lost that one case.

H: Is that right?

D: Yes.

H: Did everyone get then what they wanted? Just about?

D: Yes. And no one was asking too much because this hundred acres that Joe had up there, twenty-six dollars an acre wasn't too much for it and they offered him eighteen. They tried one case and they lost it so they called everybody in to settle. So I think everybody actually got what they wanted. But you couldn't fight them because they come along and you had to sign a paper that if they wanted to take a piece of heavy machinery right down through your yard, they could do it. Anytime of the year, if they cut a rut a foot deep, you couldn't do anything about it because you had to sign a paper that they could do that.

H: Why did they want to build that?

D: Well, it was built during the war.

H: Why?

D: And they claimed that the mills down in the valley needed the water.

H: Did you believe that? Did you agree with that?

D: Well, yes, in a way, I think they needed it because it was Republic Steel and all the mills down through Youngstown and of course, this went into the Mahoning. But that water, I don't think it ever got under a hundred degrees in temperature, even in the winter-time. And it was so hot that they had to do something. I think it was the mills needed it more then than they do now. You see, it was during the war and they was all working full capacity and I really think maybe they needed it then. But, I don't know, I think in a way it's maybe been a good thing for the township. It took just a third of the township. But the valuation was, oh, my goodness, I think the valuation back then was probably, well, maybe between two and three million and today I don't know. I'd say it's twenty million today because there has been a lot of new building around this lake. So, even though we lost a third of our ground which we get no taxes or anything from, why, I think it was a good thing for the township.

H: Did it bring people closer together? I've heard so many people tell me about the conflicts that went on between East Mecca and West Mecca. What can you tell me about that? A lot of people I've talked with have told me.

D: Well, you see, they always had a school on the east side and a school on the west side and up until I guess 1927 they built a centralized school, just west of Mosquito Creek Bridge. And I guess there was some conflict. Of course, that was just about the time I came up here so I don't know just too much about that. But they built that and I guess that brought them a little closer together. Well, then when the lake come in, why then they had to come over to the East side and build this school. Of course, there was a little bit of a conflict then because the west side wanted it over there and the east side wanted it over here, but they eventually put it over here. But I think now that that's all gone and forgotten.

H: That was my next question.

D: I think it's all gone and forgotten. In 1949 I was elected trustee here.

H: Of Mecca?

D: Yes, and at that time, we had a town hall on the west side and a town hall on the east side and one month

we would meet on the west side and the next meeting would be on the east side and we would alternate back and forth that way. And that went along until probably ten years. I was a trustee for twenty years. Then probably in ten years they widened Bazetta Road and they widened 88. Our town hall on the west side sat right in that southwest corner and they took so much land off of each corner that we had to sell the town hall because they were going to take it. So then we held our meetings on the east side. So I don't think there's any strife now between the east and west but I guess at one time there was. As I say, this new schoolhouse started in 1927 and that's when I came up here and I think that settled a little bit of the strife.

H: What made you interested in political life? You were a trustee; what made you interested in being involved in that?

D: Oh, I don't know. I actually hadn't thought nothing about running for trustee and Frank Benton and a fellow named Guy Erwin came over here one night and wanted to know if I'd run for trustee and I said, "Oh, I don't know, maybe I would," so I run and I got it and it was very interesting. So after my first four year term was up I thought well, I'll try it again and I was in twenty years and I--I'm not bragging--but obviously if I would have run for the sixth term, I would have got it. But I figured twenty years was enough. Let somebody else have it!

H: Right.

D: When I went in as trustee, the cemeteries weren't too well taken care of and there wasn't a hardtop road in the township. Now, there was a state road that was hardtop but the township roads weren't. So, I kind of thought well now that I got in to be trustee, I'll get some hardtop roads. So, the first year I was in, we put a mile of road in. It was the north end of Phillips-Rice Road over here north of 88. That was the first hardtop road Mecca Township had was a mile of road up there. And in the cemeteries, there were a lot of the stones that fell over, and they let the grass grow; they couldn't get nobody to mow them. So, we got a fellow that set all the stones back up and we bought a power lawn mower and we advertised for bids to mow the cemeteries. And I will say that I think since I was trustee, that the cemeteries have always been kept up nice. Even after I got out of office, the existing trustees kept them up nice. But

I've seen a time when there was grass up there knee-high in them cemeteries. And just about that time too, the legislature in Columbus passed a law that the trustees could use township money to keep cemeteries up. So that helped out a lot right there.

