

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Mahoning County

Personal Life

O. H. 458

LYLE CLEMONS

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

May 29, 1981

LYLE CLEMONS

Lyle Clemons graduated from Boardman High School. He worked from 1943 to 1977 for G. F. Business Equipment in Youngstown, Ohio. He is married and has been since October 1935. They have three children. He retired in 1977 and presently works for the Catholic Diocese as a parking attendant. His hobbies include gardening and making furniture.

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INTERVIEWEE: LYLE CLEMONS

INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy

SUBJECT: Clemons' family, George Washington cane,
Tippecanoe Mine, Flag Parade

DATE: May 29, 1981

B: This is Philip Bracy for the Youngstown State University Program. This morning I am interviewing Mr. Lyle Clemons.

Mr. Clemons, could you please tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?

C: I'm Lyle Clemons. According to history, I am the seventh generation of one Nicholas Clemons, who was a German. He was born in Germany and came to this country on January 2, 1775.

His wife, Elizabeth Goetz, was born in Holland. They had four known sons and two daughters whose names are Nicholas Jr., Daniel, Philip, George, Elizabeth and Susanna.

Our branch of the Clemons family came through the George family.

B: Excuse me, could you tell me the conditions under which he came from Germany?

C: I'm not sure about the reason he came from Germany. I suppose, more or less, he came to a new country which was interesting to him. The only way he could get passage was to sell himself into indentured service, which cost him two years.

Shortly after they arrived (they were married just before he left Germany) in America, the man who paid for his passage saw that Nicholas was unhappy. So he just used common sense and knew that Nicholas wanted his wife over here. In another two years, he brought his wife over. Of course, he had four years to serve to pay for their passage.

But as it turned out, Nicholas enlisted and he survived and their indebtedness was automatically cancelled-- because he had served in the Continental Army.

B: Where did they first settle when they came to the United States?

C: They settled in Philadelphia where they were bakers. When he had enlisted in the Continental Army, she was a baker for the Army. Not too long after he had enlisted, for some unknown reason, Washington took a liking to Nicholas. So he was made cook and chief aid to Washington during the Revolution.

History has it on the records that Nicholas served under Washington as aid and cook and spent the winter at Valley Forge. Like I said, his wife was a baker.

Then when the war was over and the Army was disbanded, Washington presented a cane, which we will describe a little later on, to Nicholas. Then Nicholas and his wife went back to Philadelphia. They lived in Philadelphia for thirty years. They had a bakery shop and he was a miller. Then they sold out.

We have to go back a little bit, because I failed to give some birthdates which I think should be included. Nicholas Clemons was born March 17, 1749. His wife, Elizabeth Goetz, was born February 27, 1754. Nicholas Clemons died May 15, 1834. His wife Elizabeth died August 6, 1836.

When he worked under Washington, according to the records and grave registration card, Nicholas served in the Army and cooked for General Washington. The outfit was the Washington County Pennsylvania Rangers of the Frontiers, between the years 1778-1783.

While we're on the grave registration, he is buried in Lake Park Cemetery. When they moved to the Mahoning County area from Philadelphia, they bought a farm and began farming. That farm is now part of Lake Park Cemetery. Nicholas' grave is on that piece of property.

B: I think what you had mentioned last was that he had moved to Philadelphia following the separation from the service. Did they continue to bake or what did they do?

C: They spent thirty years in Philadelphia as bakers. They had a bakery shop and at the time a farm. Then they sold out and came to Mahoning County, which then I think was part of Trumbull County. I think the whole thing was Trumbull County.

B: Do you know the reason why they moved?

C: There's nothing that I've been able to find in the records why they moved.

B: Did he continue to farm here?

