

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Save Our Valley Campaign Project

Save Our Valley Campaign Staff Experience

O.H. 178

JOHN F. GREENMAN

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

April 10, 1981

JOHN F. GREENMAN

John Frederick Greenman was born in Syracuse, New York on October 12, 1949. He is the son of Martin Allen and Mary Clare Greenman. He attended Breckinridge Training School and graduated from Youngstown State University in 1972 with a B.A. in American Studies. John went on to Antioch College where he graduated with an M.A. in Media in 1975. He has been employed by the Warren Tribune Chronicle since 1978. He previously had been, first, publicist for the "Save Our Valley Campaign" for the Ecumenical Coalition since February of 1978, and later became it's Youngstown Director.

John Greenman married Mary Alice Budge in 1979. He holds nine journalism awards for stories written in 1979. He is a member of the Unitarian faith, and his hobbies are baseball and cycling.

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN F. GREENMAN

INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy

SUBJECT: Internal Operation of Save Our Valley;
Interaction with Ecumenical Coalition

DATE: April 10, 1981

B: This is an interview with John Greenman for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Philip Bracy at the YSU Library on Friday, April 10, 1981 at 9:00 a.m. on the participation on the Save Our Valley Campaign that resulted from the Ecumenical Coalition.

G: My name is John Greenman. I was born in Syracuse, New York; moved to Rochester, New York, where I lived until I was seven; then to St. Louis, Missouri, where I lived until I was nine; then moved to Hingham, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston, lived there until I was a young adolescent. My family moved then to Morehead, Kentucky, where we lived for five or six years, then I moved to Youngstown. I lived in Youngstown since 1968. That time was interrupted by a three year period when I lived in Washington while I was in the Navy.

I've attended public schools all my life with one exception. I went to a laboratory high school associated with Morehead State University. In a sense, it was a private school because admission was restricted, but it was a public school in the sense that it was funded by the state. I'm a graduate of Youngstown State University. I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree in American Studies and a Master of Arts from Antioch College in Media.

B: How did you find out about the shutdown of Youngstown Sheet and Tube? I mean, do you remember the circumstances of where you were?

- G: Yes, I was sitting in a bar in one of the new office buildings downtown and a guy that I had gone to school with, Daniel R. DeSantis, who then was a planner for the City of Youngstown, told me that there would have to be more demonstrations coming up because there was an announcement on the news that Youngstown Sheet and Tube was going to close its Campbell Works. That was my first notification.
- B: Could you kind of explain how you got involved in the Save Our Valley Campaign and with the Ecumenical Coalition?
- G: Between June of 1977 and December of 1977, two others and I were trying to publish a city magazine for the Mahoning Valley, a magazine that we called Youngstown Magazine. During the time that we were selling stock in the corporation that was going to publish that magazine, and during the time we were selling advertising for its first issue, Youngstown Sheet and Tube announced it was closing its Campbell Works. We discovered that business closed up really, in the Mahoning Valley, for several months. People were not making investments; they were not making advertising decisions and our project fell by the wayside. That left me without a job and substantial debts and so, in March, when the Ecumenical Coalition asked me to go to work for it as their public relations person, I agreed.
- B: That would be March of 1978?
- G: That would be March of 1978. I worked as their public relations person for several months and then when the Reverend Richard Fernandez left the Save Our Valley Campaign to go to New York to open an office for the Ecumenical Coalition there, I was asked to take over the Save Our Valley Campaign and run it until approximately August of 1978 at which time I left the Ecumenical Coalition to go to work for the Warren Tribune Chronicle as a political reporter.
- B: What was the organizational structure of the Save Our Valley Campaign?
- G: Of the Save Our Valley Campaign or the Coalition?
- B: Well, the office that you were operating out of on Federal Street, I'm familiar with it as Save Our Valley. Now, maybe you could clarify that point.
- G: The Save Our Valley Campaign was one aspect of the Ecumenical Coalition's work. The staff that conducted the Save Our Valley was the same staff that did most of

the Coalition's work. There was an Executive Committee, which was a lot like a board of directors, and there was a Steering Committee, which was a lot like an executive committee that made day to day decisions about how the Coalition would function.