H: Did you know what you were going to get yourself into? Did you know anything at all about local government?

D: Well, yes I did because when I lived in Howland, I lived with a fellow that was a trustee down there. Of course, at that time, the trustees--this was in the 1920s--if there was a poor family in the township, the trustees of that township had to take care of that family, see that they had food and one thing or other. And I learned a little bit from him, but of course at the time I was trustee, why, the welfare had gone to the county or the state or somebody else. But back at that time it was up to the trustees. If a family didn't have food or clothes, it was up to the trustees to see that they got them.

H: I know I've read a lot of accounts where they want to get rid of those people. They'd ship them on to the next community because they knew they had to take care of them.

D: Well, there was at one time, if you were on welfare and lived in the state of Ohio and you could get a better deal in Pennsylvania, you couldn't move to Pennsylvania to get that but now you can. They passed a law now that if you're on welfare and you decide you want to live in California why, you can move to California and be on welfare. I think that's the law today.

H: What was the most important thing you feel that you did for Mecca as a trustee in those twenty years? What was the thing that you felt most rewarded and did the most good for the community?

D: Well, I think that probably the biggest thing that happened while I was trustee was that we got the fire department. There was no fire department when I went in. I went in 1949 and we got the fire department in, around 1959 I'd say. Of course now, I wasn't all responsible for that. We all worked together on it but it did happen while I was trustee.

H: You say, "we". Who were some of the men you served with?

D: Well, there was at that time, Faye Millikin was a trustee and Fred Shohayda was a trustee.

H: He still is, isn't he?

D: Yes.

H: I thought so. So you really enjoyed it then?

D: Yes, after we got it started, then the younger boys, well, they were men, but I mean probably, I don't think we had anyone on the fire department probably over thirty-five when it started. But when they found out we were going to start a fire department, these men went together and they formed this Volunteer Fire Department and in that we had a mason, and we had carpenters and we had electricians that joined it. So, we worked with them and we put a two mill levy on the ballot and it passed so we worked with the volunteer department and they said if we would furnish the material, they would do all the labor. So that's how we got our first Fire Department Building. The trustees furnished the material and the Volunteer Fire Department built it.

H: That was probably the most important thing that was good that happened to you. What was the worst thing? What was the thing you most hated about being a trustee out here?

D: Line fences. If you had two neighbors that was fighting over a line fence, we would have to go and settle it. We had one on the west side. They were having trouble. So, we sent both men a registered letter that we would have a meeting on a certain night.

H: Can you give me their names?

D: Well, I shouldn't I guess. They're both dead and gone now but anyhow . . .

H: Okay, go ahead.

D: But anyhow, they were both there. Well we started to tell them what we would do: that we would measure the fence and we would split it in the middle and they would decide whether they wanted woven wire or barbed wire or what they wanted. Although barbed wire wasn't legal if either one did want it. It had to be woven wire. So we had everything pretty well under control and this one man spoke up and says, "Hey, did you know

that farm is not in my name?" Well, that was something else. So, I said, "Whose name is it in?" "Well," he said, "You just find out whose name it's in." So, the clerk and I, Bill Grove, went to Warren the next day and we looked it up and it was in his wife's name. So, we wrote her a letter and the other man and set up another meeting. Well, they came to the meeting and here come this man back and I said, "What are you doing here?" "Well," he says, "I'm my wife's agent." So, I said, "Weren't you her agent before?" "No, No," he said, "We just fixed this up since then." Well, I said, "I just have a notion to send you home and make you bring your wife up here but I don't know but I will do it." "Oh, no, no," he said, "Don't do that." He said, "I'll do whatever you tell me to." So, we let him stay and we made out the papers and everything. Well, then he was going to sign them. "No," I said, "you can't sign that. Your wife has got to sign it." So she did sign it. But after that he done this, in fact, he took the hard part of the fence to build. He said, "I've got a bulldozer," and he said, "I can clean that brush out. I'll build that end of it." After that, that guy was always a pretty good friend of mine.

H: Is that right?

D: Yes, he was, but he made me pretty mad there for a little bit.

H: Well, I don't blame you.

D: But that was the worst fence deal that we ever got into. I think that was probably the worst thing that we had to do. Getting back to this fire department, we voted a twenty-two thousand bond issue and we built that building and bought the first fire truck for twenty-two thousand dollars. And today I think a fire truck would cost you sixty. So, I think we done a pretty good job. But the Volunteer Department deserves a lot of credit there. They did a lot of work on that building.