C: He continued to farm in what is now Lake Park Cemetery. I have here a record from the DAR page 64, 1775, Revolutionary soldiers from 1775-1783. It lists here Nicholas Clemmons--by the way, he spelled his name with two "m's" then, which we spell with one "m" now--Mahoning County, private, served as cook for General Washington, Ranger B Company. Born prior to 1750 in Germany, he brought his wife from Germany in 1775 and had children. After the Revolution, they lived in Washington County, Pennsylvania, for thirty years, then came to Boardman Township, Mahoning County, Ohio. He died about 1837. This information is from the History of Mahoning County, page 1878; Sanderson, History of Trumbull County, Volume II, page 127; and Upton, History of Mahoning County, Volume 2, Page 361. The tax list was from 1826, not 1837.

B: So 1826 would be the time he moved to Mahoning County?

C: In approximately 1826, they moved to Mahoning County.

Going back now, as to the children of Nicholas Clemmons, There were two daughters and four sons: Elizabeth, Daniel, Philip, Nicholas Jr., Susanna and George. The George branch is the branch of the Clemons' family that my family came down.

The way it reads, of course, we'll go back to Nicholas Sr., then George, William, another George, Malcolm, my dad Paul, and myself, which would make me the seventh generation. Adding to that, as far as the family is concerned, I married Margaret Barnhouse and we had three children: Mary Marie, Carol Lee, and Patricia Mae, who are the eighth generation. From those three marriages, we have seven grandchildren (listed from their ages): Kim, Barry, Lisa, Mike, Mark, and James. That makes the grandchildren the ninth generation of Nicholas Clemmons, and we're rather proud of the heritage that we have.

When I was a boy, I always knew of a cane that had been presented to Nicholas Clemmons at the end of the Revolutionary War when they were disbanded. Just prior to Washington giving the cane to Nicholas, he was to have told Nicholas, "Cheer up friend Nicholas. Be of good cheer. God will be with us. We will see better times soon." Then he presented Nicholas with this cane.

My dad mentioned on different occasions about the cane that Washington had given to Nicholas, but he was never able to find out for sure what branch of the family had it or where the cane was. He always wanted to see that cane, but he

never succeeded and died not having seen the cane.

In the February 15, 1976 issue of the Youngstown Vindicator, Jane Jenkins wrote an article entitled "Residents Treasure Two Historic Canes." One was a cane that was given to Miss Genevieve Mariner, 86 years old, Glenwood Avenue in Boardman. It was given to Governor David Todd, who presented it to Major Mariner, an ancestor of Miss Mariner, by Andrew Jackson. Of course, that isn't the cane we're interested in, but I thought I would put it in anyway.

The cane we're interested in is the one given to Nicholas by George Washington. It was given to a family now whose name is Daniel Elsten. She, Mrs. Elsten, was a Clemons. So she married into an Elsten family, but it still makes her a Clemons.

- B: Well, there's a couple of questions I wanted to follow up on before you get too far. Do you know who the last was to own, return to the farm before it was this part of the cemetery? Which Clemons was the last one to own the farm before it became the cemetery?
- C: I have never dealt into trying to find that out, so I don't whether it was Nicholas or who. I never went that far, so I couldn't answer that.
- B: Could you tell me, you had mentioned to me the fact that the reason that your father passed down the information . . . How did this become a bicentennial project for you? Could you kind of elaborate on that before you get too much more into it?
- C: I was so interested in the cane, but I had no idea of who had it or where it was. All that we ever knew was that it was someplace in the Warren area.

So when I saw this article by Janie Jenkins giving the name of the people who had it, I made up my mind that I was going to find the people and take the information that we had on the Clemons family and go out and compare notes with them to see if they had anything that we didn't have. I wanted to see whether it was possible if we had notes that they didn't have, which it turned out that we exchanged notes and spent a very pleasant afternoon with them. I got to hold the cane which was a thrill.

To describe the cane a little bit, according to the story by Janie Jenkins, the sturdy cane about an inch and a half at the top and tapering to the end with a brass diamond shaped inset on the side near the head is a reminder that Washington was for his time a big man in stature, 6'3" tall and weighing 220 pounds. The cane is supposed to be ironwood. It is just

as though it was a spiral. That's the way it was supposed to have grown. On the top of the cane is a brass pearl with very legible beautiful script writing, GW. A son, Daniel Jr. who is seventeen years old, is the one who is getting the cane when his parents are through with it.