The office Downtown Youngstown had four or five employees. The top guy was Dick Fernandez. He was the Director of the Save Our Valley Campaign. I worked for Fernandez doing public relations for the Save Our Valley Campaign as well as public relations for the rest of the Coalition. We had a couple of clerical people and an office manager, Marsha Peskin, and we also had a part-time employee who was doing some community outreach work, Jacqueline Alfred, a League of Women Voters type who lived with her husband, an architect in Youngstown.

Our staff was not organized according to a line structure as much as it was a staff or function structure. Each of us had access to the Coalition's decision makers. Each of us felt relatively free to talk with the decision makers about how we would do things, how we would get things accomplished.

B: Did the staff sit on the Steering Committee meetings?

G: Yes, and also Executive Committee meetings.

B: Who sat on the Steering Committee that you recall?

G: Let's see, the Steering Committee was composed of eight or nine people. Let me see if I can list them for you. Bert Campbell was a member of the Steering Committee, David Stone, Chuck Rawlings, Ed Wisehiemer, Diane Kinney, Bob Taylor, Ed Stanton. I'm sure there were a few others; their names escape me.

B: Do you know who originated the Save Our Valley Campaign? I realize you came on board after the fact.

G: Well, I'm not sure. I know why it was established. I don't remember whose idea it was.

B: And its purpose or goals?

G: The Save Our Valley Campaign was organized in an effort to show the federal government and the investment community that people in the Mahoning Valley were, number one, interested in the reopening of the Campbell Works and, number two, were suggesting their interest in investing in that effort. We could not, as a matter

of law, tell people that the money that they designated as a Save Our Valley Savings account would subsequently be invested in shares in a new corporation that would operate the steel mill. That would have been a violation of the securities law. Nevertheless, we indicated to people that that was the reason we were organizing the Save Our Valley Savings Account; and while they were under no obligation to subsequently invest in a new company, I think many people intended to. It was also a device to show the federal government a grass roots effort in the Mahoning Valley to take back this mill, to make the mill whole again, to make the mill the property of the residents of the Valley and not a conglomerate located thousands of miles away.

B: Were there branch offices, eventually, of the Save Our Valley Campaign or the Ecumenical Coalition established?

G: Yes there were. There was an office of the Ecumenical Coalition established in New York City. It was co-located with the Committee for Corporate Responsibility on Riverside Drive and it was staffed by a couple of people. Dick Fernandez was one. The other guy, who I believe was the main staff person for the Committee for Corporate Responsibility, was also involved. His name escapes me.

B: When Reverend Fernandez went to New York, do you know approximately what date that was?

G: No I don't. I would say it was in May.

B: May of 1978?

G: That would by my guess, or perhaps June.

B: Did you also have branch offices like in the State of Ohio?

G: Well, there was an effort established by Chuck Rawlings to have Ecumenical Coalition part-time organizers in seven or eight cities in Ohio. They were not store fronts as I recall. There was space given to these people, council of churches offices and other church offices and there were these part-time organizers hired. That wasn't for a long period as I remember, several months at the outside.

B: So that would have been latter 1978 into, let's say, the end of that effort, which would be in May of 1979? Would it run that period perhaps?

- G: I don't know that it lasted until May of 1979. My guess is that it did, yes.
- B: On Wednesday, July 12, 1978 there was a joint news conference with Mayor Richley and Father Stanton. Could you kind of give us some background on why that came about and the announcement that took place?
- G: Yes, as a matter of background, a decision had been made in Washington months earlier that the Ecumenical Coalition would plan the reopening of the Campbell Works and would conduct a study to determine the feasibility of reopening the Campbell Works and if it was determined feasible, then the Mahoning Valley Economic Development Committee would take over and bring the project to fruition. At the same time that the Coalition was proposing the reopening of the Campbell Works and studying the feasibility of that effort, the Mahoning Valley Economic Development Committee was studying a Steel Technology and Research Center and there was a sense, not just in the press, but a sense elsewhere that the two projects were in competition with one and other, that if the government funded our project, it would not fund the Mahoning Valley Economic Development Committee's or vice-versa.

The common denominator to the projects was the use of this closed steel mill. So, to quiet press speculation and to send a message to the federal government, we agreed that if the Coalition's project went through we would, at the same time, try and establish a Steel Research Center and if the Steel Research Center went through, it would use the Campbell Works on a reopen basis as its test bed. And I got the mayor together with Ed Stanton for a joint press announcement to that effect. It had greater public relations value than it had policy value; and it was really done for its public relations value rather than its policy value.

- B: Were the commercials, then, the public relations releases? Were those basically those following your domain? Did you design those?
- g: Yes, well, most of them anyway, yes, not all of them. I did all of the commercials, wrote and produced them. I wrote most of the press releases. Some of the press releases were written by John Lencyk, a very capable Director of Communications for the Diocese of Youngstown. And subsequent to my leaving, releases were written by Lencyk and by other members of the Ecumenical Coalition staff, but by and large, I did the Coalition's press work while I was there.

- B: Okay. Did you get a lot of cooperation from the local press and papers and such?
- G: Oh, most assuredly. In retrospect, my feeling is the press didn't do a very good job examining either the Coalition or its plan to reopen the Campbell Works. There was a sense that, let the Coalition go forward, let the Coalition go as far as it can. If it is successful, that's great; if it's not, well, not much is lost. There was a sense that a project that Bishop Malone is involved in should not be criticized because you don't criticize Bishop Malone. There was a real trend toward being positive, not negative, so working for the Coalition was a publicist's dream. I could get virtually anything I wanted into the Youngstown daily newspaper, the Vindicator; and television was extremely cooperative. Almost no one asked difficult questions. Those that did allowed us to answer them as we wished.
- B: Dick Fernandez left to go to New York, your role then changed. Could you kind of go into it. Did you assume responsibility for the office in Youngstown?
- G: Yes, I took over Dick's job. Dick had been the Director of the Save Our Valley Campaign and the principal staff person for the Coalition. When he went to New York, I assumed that responsibility. I continued to do press work and took over running the Save Our Valley Savings Account Program and ran the office downtown.
- B: Did you ultimately see the Save Our Valley Account part of the program as a success?
- G: Well, it depends on how you define that. Initially, the press asked what were our goals. That was before I went to work for the Coalition, and the answer from the Coalition was: our goals are to have 6,000 or 7,000 accounts containing, I think, \$8,000,000 to \$12,000,000. When the Save Our Valley Savings Account Program was concluded, there were \$4,000,000 or \$5,000,000 in accounts opened by some thousands of people. I don't know how many, I don't recall.

You could say, on the one hand, that we didn't meet our goals and that is a failure. On the other hand, there has not been, in this country, to my knowledge, any fund raising effort of this sort which has done this well. So, it's hard to think of an unprecedented community response to a serious economic crisis, as impressive as it was, being a failure. So, I guess I

have two minds about that.

B: You mentioned the funding of the organization. How was the organization, the office staff, paid through? I mean, how was the organization funded?

G: Money was raised through churches and church denominations around the country. There was a goal of raising \$50,000, that was realized. There was a second goal of raising some additional \$20,000 or \$30,000. I also understand that was accomplished. The Coalition never really wanted for funds. There were some lean cash times, but there was a lot of credit and money ultimately was available. The Coalition was well funded. It paid its employees well. It was very careful about its funds in that they were carefully audited and accounted for, but there was plenty of money; there was never a lack of money.

B: So, the actual shutdown of the Federal Street office itself was due more to the, let's say, the rejection of the proposal more than funding? It wasn't a funding move was it?

G: I don't think so, no. It is the case that once the federal government decided not to underwrite the re-opening of the Campbell Works, that the Coalition's reason for being, at least popularly conceived, was no more; and therefore there was no need to have Save Our Valley Savings Accounts and an office downtown. My guess is that if the Coalition had decided to stay in business and redirect its efforts to some other kind of community outreach, community organizing work, and it required an office and a staff, it could have found the money to pay for them. But it elected not to do that and therefore had no need for this downtown office.

B: Okay, but then the termination day of the office itself was right after the announcement May 24, 1979 or did it run longer?

G: I'm not clear about that. My memory is that the office ran for a while longer than that while the Coalition was trying to decide what to do, but I don't think that it ran for very long after that and that's just a matter of my memory.

B: One of the organizations that kind of showed up in the process of that was the Steelworkers United for Employment. There seems to be a sense running through some of the minutes and so forth of this, that, and the

other organization that the Coalition helped organize that group or at least supported them. Do you know of any of those efforts?

G: I don't. They post-date my association with the Coalition. I think that it's the case that the Coalition supported the formation of this organization and I think it did so because there needed to be some sign from the steelworkers that, one, it was involved in planning this reopening and two, it supported this reopening. And since the top leadership of the steelworkers union neither supported the Coalition's plan nor helped plan it, at least early on, this local steelworkers group was an alternative to having the steelworkers union be ultimately involved.

B: In 1978 I believe there was a situation where the United Steelworkers was approached for mass mailing. Could you kind of give us a little background on that and what the results were?

G: Sure. The proposed mailing was for the spring of 1978, that would have been April or May. The purpose of the mailing was to encourage steelworkers to open Save Our Valley Savings Accounts. It was part of the Save Our Valley Campaign. Some members of the Coalition Steering Committee and staff, I don't recall specifically who, went to see Frank Leságanich, who at the time was Director of the Steelworkers District 26. Frank Lesaganich agreed to sign a letter and mail a letter to the forty or fifty thousand steelworkers of the Valley. We had such a letter prepared and then Lesaganich did not sign it.

It was our understanding that he did not because he was told not to and he was told not to by the Steelworkers international office in Pittsburgh. I don't know who, I assume that it would be Jim Smith or perhaps even Lloyd McBride. But it was clear to us from Lesaganich's failure to sign that letter plus other indications that the Steelworkers international office was not supporting the Coalition's work.

B: Did you feel, overall, that the Coalition's work was successful?

G: Well, the simple answer to that would be no. The Coalition, as I recall, was formed to do at least three things. It was formed to present a religious response to what was seen as the Mahoning Valley's economic crisis. It did do that. It was formed to encourage a new national steel policy. I think that

it encouraged that, but it certainly was not instrumental in establishing such a policy. And it was formed to study the feasibility of reopening the Campbell Works. Those were at least three of its early goals.

In a short while, the public's perception of the Coalition was that it existed only to reopen the Campbell Works and my guess is that the Coalition did not discourage that view. That was the high profile part of our work. That was the part that brought us into contact with the important national, political, academic and religious leaders. It was the aspect of our work that drew vast attention in the press. And so, it became our perceived goal to reopen the steel mill. To the extent that we did not do so, we were a failure.

Now, you can change your perspective on the Coalition and say that it was a success. You can say that it raised people's knowledge about what communities can do to organize themselves in reaction to economic crisis; and say the Coalition did a reasonably good job of that. You can say that the Coalition's goal was to show how the nation's religious community can bring pressure to bear on politicians and at least get their attention; and the Coalition succeeded at that at a very high level. But fundamentally, the Coalition's objective was to put people back to work and it did not do that and so its efforts must be judged a failure.

I guess the only other thing I would add is that at no time was the Coalition the decision-maker. The Coalition was the advocate. The Coalition said, "This is what we would like to do. We haven't the wherewithall to do this, that's why we need your help." They asked that of the people of Youngstown and got some of it. They asked that of the federal government; they got money for a study, but they got no money to reopen the Campbell Works. Had the Coalition had the money, my guess is that that plant would be operating today. The Coalition did not, and the plant is not.

- B: Were you--through the Ecumenical Coalition office--involved in a planning for a September 28 and 29, 1978 gathering?
- G: No, not as I recall. I was involved in some very early planning, but nothing more than that.
- B: Finally, do you feel that clergies should undertake this kind of effort?

G: Oh sure. I think that any kind of interest group in this country ought to undertake these sorts of efforts. I think the clergy is a powerful institution in America. I think it could be more powerful in important ways. I never had any question that the clergy was behaving responsibly in raising economic issues, in raising the moral side of economic issues and attacking what it regarded as immoral economic decision making and using its political pressure to foster appropriate political decisions.

I think the church has been doing this privately for many, many years. I also think it has been doing it publicly in lots of important issues. It assumed a very high profile in the anti-war movement very satisfactorily, successfully. It assumed a high profile in the civil rights movement and was successful. Many of the people who stood against Joe McCarthy were church people. So, I think the churches role was an appropriate role and I would like to see more often the church involve itself in economic issues and political issues. It would be encouraging, not discouraging.

G: Thank you very much.

G: Sure.

END OF INTERVIEW