H: Is it volunteer today or do you have a regular . . . ?

D: No, it's volunteer today. There's not too many members in there yet that was in when it started. I'd say probably eight or ten fellows in there now [that were in there] when it started. But we had one of the best Volunteer Departments in the county at that time. Oh, they're still good and deserve a lot of credit. I think that was the most important thing that we did.

Of course as I say, we got hardtop or blacktop the roads which was a good thing. Now, they were slag roads before; they weren't mud. But they were slag and it cost a lot of money to keep them up. We had to go over them with a drag and smooth them out and then we'd have to haul slag and dump [it] on them and it cost a lot of money to keep them up. But I think the worst thing we had to do was to keep them open of snow. That was a bad job.

H: How did you do that? How did you keep them open?

D: Well, we had the truck with the snowplow in front. But my goodness, the first year I was in there it started to snow on Thanksgiving Day and it kept snowing and snowing and by the next Monday morning there was about three foot of snow and drifts four foot deep. And it took us near two days to get through two miles of road up here on this one road. It was terrible in there.

H: Did you ever want to do anything else besides trustee? Did you ever have any more political . . .

D: No.

H: That was it?

D: That was it.

H: That was the end of your political life!

D: Yes, that was as far as I wanted to go politically. Well, the trustees have a State Association and, of course a County Association and I was vice-president of the County Association for about twelve years and I was president two years of the County Association and that's when I didn't run again, wo I had to give up the presidency. I'm an honorary member of the County Association now but I couldn't hold office anymore. But that was about as far as I wanted to go politically.

H: Looking back over your years as a trustee here in Mecca, has the job of the trustee changed from when you were there as it is today? Is it pretty much the same?

D: It's practically the same thing although I think today people are a lot more demanding of the trustees than they were when I was in there. Of course there's more

people too, and that makes quite a lot of difference but I would say that it's practically the same as it was outside of maybe people are a little more demanding today.

H: Right. Getting back to your personal life, when were you married?

D: In 1936.

H: What's your wife's maiden name?

D: Graham.

H: Was she originally from Mecca?

D: Yes. She was born over beside Nora Palmer over there.

H: Oh, yes? Are her parents still living?

D: Her mother is but her father died in 1959.

H: How many children have you had?

D: We didn't have any.

H: None. Did you ever think of leaving Mecca? Are you satisfied living here now?

D: Well, yes, we've thought of leaving and still may. I don't know. We've been thinking awful strong of maybe going to Arizona. We just got back from there. We did look at some houses out there but we didn't buy one.

H: Are you pleased out here though? Do you like country living?

D: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I like it out in the country. That's one thing, if we move out there, the houses are right close together and I don't know that I'd be happy or not.

H: What do you like the most out here? The air? The space?

D: Well, the space. I don't like to be crowded in. We've got two places and we got plenty of room here to roam around and I like it here. Of course, you live in one place for forty-one years or forty-two years and you kind of get roots down there. Of course, the neighbors are all different practically

than when we moved up here. Mr. Knight up there, he lived there when we moved up here, and Ruth Chapman lived here but other than that it's practically all new people around here than when we moved here. Then of course, there's a lot of new houses in here, and that makes more people. But as far as the original people here, there's very few of them [that were] here when we moved in here in 1937.

H: Have they moved or died or a little bit of both?

D: Well, the old original farmers here they mostly have all died off. Now this Mr. Baldwin across the road, him and his wife are both dead and the Anschak lived next to us; they're both dead and Cauffields lived down where this Black Angus Farm was and of course, they're both dead.

H: Was that Lee Cauffield? No.

D: No. Lee Cauffield, he lived in Green, yes.

H: He was a teacher.

D: Yes. I don't think they were any relation to these Cauffields down here, because Lee's folks lived up in Green. Lee taught in Hartford.

H: Yes, then he went to Liberty because I had him in high school.

D: You were his student?

H: Yes.

D: Is that right? Of course when the lake went in, on this side of the road, all the farmers had to move out because the lake took their land. Now, this place next to me here, a man named Bedlion lived there and they took all of his farm but eleven acres so my father-in-law bought that place. I had already bought this one in 1937 and they bought that in 1947, I guess, 1948. This farm here, the man that owned it, he stayed a year or two and farmed it. Of course they took all of that he had then he moved away. Well him and his wife are both dead. So, the older farmers have really passed on. Well, Mr. and Mrs. Bedlion are both dead, too.