It has always been said and we have known that the well-known author who is now dead, but wrote many books which a lot of people have read, Mark Twain, his name was Samuel Clemons. We have on record that Mark Twain is from the Daniel Clemon's side, which by the way is the branch that the Elstons are from.

Mabelle Harris who was 90 years old when this information was put together in 1976, was Nicholas Clemmons' great granddaughter. Daniel Clemons was her grandfather, Mark Twain was her third cousin. That's on the Daniel Clemons side. So how many times removed cousins, I've never been able to figure out, but Mark Twain is a distant relation of ours through the Daniel Clemons side. I just thought that might be an interesting little piece to add to it.

B: Could you tell us about yourself?

C: Yes, I was born on Leffingwell Road in Canfield. The house I was born in is still standing, although it has been extensively remodeled. I was born July 15, 1916. We moved from there down onto Tippecanoe Road about three-fourths of a mile north of Western Reserve Road. When I was four years old, we moved to what was known as the Harmen-Ruggy farm on the corner of Tippecanoe and Western Reserve Road. Now I live on Western Reserve Road, which is still part of the old home. I married Margaret Barnhouse.

B: What year?

C: On October 2, 1935. We had three daughters as I mentioned before: Mary Marie, Carol Lee, and Patricia Mae. Mary Marie has two sons Mark and James. Carol Lee has two children, Kim and Barry. Patricia Mae has three children: Tony, Lisa and Mike. Carol Lee was recently divorced and married again. So through that marriage, we automatically acquired the eighth grandson Danny.

B: Where did you go to school?

C: I went to Baordman School and graduated in 1935. Our three daughters also graduated from Boardman High School.

Mary lives in New Waterford. Carol Lee lives in Canfield and Patricia lives in Lisbon.

B: What kind of jobs did you do when you were a

youngster that stick our in your mind that you enjoyed doing?

- C: Well to begin with, they were just various jobs. Then one that I really enjoyed was working for Kenmar Manufacturing Furniture Company in East Palestine. I was working there when World War II broke out. The company couldn't get any defense work.

I was draft age, so I went to work at General Fireproofing in Youngstown. We made aircraft for Bell Aircraft in Butler, New York. Then after the war when they started slowing down in aircraft construction, they released a lot of the employees. I went to work at Helen Murray Lumber Company in Canfield. They were still contracting some defense work; we were making saddles to ship dropable fuel tanks. Then GF called me back after they started making their line of office equipment. Altogether I worked there for 34 and a half years before I retired.

- B: What year was that?

- C: My heart acted up on May 24, 1972. I was able to go back to work at GF. They very graciously let me come back to work in a limited capacity. I was 57 years old at the time. I had planned on retiring at 62. But on August the first through the tenth of 1977, I had to go to the hospital.

I spent two weeks, in North and South Side hospitals. I went through all of the tests. When I came out of the hospital, I had no heart condition whatsoever. A helping hand from above saw fit to give me a new life. I retired right then. I retired at 61 years of age, because I wasn't about to take another chance on having to ask for some help to lick the heart condition.

When it first came on me, I asked Dr. Schreiber if it could be licked. Dr. Schreiber said it could, but he and I and the drugstore could not do it. There had to be a helping hand. I told him I was going to lick it because I had grandchildren. I wanted to see them graduate and hopefully marry.

Well, the Lord being willing, I have seen one grandson, Tony, who graduated two years ago from Lisbon High. I am about to see the second grandchild, Kimberly, graduate June 7, 1981, from Canfield. My wish back then when I had that heart condition has been granted; I'm going to see two of my grandchildren graduate.

- B: Hopefully, you'll see the rest of them graduate.

- C: And hopefully I'll see the rest of them. Kimberly, for her prom, wore her great grandmother's wedding gown, which was

72 years old.

B: I would like to thank you for taking the time to talk to me this morning and fill us in on your family. Thank you very much.

C: Do you have any more time? There are a couple of things I would like to say.

B: Yes, sure. Go ahead.

C: This is just more of a personal thing down memory lane with the daughters. Let's just reminisce a little bit back when you kids were little. We used to butcher and they used to stand on their tip toes to cut lard and trim meat. We used to get such a kick out of sneaking the tenderloins and roasting them and always ended up with the tenderloins short that granddad couldn't figure out what had happened to it. But, he had been helping to eat it.

We used to have so much fun, Bob Berlette coming up and we would catch him on movie film trying to sneak two hams to his automobile. There are so many things down through the years that have happened.

B: You must have owned your own smokehouse then?

C: And we cured it. We had our own smokehouse and we cured our own meat, yes.

B: Now was that a family thing that was passed down?

C: Yes. While we're talking about butchering, my dad told a story one time that I think should be on this. When he was a boy and lived on Tippecanoe Road they used to do . . . each neighbor would help the other one. My dad was always the one who always did the shooting, whether it was pigs or steer. So he went to Uncle Henry Hientzleman's place to butcher a steer with one of the cousins, and Faye, Kenneth, and John. But, one of them got a new rifle, so they told dad instead of using his rifle, to try our new one and see what he thought. Dad just set his rifle down and took the new one. He pulled up and shot. The steer never flinched.

They started kidding dad about what was the matter. Did he lose his touch? They reloaded the gun and handed it to dad. Dad shot the second time and the steer still never flinched. They were just having a big time, because Paul had lost his touch. So dad told him the rifle was no good. He handed it back to him and picked him up, shot and down went the steer. Dad never knew what went on until . . . oh, it must have been at least forty years later when dad and Faye Hientzleman belonged to Dublin Grange at Canfield. One

night at a meeting when they were having a little business meeting like they usually did, Faye got up and asked if he could have the floor because he had a few remarks to make. So Faye said that he thought that there was an incident that happened when he was a young fellow that involved another one of the Grange members who was there that night. He thought that he should make it known while the two of them who had been involved in this incident that he was going to tell were still alive. So in front of the Grange members, he told about the slaughtering incident that had happened years before. He said, "Paul Clemons, I'm talking about you." He said, "Now is a good time to reveal while you and I are both living that we pulled a trick on you. That new gun was loaded with blanks."

B: Oh, after all of those years, that must have been quite a surprise.

C: After all of those years, Faye decided to tell it. The Grange got a big charge out of that. Dad said he figured something was wrong, but he just couldn't figure out what it was. So Faye revealed that they had been loading the new gun with blanks.

There are a lot of things that I could go on for a couple of hours yet and tell you different things. But, I think we have covered things from Nicholas down through and little things that have happened that will be interesting for the kids and the grandchildren and getting it on tape will be more permanent than on paper which could be lost.

B: I would like to thank you for taking time this morning to sit down with me.

C: Well, I sure thank you for making this all possible. It was very interesting. It's the first time I've ever done anything like this. It may sound a little mixed up when the tape is run, but . . .

B: One other thing probably we should mention is that you've been working with Ann Harris about the mine shaft situation that's here in Youngstown.

C: Yes.

B: Why don't you tell me a little bit about that first. I should have asked you this earlier.

C: I first got started with Professor Harris--I'm going to call her Ann--because she was on television one time when she first had started with this. It showed a map and said that the map listed Tippecanoe shaft. She had no idea where it was. If anybody who was watching the television program, the news

program, if they had any idea where it might be, she said she would appreciate them calling her.

Well, I could remember where Tippecanoe shaft was. So I hesitated for a couple of days thinking, if she is a college professor, would she be interested in listening to me. Then I thought that since she asked anybody who had any information to contact her, I might as well.

She had given the phone number and I called her. That was the beginning of it, because I knew just where Tippecanoe shaft was.

B: How did you know where the shaft was?

C: I can remember from being a boy where the spoil bank was and I can remember the remains of the old tipple. Tippecanoe shaft is right across Tippecanoe Road from Tippecanoe Country Club. So as a boy, I could remember the old spoil bank and the dilapidated tipple.

From that, she asked if I knew of any other mines. She told me what she was working at and why she was working on the mines and if I knew of any other ones. I said, "Oh, yes. I knew a lot of them in southern Mahoning County and northern Columbiana County." Well, at the time, she was just working on the mines in Mahoning County and Trumbull County. The purpose was there were so many housing developments and buildings going on and expressways and everything. These homes are being built over the dug out mines and there's a possibility of collapsing, which there has been a lot of in these last four or five years. Now, she has Columbiana County.

B: So you've been active in helping both from recalling where mines were when you were a child and growing up. Are you still working on that project?

C: I'm still working with her on that. I have located a number of mines and have been fortunate enough on several occasions to talk to elderly men who told me that they had worked in particular mines and gave me some information on them.

The information that I was able to pick up from these various elderly men . . . I sat down and they would tell me. The rooms were approximately so many feet wide, so many feet long. We had maybe three feet of coal. This is the way they were mined. They would leave a three foot wall of coal between the rooms as supports. The mine ran just northeast from the entrance. This whole area was mined out. I, using the imagination plus the information that they gave me, gave information to Professor Harris who now has four different large maps furnished from me. She has

checked records and everything. She said that she isn't going to improve on them, because I am as near accurate as what she could ever come across.

B: I wanted to bring that out, because I had it in my notes but hadn't mentioned it.

C: Right now of course, I work with Catholic Charities here and John Herlick, who is a wonderful fellow. Pat Palumbo is Assistant Director of the Charities. I've just enjoyed it. It will be four years before very long since I became . . .

B: Have been on the board. I mean, have been working here.

C: What I'm trying to say is, since I had a new life given to me.

B: Thank you very much.

C: I sure appreciate the chance to do this. It's going to be very interesting to hear it when we play it back from the tape.

One last thing here before we call is quits. In 1976, Canfield Schwebels' Bakery participated in the bicentennial parade. They placed little historical cards, flag cards, in their bread. I checked to see about getting a full set from Schwebels. They showed me a poster of 31 historical flags going back to the year of the Vikings.

The Vikings never set foot on U.S. soil, but they are supposed to have in the year 1003 landed on the North American continent. That is in history, which a lot of us have read. I don't know if the younger generations have read, but I know that I read a lot about it.

The thirty-one historical flags covered different events down through history: Bunker Hill and the Revolutionary War, the Civil War and various historical events.

I got the idea of having a mounted horse unit for Canfield's Bicentennial Parade if I could find the flags. Well, I found out that the flags could be manufactured for me by Valley Forge Flag Company. Through the generosity of people in Canfield and the businesses a flag fund was set up in the one bank in Canfield. The money was made available to me.

I had a mounted horse unit, 3 x 5 foot flags with 39 horses in the unit and everybody carrying the flags. I had outriders and then I had parents walking with lead ropes.

My two grandchildren, Kim and Barry, rode with me which was a thrill. Through the kindness of Judge Flynn, who is the judge of District Court in Canfield, he loaned me his big 5 x 7 gold fringed flag to carry and lead the parade.

B: What was the fringe flag? What was on it?

C: It's the fifty star. Is that what you mean the fifty star?

B: Yes, but I mean what was on the flag, because you mentioned it was a flag. You didn't tell us what was on the flag itself. Was it just an American flag?

C: Just the American flag that he has set in his courtroom. He loaned it to me right out of his courtroom, which was very surprising.

In 1977 then, we had the group again, which was a big thrill to me not only because of putting the unit together, but of my heritage back through all of the years to Nicholas Clemmons. I just thought that I would like to include this right at the end of the tape. That was a big thrill to me.

B: I'm glad you mentioned it.

C: I thank you again.

END OF INTERVIEW