

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Depression Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 276

ALBERT G. MOFF

Interviewed

by

Kim Marie Oliver

on

July 12, 1974

ALBERT G. MOFF

Albert G. Moff was born on June 14, 1893, in Beaver Township. In 1923 he began working for E. P. Zinn, a Franklin auto dealer, who had an agency for Franklin cars, the last large car with an air cooled engine. When Mr. Zinn died Mr. Moff stayed on with his successor A. Molinski. Times were bad, his wages were 75 cents to 80 cents per hour. Some days he only worked one or two hours.

In 1933 he started his own shop and did very well for four years.

Mr. Moff worked for Republic Steel Company for 13 years and then he and his wife, Mary, decided they needed a good vacation. They bought a travel trailer and on their 25th wedding anniversary started a tour of the western states. They travelled 11,000 miles in nine weeks.

Mr. Moff did not return to Republic Steel, but kept busy on ten acres of land on Herbert Road in Canfield. He and his wife took several trips including a trip to Maritime Provinces of Canada and spent a month in Old Mexico. They sold their little "ranch" in Canfield in 1962 and bought their present in Columbiana.

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INTERVIEWEE: ALBERT G. MOFF

INTERVIEWER: Kim Marie Oliver

SUBJECT: Unemployment, Presidents, Radio, Movies

DATE: July 12, 1974

O: This is an interview with Albert Moff for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Depression by Kim Marie Oliver at Mr. Moff's home in Columbiana, Ohio, July 12, 1974, at 3:30 p.m.

Before we begin, I think it's interesting to note that Mr. Moff kept a diary during this time and some of the quotations are taken directly from his diary. Mr. Moff, did you lose a job because of the Depression? If so, when did you become unemployed and how long were you out of work?

M: During 1933, business was very bad and I lost my job over at the garage where I was working at the time. I opened a repair shop of my own at 606 Idora Avenue. I had a double car garage and I enlarged that to make room for my tools. Most of the time I had work, had more work than I could do. For four years I operated this garage during the Depression. Before this I worked for Pete Corell and Mark Weir, who had an implement store on East Boardman Street. As times became rather difficult they closed up. They cut down and released their employees. That's when I started to work at the garage.

O: Did you know many people who were long out of work? How did this seem to affect them? Were they largely bitter about it or did they tend to feel that, after all, everybody was in the same boat?

M: I think everyone was in the same boat at that time, except the few people who had permanent jobs, usually salary jobs.

- O: What did people tend to think of Hoover during the period, or Franklin Roosevelt?
- M: President Hoover was blamed for a lot of things unjustly, I think. President Roosevelt was elected by a good majority when people felt that he could do something, and he really did do a lot of good for the working man.
- O: What did people think about the Democratic Party during this period? Were there any times during the Depression when people sensed that things were about to get better?
- M: Yes, I think that a lot of people thought that things were going to get better. President Hoover's Administration kept saying that the good times are just around the corner, but they seemed to be slow about arriving.
- O: Were there any people who discovered surprising ways of making a living during the Depression? Do you know of anyone who was able to start a small business?
- M: There were a number of people who started up small businesses of their own in order to have a job. I did the same with my repair shop and did very well for about four years.
- O: Do you remember how well-supplied grocery stores were during the Depression? Were their prices high or low?
- M: The grocery stores seemed to have plenty of merchandise and their prices were very low. For example, George Oles, who had his grocery store and bakery on West Front Street, was selling bread four loaves for twenty-five cents. Haircuts were fifty cents, and gasoline was selling for from fourteen to seventeen cents a gallon, with a water glass or a cup and saucer and some other prizes with five gallons of gas. Hogs were selling for two cents a pound, corn, eight cents a bushel, and an ad in the Vindicator, October 1931, had for sale two thousand bushels of good variety apples at three to ten cents a bushel at a farm three miles outside of Lisbon on East Fairfield Road. The owner was J. E. Galbreath.

Foreclosures were common for farmers and businessmen who were in debt, and many were. Farms and businesses were sold for a fraction of their true value. Neighbors would get together and bid perhaps twenty-five cents for a horse, ten cents for a plow, and so on. After the sale ended and the sheriff had performed his duty, neighbors would return everything to the original owner. It was all perfectly legal, but not much help to the mortgagee. In Marcus, Iowa, instead of burning coal to heat their courthouse in the winter of 1932 and 1933, they burned corn as

it was cheaper. An elevator in South Dakota listed corn at three cents a bushel.

O: Did lots of people raise gardens during this time, as it was sometimes said?

M: A lot of gardens were grown during that time and it helped out a lot. The people had time to do their work and raise part of their produce.

O: After the Depression did people put money in the banks or did they distrust them?

M: After the stock market crashed in 1929, people lost confidence in banks and many people were storing their money anywhere they could store it, and it would be available when they wanted it.

O: Were women and girls encouraged to find work during the Depression?

M: No, the women were not encouraged to do work during the Depression because for every job they took, they were taking a job away from a man. The men working for us resented that very much.

O: Did many young people tend to leave home during the Depression and try to find work?

M: Yes, a lot of people did. Especially the young folk that were free. They would roam around different parts of the country trying to find work. They would ride the boxcars.

O: Who had radios during the Depression, everybody or only some people?

M: I think most people had radios and some of them were homemade. But, there was an Atwater Kent, which was one of the new models at that time, that went over pretty big. But most people, I think, had radios then.

O: What were some of the most popular radio shows during this period?

M: The radio shows at that time were mostly newscasts, and movies. One of the newscasters that we liked very well was Floyd Gibbons, who later was replaced by Lowell Thomas, who is still on radio.

O: Do you remember what the movies were like during the 1930's?

M: The movies, as I remember them, were mostly newscasts and some movies with the old actors in them like Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and Laurel and Hardy. Ones like that were quite prominent in those days.

O: Were the movies cheap or were they relatively expensive during this time?

M: They were very cheap. The old nickelodion, you could get into a movie at the nickelodion for a nickel. Then you could find some better movies maybe for ten or fifteen cents.

O: Did you take any vacations during the Depression at all?

M: Yes, we used to take vacations. We would go up to Lake Erie to a cottage and that was about the extent of our vacation during the Depression.

O: Was it popular for vacationers to stay at hotels?

M: For people with money, they usually stayed at hotels, but it was more common for the average man to stop at a cabin. These cabins were the forerunner of the motel of today.

O: Was this area hit harder than other areas during the Depression?

M: Yes, I think it was, because of the industrial area here, in which steel was the main business. Also, the farmers who specialize, like the farmers in the midwest, would have probably just wheat or corn as their year's crop and if the price was low on that, they were hit pretty hard.

O: What were the wages during this time, like yours, for example?

M: Well, the bottom wages around that time were maybe \$75 or \$100 a month. That was very low compared to what they get today.

O: Thank you, Mr. Moff, for sharing your recollections of the Depression.

END OF INTERVIEW