H: Are you glad to see Mecca building up as it is? I started teaching here four years ago and just in that short time, I just can't believe the houses, the people that are moving in.

D: I think it's a good thing.

H: Do you?

D: Yes, I do.

H: Why?

D: I'm glad to see it. Well, it shows that you're progressing, that you're not standing still. I think it's a good thing.

H: And property is very high out here right now.

D: Oh yes, very high.

H: Very, very expensive.

D: That's right.

H: Would you like to see industry come here?

D: No.

H: Why?

D: Oh, I don't know. If you get industry here . . . at times a good industry is all right but if times get slow, people get out of work and then what have you got? You've got a lot of people on welfare that the township has to take care of. No, I don't want to see no big industry. In fact, I don't think any will come in here as far as that goes. But, I wouldn't like to see it, no, not a big industry.

H: This circle up here, in looking over Tom Kachur's book, it used to be just so beautiful and now it's hmm; it's still nice. What do you think about the circle? What are your feelings?

D: Yes, but the kids ruined it. Well, I'd hate to see the circle go.

H: Do you think they'll ever remove it?

D: No, I don't think they'll ever remove it. But it's a good thing to be there in a way because I think it's about the only four corner of two main state highways in the county there has never been anybody killed on. That's a good thing of it. But back when I was trustee, at one time, a lot of the people came to the meetings,

they wanted a little shelter house put up in there so they could have little picnics there. We did at one time really consider it but [when] we got over and got the measurements, we would have to take too many of the trees out so we didn't do it. But I think now what they need is. . . when I was trustee, we had a constable but they don't have one now. And our constable would go up there and he would talk to them kids and he got along with them and they didn't damage things like they do now and litter the park. But we don't have a constable now and the kids, I think, do a little more vandalism now than they did back twenty years ago, too.

H: I think a lot of people don't realize the value of that and the history that goes behind it.

D: That's right.

H: Because in all the pictures that I've seen, it's just beautiful up there.

D: Well, the trees are all getting old and some of them have been taken out and the trees aren't as pretty as they used to be but I'd hate to see that park go and I don't think it ever will go. The trustees own that. They own the park and they own, well they own up in three foot of that store over in this corner. They own a square. In fact, they own right up in front of Bill Falkner's house. That little piece of yard out here belongs to the township and I don't think they'll ever, they'll ever take that park out of there.

H: Do you remember shopping at Falkner's store?

D: No, that was a little before my time.

H: A little bit before you were there.

D: A fellow by the name of Plumley, Doc Plumley had the store when I first came around here.

H: Was it a general store then?

D: A general store then, yes. Yes, then it was sold to a fellow named Pete Roth and then Steve Evans bought it and Joe Gesue owned it at one time and then after Steve left it, why then, it wasn't a store anymore; it was only a beer joint then.

H: Then in your opinion, Mecca has changed tremendously?

D: Oh yes, I'd say.

H: It was really an about face.

D: Since 1936. You wouldn't know it was the same place actually. If some of these older people would come back I don't think they'd recognize it. Especially this Phillips-Rice Road, well that's filled pretty near solid most of the way up through there and you take from 46, east to the schoolhouse, look how many houses are built in there. They've probably built this in the last few years.

H: Looking back over your life, what would you have liked to change? Would you change anything? Just taking your whole life in front of you for a second, would you change anything? Would you change living here?

D: If you clear back [to] when I was a kid, if my parents hadn't died, I would have been a railroad engineer because we lived right along the railroad tracks and in them days, everything came in by railroad. We had the eastbound local and the westbound local come in every day and, of course, I was just a kid and I was hanging around the station there and especially the guy on that one local, he kind of took a liking to me and he'd get me right up in the engine with him. While they was switching cars why, I'd ride in the engine and I would've been a railroader if my parents would have lived.

H: Are there any railroad tracks here in Mecca?

D: No.

H: No?

D: Well, just a little one over there in the corner. But that's what I would have been because even as small as I was there nine or ten years old, I really enjoyed that steam engine and that's one reason I got to working in a sawmill because I always enjoyed a steam engine and I wanted to fire a steam engine. That's how I got the job in the sawmill was to fire that engine. But I would have been a railroader. I would have worked to have been an engineer. Whether I'd have ever made it or not I don't know that I would have but that was my goal when I was a kid.

H: What do you look [for] in the future for Mecca? What does the future hold for Mecca?

D: Well, there'll still be more building going on here. There will be growth as far as residential houses are concerned but I don't think you'll ever see any industry here. I think eventually you'll see this [Route] 46 built solid clear up through here. It may be fifteen years, maybe twenty but it will come to it. It'll have to come to it because Cortland is expanded quite a bit and if they go east any further, they're going to have to go into another township and they don't want to do that, so this is the only way they've got to come, this or south. I think that in twenty years you'll see [Route] 46 built solid.

H: Very interesting.

D: And I don't think you'll see industry up here.

H: In talking with you, can you tell of anyone else who could help us with this project? Any names that you can give us?

D: Actually as far as the history is concerned, I think Tom Kachur would probably give you the best, could give you more on that because he really delved into it and well you've read his book. But as far as any old-timers, well I don't know. There's just not too many old-timers around that were back here sixty, sixty-five years ago.

H: Most of them have died.

D: That's right.

H: Probably then Nora Palmer is one of the oldest ones living then?

D: Yes. She's about the oldest person in Mecca Township, I'm glad you interviewed her.

H: I have to go back.

D: I'll bet she enjoyed it, didn't she?

H: Yes. I think so. She wants to talk about it but I think some things are so unpleasant that . . . it just sounds like she had a hard childhood.

D: Well, she only had one boy.

H: George.

D: And he died five or six years ago. As I say, she's got two sisters but I don't know. They just don't seem to want to live together.

H: Okay, is there anything else you would like to say here about Mecca? I'm putting you on the spot now.

D: Yes, you've got me on the spot right now. I'll tell you one of the worst jobs I had when I was a trustee, was the Hordovsky brothers from Burghill wanted to put a garbage dump on the Phillips-Rice Road and it run along here for three or four weeks, till we had a special meeting at the town hall and I think there was more citizens to that meeting than there had ever been before. And we just couldn't get them stopped so I went to the County Board of Health and I said, "Well, what kind of a garbage dump are they going to put in?" They said, "Oh, they'll bury it." Well, I said, "Did you ever take a soil sample up there?" I said, "You go down there probably two feet and you're going to hit solid rock," which they would. So, I said, "How are you going to bury too much garbage in a thing like that?" And I said, "Well now, who has the say--so whether this is going to go or whether it isn't go? Does the county commissioners or the Board of Health or the trustees have the say--so?" Well we had the commissioners out there and the Board of Health and we went up and looked the site over. And I talked to the Board of Health, the main man. Well he says, "I don't know. I don't have anything to say about it." I asked the Commissioner; Baldine was Commissioner and he says, "No, I don't. I don't know who does." So I said, "I'll tell you, you just tell the trustees that they have the right to say it and I said we'll put a stop to it right now." So, they kind of agreed that maybe that would be a good idea. They had already bought the ground. They bought, I think, about nineteen acres of ground over there. In fact, there's houses built on it. It's right straight across from here is where it was. But I'll tell you that really got the people up on their ears.

H: Oh, I'm sure of that.

D: Of course, Cortland did have a dump back there but it wasn't too bad but they was going to haul the whole county in there, so that really got the people stirred up. I think that got more people stirred up than anything else that happened in Mecca. I think it really got them stirred up more than the lake did as far as that goes.

H: There's just one more other question I was thinking about. Do you belong to a church here in Mecca?

D: West Mecca Methodist Church

H: Is that the one with Rev. Kindle?

D: No.

H: No, no that's not the one. Do you belong to any . . . I know there's an Odd Fellows Lodge.

D: No, I don't belong to no lodges at all. We did belong to the Grange when the Grange was going stronger, my wife and I, but we were on the Degree Team for years but all I belong to now is an honorary member of the Trustee's Association and the church.

H: Active with the church?

D: Not too active, no. It's too bad that maybe I should be more active than I am because that is rather a small congregation over there. It's hard to get people to go to church anymore, I don't know why. They just don't go. Frank Benton comes over every Sunday.

H: Yes. I remember him telling me. Well, I want to thank you very much for spending this time with me. I certainly enjoyed it and you've added a lot to the history of what I have already.

D: It's been interesting, I'll tell you, really more than I thought it would!

H: Good, very good. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW