

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Campbell, Ohio During the 1930's and 1940's

Personal Experience

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JOSEPH A VRABEL

Interviewed

by

William M. Kish

on

July 15, 1989

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH A VRABEL
INTERVIEWER: William M. Kish
SUBJECT: Social and economic conditions, landscape,
gardening, steel mills, steel strikes
DATE: July 15, 1989

K: This is an interview with Joseph A. Vrabel for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Campbell, Ohio During the 1930's and 1940's, by William Kish, on July 15, 1989, at 2271 Cordova, Youngstown, Ohio, at 11:30 p.m.

Mr. Vrabel, what do you remember about Campbell during the 1930's?

V: Campbell is a unique town. The people came up the hard way. They came here from Europe where they were abused. They came over here for a little bit of salvation. No matter how tough it got over here, it wasn't as bad as what they were going through in Europe. It was that much tougher when the Sheet & Tube slowed down. They put people out of work. There were no relief coupons or anything, as you have today. So, everybody went out and grew gardens. They grew gardens all over. The Youngstown Sheet & Tube was gracious enough. All the land that they owned up there on Blackburn Farm, that later became Sheet & Tube home, and the upper part is now St. Michael's land. The vacant land was used for gardens. They were some of the most beautiful gardens you've ever seen. Everybody worked together. You would have a plot here; your neighbor would have a plot here. They had no trouble whatsoever. They were just

as friendly, and everybody worked together to help one another. Of course in the wintertime, many of the people who lived in the Sheet and Tube homes and others had the coal furnaces to heat the house. And, if there was no furnace in the house, they'd go down and get coal for their stoves. That was the funny thing. They used to go down to the railroad tracks, and as the coal wagons used to come up from Lowellville and up that grade, some of the young boys would crawl in up on top, kick the coal off on the side of the tracks. And, the railroad people never said nothing about it. The coal people never said nothing about it. It was just a Godsend. Everybody said, "Well these people need to keep warm." They managed to get through. One thing I can say about Campbell people, there was less foreclosures on homes than any other place in the whole state of Ohio.

K: Why would that be?

V: When these people bought their homes, they paid for them. This was their nest egg; this was where they were going to stay. I read that in the Youngstown Telegram at that time The Vindicator had it in the newspaper in the early 1930's--1932, 1933--that Campbell is unique in the fact that its foreclosure is the lowest in the State. So, that goes to show you that the people that did work in the mills, that they did put something away. Now, many of them put it in the bank. When the banks closed up, they were held up for a while; and of course, that didn't help them any. But, they eventually got all their money out of the bank. Black people lived down below Murray Avenue. They were all good people, and most had jobs. They were given an opportunity to make a living, and they showed the rest of the people that they could live just as the white people did. We had no difficulty with people. There was no such thing as, "We don't want to go to that school because the blacks are coming in there." They had been going to Campbell schools. Myself and Mr. Higgins--he's dead now--his father used to own a place right where the sewage plant is now, down at Pine Hollow. His son went to school with me from 1914 until he got a job in the Sheet & Tube. Now, his son was the Law Director of the city of Youngstown. Now, these are people who went to school with us down there from way back around World War I, during the Roaring 1920's, during the Depression.

In 1926, I got paid fifty cents an hour. I worked eight hours a day; and then, you had what they called a bonus. If you put out so much work, they gave you an extra dollar or two. It was an incentive program. So, people have an incentive. You know, it gets monotonous working the same thing over. Then you figure,

"Well, I can make more money if I do that." That takes your mind off it, and it gives you the strength and the ability to go out and produce better. So, we used to make \$2, \$1.50, \$1.75 a day. Well, we got paid twice a month. Well, in fifteen days, you averaged better than \$1.50 a day. You got a nice piece of change. So, everybody had money in their pockets.

K: Jobs were plentiful then, during this time?

V: Oh, my God, yes. They were advertising for men. I was born in Pennsylvania, Fayette County, and my mother didn't like my dad working in the mines because she was afraid he'd get killed, which was common. Because, as bad as things are today in the coal mines, they were one hundred times worse in them days. Just timber was put up to hold them up, and so many men got killed. So, she insisted on coming here. Somehow, she contacted some people here that were of our ethnic background. We come over here one day; and the next day, he went to work.

Youngstown Sheet & Tube at one time, used to have thousands of people working there because there wasn't all this stuff that they have now. Horses used to come in the mill to do a lot of the work. Now, they have cranes and all that which makes it much easier. They weren't making much money. In 1908, when my dad got a job, he got paid twenty-two cents per half an hour. But, we built a house on Oxford Street. It still stands there. We sold it later on for \$1,500. It was a four bedroom house. So you figure out; we had a barn, chicken coop, everything.

You worked ten hours a day. One week, you worked six days; and the next week, you worked eight days straight. In other words, when you worked day-turn, on your last day, Saturday, they brought your lunch bucket down to the bridge; and you took it in, and you worked until six o'clock Sunday morning. That was every two weeks. You worked twenty-four hours. This is the way they worked. So, everybody was glad to work; and you figure, they worked ten hours a day and twelve hours a night. So, you figure with how much they collected, they were able to do so much with what little bit of money they got. They came home and raised a garden because everybody had a cow and chickens, ducks. Everybody had to raise their own pigs, and everybody had a big garden. And, they raised a lot of grass there too, and all that stuff. That's the way people were growing up them days.

You see a lot of that on TV now and then. If you watched the homesteaders . . . we were homesteaders when we came here. You had to do that. The only thing

you went to the store to buy was maybe breakfast cereal, coal oil because you had a coal lamp, like this one here. So, you had that. There was no electricity; there was no running water. You had to pump your own water; there was no washing machines. So, your expenditure wasn't so heavy because you didn't have to worry about paying the telephone bill, the gas bill, the electric bill and all that. The only thing you paid for was clothes and whatever necessities you needed at the store, like breakfast cereal. A big box of Kellogg's corn flakes cost you I think \$2.75 now, was \$0.10. Well you had to work a half hour for that ten cents. Well today, if you pay \$2.75 and your making \$10 an hour, you're still getting it cheaper than we got it.

K: What time period are we talking about here?

V: We're talking the period from 1910 to 1920.

K: This was what your father was making.

V: That's the way things were. After the war, Prohibition came on. Things changed an awful lot in Youngstown because they put in new work. People working in the mills over there, they saw how they could improve the working conditions, the machinery and everything else. Things started to change.

K: When you mentioned before about 1910 and 1920, do you remember living in East Youngstown, now Campbell, when there was that fire?

V: Yes. I wasn't very old, but I was old enough that I still remember today. It started on January 6. It was an Orthodox Christmas Eve. Everybody was having a good time, and strikes were on. People were out there. They came in on the streetcars, because in them days one streetcar would come after another, and it would have one hundred people on them big streetcars. That's how many people used to come to work by streetcars from Youngstown from all different places. They'd get off at different places, and they'd get off there at Stop 10 and Robinson Road.

Well, a lot of them were told, "Either you go back, if you didn't. . . ." It was some rough stuff over there. They got beat up; they would throw their lunch pail over there. Somebody stood up and said, "I'm going to work." They blocked the bridge over there; they wouldn't permit anybody out there. So, it just because a conglomeration of people. Over there, they were milling around all day long. All of the sudden, somebody came in town with a lot of money; and there was two or three saloons on Wilson Avenue, about three on

Robinson Road, about four on Short Street. There were saloons all around there, and every one of those saloons, there seemed to be someone who come in there that was buying drinks. The drinks were cheap there. Fifty to ten cents for a shot of whiskey and a beer. He was buying drinks for everybody. They started around six o'clock at night. "Come on. Let's go out and have a good time." Then, around midnight or after nine-thirty or ten o'clock, after it got a little dark, a fight broke out, and a fire started up on the bridge on Short Street. There was a shot fired. Now who fired it, we don't know. It was the people that were working in the mill because they had their men over there to protect the plant. So, trouble started over there, and they started yelling, "Let's burn them out." So, they not only burned them out, the bridge; but they burned the stores down right around the place. Then, they got into the saloons, and they started at the saloons. When they broke in the saloon, everybody went for the booze. Everybody got drunk, and they just went from one store to the next. They got up as far as 12th Street. They burned everything from Washington Street all the way to 9th Street and all the way up to 12th Street and Robinson Road; some of them on 10th Street. They burned everything. Everybody was fighting and arguing

Now, what I remember mostly about it, because I got the darndest tanning from my dad--he was at that time, working for Dan Barbis--and when the fight started, he went home. He got home about eleven o'clock, and I'm not home. I'm down the Coal yard. I'm looking down there, and I'm seeing how they're burning everything. Reed's Hardware Store on Wilson Avenue was burning; and when it hit the paint shop, you could see the paint blowing up in the air. A couple of fellows got killed over there. They were shooting. Then, there was looting. I remember one old fellow used to live on Jefferson Street. My dad was telling me about him--I don't want to mention names because that name is still prominent in the city of Campbell--and he was rolling up a twenty-five or thirty gallon barrel of whiskey up the street. My dad was laughing. He said that the police came in the next day. They checked everywhere. They went house to house. We stood in that . . . Judge Kalafut in Struthers, his father, and I were in that wagon up at the coal yard, and a fellow by the name of Steve Collar, all still living. Steve Collar now lives up on Struthers Road in New Middletown, a farmer. We stood there, and we watched all that stuff going up there, the fire. When we got home, we got fired up real good.

The next day then, the soldiers come. . . . The National Guard come in, and started to search all the homes. My aunt owned a store on the corner of Reed and 13th Street, right across from St. John's Church. When they started to burn up 12th Street, they had a grocery store. So, they packed all their clothing so they could sleep in their wagon. They came all the way up on Oxford Street to stay with my dad, which was her brother. They were burning everything. She figured they were going to burn down her store. They knocked all the windows out. They stole a lot of stuff. They started to ransack it so she got the hell out of there. The next day, they came around and searched every place. They came up to our place, and somebody told them they brought stuff up in a wagon over there. The National Guard came in the house. They tore the house up-side-down, threw everything all around the house. You should have seen. My mother cried. Then, they walked out. They didn't find a thing. Then, they went to the next house and the next house. They just went through the house and tore the whole house apart.

K: They were looking for the stolen stuff from the stores?

V: Yes. They were looking for stolen stuff. They didn't find anything at all. That's almost a mile. When you walk from 12th Street all the way up to Oxford Street, it's a good distance. They came around. They were pretty nasty, the soldiers. They went up there, and they searched these innocent people's homes. They did catch a few people who stole watches from the jewelry store. Somebody went in there and stole a pair of shoes or something like that. I don't know. Heck, you go in there at night and steal a pair of shoes, you can't even figure the size or anything.

K: How long was the military here?

V: They were here for about a week. They broke up the strike. The fellows went back to work. The town never recovered.

K: Did they level a lot of those buildings that were burned down then?

V: They rebuilt them. This was a beautiful place. They had two five and ten cent stores down there. They had a dry goods store. They had Mulnar's, Resetars, Ragozine's. You had doctor's offices there on the corner of Wilson Avenue, Dr. Sherk and Dr. Riley and Dr. Smith. We had more doctors, then than we have today down there. Sure it was a beautiful place over there.

K: You mean along Wilson Avenue and Robinson Road?

- V: Wilson and Robinson Roads. We had two theaters over there. It was nice. Washington Street had a store, Mr. Mulnar used to own it. He was a Hungarian fellow. Then, on the top of the hill, on the corner of Washington and Robinson, there was another store there, a clothing store. Then, where the diamond was at, that was a big shoe store and dry goods. It was wonderful because people had to walk down the hill, and they shopped over there. It's not like today when you jump in the car and go to the mall. In them days, it was local. We had grocery stores all over the place. That's the way that people bought their groceries. It was a community, and it was close-knit. Everybody knew everybody because they shopped together and they lived together. Maybe they weren't as well known with their neighbors in the neighboring community, but they knew all their neighbors real well.
- K: Those streets that are off of Wilson Avenue now, basically in the area where that parking lot is now for the Sheet & Tube, were there houses all up along there, around Washington, Jefferson, Adams Streets?
- V: We had all of those. There was Washington Street. There was a house from Wilson Avenue all the way to Murry on both sides. Every lot. The same thing on Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe. Jackson was a little further away, and there was about only four or five homes there. In 1916, the Youngstown Sheet & Tube built those homes over there. They built 265 homes in the front. Then, they put a little park in the back there and a pool of water and on the other side of Jackson Street. They built 250 homes there for the blacks. They brought the blacks up from the South. They gave them a job. They worked. They had no trouble. Those blacks that came up from the South, they were real gentle to people, because they were abused so much. And, when they come up here, they thought it was just a beautiful place to live. Why abuse it. So, we didn't have no trouble.
- K: Do you remember when they were building those Sheet & Tube homes?
- V: Are you kidding? I used to come there with a wagon every night and pick up the little pieces of wood. Scrap wood, they'd throw it all outside, and they encouraged the people to take it. We'd take it home because we had no furnaces. Everybody either had a coal stove or kitchen stove downstairs. Your kitchen was also your dining room. You had two bedrooms upstairs; and you had a coal stove in each one of those rooms to keep warm, because if you didn't, you'd be cold. So this wood, we'd collect over there. We'd stock it up. A lot of it, we'd go out in the woods and

bring it in. We'd go out and take the cows out to pasture. And, when you'd come back, you had to bring some wood back, dried up wood that fell down. So, you'd tie it up, put it on your back, and bring it home every night. You'd have a pile of wood in the back for the cold.

K: So, when you were a young boy, what else did you do? You did the gardening, you watched cows. Any other responsibilities?

V: It amazes me because I know what I had to. My dad worked. If he worked day-turn from 7:00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. in the summertime, I'd take the cow out, bring her home at night and take her back out in the morning. In the wintertime, you had to feed it, and you had to clean around it. That was my job. Now, I remember that my job was to see that the cow never laid in it's own dirt. If it did, I'd get a good back hand or two. So I had to take the manure out, feed the cow. My mom would tell me how much hay to give her and [to] make sure that she had some water. That was my job. Then, when I'd get through with that, I'd take care of the two pigs we had. Then, I'd go down there and see the geese and the ducks and the chickens. You see, everybody at home had that.

Between the two lots that came together in the back, there was an alley. A sixteen foot alley. Everybody threw all these cans and everything in the alley. Then in the spring, we had a spring clean up. Everybody would get out and clean his share. The village would come around with the wagon. We'd put it all in there, all the cans, whatever it was, and we'd clean it. I know that my job was to be a nurse maid for the cow and all the other animals.

On Monday night, after I got through with that, my job was to go out there and pump an awful lot of water and bring it into the house, because mom was going to wash clothes on Tuesday. So, you had to bring the water in. Everybody had a big copper tub. Maybe you've seen them on the stove. They would take their clothes and wash them, throw them in the boiler and boil the clothes, actually boil the clothes. [They would] put them on there; and then, take them out again to get them clean. And, you had a wringer. So, I'd help my mother. She'd be putting them up, and either me or my sister would be turning the wringer to get the water out. In the wintertime, you'd have the clothes hanging in the kitchen, because if you'd take them outside, they'd freeze. You'd have to hang so much around the stove, and you had to fix up the clothes line, whatever it was. That's the way it was.

K: What school did you go to during the 1920's?

V: At one time, we had the old Italian Hall. They tore it down here not so long ago.

K: Where was that located at?

V: On the corner of 12th Street and Gordon Avenue. They made a tavern out of it after a while. That was one school. Then, there is one that's still standing now on 7th Street.

K: Is that near 6th Street?

V: It's near 6th Street. Then, you have to go over, and there is a place there. He turned it into a housing project. That was a school over there. Then, there was a third school on Main Street and Fairview Avenue. So, those were the wooden buildings. When I started school, they built Fairview School already, and they made a high school out of it. They had the Gymnasium on the third floor. They built Gordon School in 1912. I started school in 1914. That was my first year. I started at the Italian Hall. There were four school rooms there. Then, we had two Lindsey Sisters that were teachers there, upstairs. One was Sadie and the other one was . . . I don't recall what her first name is. But, we called them big Sadie and small Lindsey, because one was tall and the other one was short.

K: Were they strict?

V: They were very nice girls. We had two rooms downstairs. We had the 1st and 2nd grades up on the first floor and you had the 3rd and the 4th downstairs. You saw that book that Mrs. Galida turned out?

K: The History of Campbell?

V: You'll find that book in there! You look in there. You'll find a bunch of kids in the class, and there is only a couple of us living here. Jimmy Rich is still living, and I'm living. I was right in the middle. I think there were about thirty of us in the class. We took a picture, and that is Ms. Lindsey. Then, the next year, we moved up to Gordon School and went to school there for two years. Then, they built Reed School. So, we moved to Reed School. Then in 1919, they built Penhale School, and they made a Junior High out of it. So, it was the 7th and 8th grade, then.

K: So you were moving all around.

V: Yes. 7th, 8th, and 9th grade. Then in 1925, they built Memorial High School. So, we finished up in 1925. We graduated from Memorial High School in 1926.

K: So, you were one of the first graduating classes.

V: We were the first graduating class. There is only three of us living: Tony Gann, Bill Holiday, and myself.

K: Bill Holiday became a teacher at Campbell Memorial.

V: Yes. Then, of course, Ms. Honda--she is Mrs. Silla--she was in our class and Ms. Hamrock too. I think three girls and three boys are still living out of that class. We were the first.

Getting back to the Depression, in order to eliminate all the trouble we had, we went out there, and we organized a baseball team. Mike Kornick was my uncle. He was a big enthusiast, and he was working with the WPA. They organized a baseball league, and they played every evening. They'd start the games at six o'clock in the evening, and they played at Gordon Park. They played Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Sunday, they didn't play that because they had the Slovak league baseball team then. So, they played baseball over there. The blacks had two teams; and then, we had fellows from Youngstown. From all around, they came down there to play ball. Every night you would go over there, and you would find two or three thousand people watching the game.

K: Two or three thousand?

V: Yes. You're darn right.

K: That was the big entertainment then?

V: Well, the people had nothing to do. They'd bring their little benches with them and they'd sit down by the fences.

Talking a little bit about the groceries back then: coffee was seventeen cents a pound.

K: This is what year now?

V: This is in the Depression. Now you see, I happened to be managing an A & P downtown. I was fortunate enough to get a job over there. When they opened that store up, I got a job as a clerk. I remember when I went up to see these people, and they asked me how much money I wanted. I think I got the job because I used my head a little bit. I said, "I want a job." I didn't say how

much money I wanted. "Whatever money you give me is going to be more than I got." I said, "I'm not arguing about money. I want a job." I got the job through hard work. I was able to build myself up to vegetable manager, and fruits. And, eventually in two years time, I was becoming the manager. Well, from \$14 a week, I went up to \$18. When I became a produce manager. And then, when I got to be manager, I got \$25 a week. Now, it might seem ridiculous because [they paid] \$25 a week, and you'd put in maybe 120 hours a week. You were there from the morning until night, every day. You could take a dollar, and you could spend it. And, you could hardly carry the groceries with it. You could buy ten cans of milk, or ten cans of pork and beans that now cost you three for a dollar. You could get ten for twenty-nine cents. So you figure, you could buy ten cans of milk and ten cans of beans. You could spend fifty-eight cents, and you got twenty cans that you couldn't carry. Bread was cheap; three loaves for a dime. A loaf of bread was ten cents. The next day, they would sell the day-old bread. It was three for a dime. Most of the people used to wait until they were three for a dime because-- what the heck, if you buy it today and they eat it tomorrow, it's the same bread. So, they went and got it three for a dime. You could get a pack of potatoes for ten cents. You figure, when you took a dollar to the grocery store, you really had enough groceries to eat for a week. I was fortunate enough. Eventually, as the business improved and I had more people working for me, I got to a position where I was making as high as fifty dollars a week, which put me in a class by itself.

K: This was what year now?

V: [It was in] 1930 to 1940. Then, when the election came around and beer was legalized, people started these beer gardens, and things started to pick up a little bit because more jobs were given out. They opened up a couple of breweries in town, and things got a little bit better. In 1937, the mills started to pick up because the war in Europe was escalating. What we were doing over here was slowly putting our mills back together so that we could make the steel, because we made a lot of stuff and we shipped it out. In the meantime, I was relieved of my job at A & P, and I worked at the mill. Everybody had to register for the draft. I had four children; I was still eligible. So, I had to go and work in the mills until the war ended.

K: What was your job during that time?

V: Working at Youngstown Sheet & Tube. I used to work with handling steel there. It was a nice job; it paid

well. We made eighty cents an hour. Eighty-five cents an hour was top wage during the whole war. A lot of people figure, "You made a lot of money." But, we worked hard. We worked any overtime that would come in. There was no such a thing as "I'm not working overtime," because the war was on, and everybody as only too glad to put in extra time to help out because Sheet & Tube was a big contributor to the war by making steel.

K: Were there a lot of women working in the mill then, too?

V: Well, I worked for a while. Most of the women used to be inspectors. They worked, and they contributed. They worked hard. We had a lot of fun with them. There was no such a thing as taking pity on them. They had to put out the work or quit.

K: So, in other words, you did your job.

V: If you and I have a job, we do it. Then, if they come out and take me away and put a woman over there and you have to do twice as much, no way. So, the woman who was working with you, she did her share. And, the girls were tough. You'd be surprised. They were tough. They went out there, and they worked with those men. You'd get familiar with them. You would have a lot of fun with them. Nobody abused the girls. Everybody respected them.

K: After 1945, did you get involved with other businesses?

V: After the war?

K: Yes.

V: During the war, I had a place of business. I worked in the mill and ran my business, and my wife helped me in the business. We had to because, when I worked in the mill, somebody had to watch the business. We were in the business; and then, later on, I got in the tavern business. When I got in the tavern business, already the war was full-fledged, going full blast. So, I used to work in the mill from three to eleven. Then, I'd run my business from eleven until we closed up. We'd come home in the morning at seven o'clock and stay up until two o'clock.

K: Long days!

V: Well, you had to. You had no choice. If you didn't do that, they'd take you in. The youngest we had was two years old, and the oldest was ten. We had four chil-

dren. I couldn't leave them with my wife. I was thirty-seven years old, then. Still, you had to produce.

K: How were the taverns during that time period? Were they filled up, or was there a lot of heavy drinkers in Campbell?

V: The places were open twenty-four hours a day because of the fact that everybody worked seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. There was no such a thing as enforcing the law. You could stay open as long as you wanted to. You could close when ever you wanted to. This was in order to help the war effort. People would come out of work--lets say they worked at the Ravenna Arsenal. They'd work until twelve o'clock. By the time they came home, it was maybe one-thirty or two o'clock. If you closed the place up, they would have no place to relax. They wanted the people to relax. So, they would come down, and they would stay until four or five o'clock in the morning. And then, they'd go home. That's the way it was. It was a good idea, whoever was the governor at that time. He permitted it. As long as everything gets done, I'm not going to enforce it.

K: So, guys were working different shifts in the Sheet & tube, getting off at eleven o'clock, getting off at six o'clock in the morning.

V: You worked seven days a week. There was no Saturdays, or Sundays, you worked seven days a week. Somebody was working all the time. A lot of fellows would work eight hours, and if they wanted to work an extra four hours after eleven until three or four in the morning, they did that because they needed all the sheet steel they could produce. Sheet & Tube made money, and the people made money. Hell, I used to carry three or four checks in my pocket and never have time to cash them. They'd send me a check. I'd put it in my pocket. They'd come up to me, "You didn't cash your check." I was working all the time. If you worked day-turn, when you would come out of the mill, the banks were closed. You go to work in the morning, the banks are still closed.

K: Was there a lot of busy activity around Robinson Road when the mills let out?

V: Oh, yes. Everybody was making big money. Not because they got big pays but because they put in a lot of time. Everybody as happy. Everybody had somebody in the Army. I had three brothers in the Army. So naturally, I wanted to do everything I possibly could. Everybody else felt the same way. There was no such

thing as, "Piss on the war," because if you did, you got your ears knocked off. Somebody would say, "Hey, I got a brother in there." I had a brother in the Pacific. I had a brother down in Texas. I had another brother that was sent home. They told him that he was a sick man [and that] he had six months to live. He died six months to the day.

K: A lot of men died in that war

V: I had a lot of relations that died in the war. The Shirilla boys, two of them, died. They were from Campbell. One's buried in Germany. The other one is buried at Arlington Cemetery. So, we have a lot of relatives. Then, I had relatives fighting on the German side. They had no choice. They were from Czechoslovakia and the Germans took it over, and they just took them all in. "Come on. Give them a uniform and a gun, and go out there and fight." If you didn't, you were gone. You either joined the Army, or you're going to be dead.

K: You really didn't have much choice.

V: I knew one fellow--he lives on Columbus Avenue. He was from Campbell. He fought for the Hungarian Army. Then, he fought for the German Army. He was in the Slovak Army, then the German Army, and the Russians took over. And, they captured him, and he told them, "We're not Germans. We have no choice." So, he fought with the Russians against the Germans. It was really something how he managed to get through all that, although he doesn't know.

K: How old is he now?

V: He's about seventy-four or seventy-five. I brought him back to this country in 1950. He was an American Citizen; but the war started, and he couldn't get back. His mother took him back when he was a little boy of nine years old, in 1929. The Depression was here and all this. So, he decided to go back to Europe; and then, the war started. And, the kid said, "I'm an American." "We don't care who you are. You put the uniform on, or we'll kill you." That's the way it was.

K: How would you compare today, with that time period, the 1930's and 1940's?

V: You've got to look at it at the time. Things have changed so much in the last fifty years. In them days, people didn't have the transportation they have now. Today, if you don't have a car, you can't go no place. Them days, you had a streetcar. The neighborhoods were so integrated that you didn't have to have a car. You

could go to the tavern, or you could go to the grocery store or the drug store, or the shoe store or the clothing store because it was all in the neighborhood. Now, things have changed so much in the last fifty years. Now, you have these malls, and you have these shopping places. You have Lincoln Knolls over there. So, you take Campbell for instance. We had a grocery store on Madison. They had a grocery store on Murry Avenue. They had three grocery stores on 12th Street and on Reed Avenue. On Trumbull Avenue, you had one way up there, on Devitt Avenue, way up on 14th. You had stores all over. You can't compare it at all. If you needed something from the store, you wouldn't have to go more than a block.

Today, if you want to go someplace and shop, you have to get in your car and go. Things have changed so much. The average person doesn't realize it. I miss it because them days, if I had a car, if I went some place, I always had about six or seven of my buddies with me. You didn't go down the road with one person like you see now, [with] one person driving a car. You see twenty-five cars, you see twenty-five people. In them days, people utilized things.

They'd have ball games in different parts of the city. Maybe four or five guys would have cars. Well, you would make sure that they would help with the gasoline to go to those places. When Sunday came around, it was a local affair. If there was a ball game in town, the whole town turned out. It was nothing to see fifteen hundred, two thousand people at a ball game. That was something on Sunday afternoon at three o'clock. Everybody would be going up to the ball field with a little bench so they could sit down and watch. That was something they had to look forward to.

Today it's different. You get in the car, and you drive out to the lake. Or, you drive out somewhere. There is no such closeness. The neighborhoods are all gone. I enjoyed it back then. I'm not sorry that I'm eighty years old because I think that the kids today are not as well family-oriented as we were back in them days. Everybody was family oriented. Everybody prided themselves on wanting to be somebody. They wanted to go to school and become somebody. Now days, it has just changed. I have grandchildren and great grandchildren, and I look at it. And, I'm disappointed. I don't say anything because I lived in a different time era. You can't compare today with fifty years ago. If you tell a kid to go to Memorial High School and they'd have to walk there from the Sheet & Tube houses, they'd say, "What do you mean I got to walk there?" We walked to school, and we came home for lunch and went back. Now, we baby them too much. Kids live a mile away,

parents say, "My kids have to walk to go to school!"
The best thing for that kid is to walk a mile.

K: Parents are very protective of kids now.

V: Overprotective. Another good thing, if I went to school and I got a paddling in school because I did something mischievous and I came home, there wasn't any such thing as "What business do you have hitting my kid?"

K: As a teacher, I see that too.

V: That was the way it was. The teachers were very nice. I remember some of the teachers. One of them lived in New Bedford. I used to go up and see her, even after I got out of school. Another one, when I ran the store downtown, she was my teacher when I was in the third grade. Her name was Patterson. She'd come over there. . . . I just loved that woman. She was just like a mother. She taught us everything. The war was on at that time in Europe. It was the first World War. She would tell us all about it, and we'd be singing songs down there, "Soldiers pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile. . . ." You look back at it today, and you figure, "[My], how time has passed." It's kind of sad. Just like a fellow said to me the other day, "Where are your friends at?" I said, "I go see all my friends. And, some of them, I never come back to see again because the last time I see them-- it's because they're dead." I pay my last respects to them. So, when you get older like I am right now, people my age . . . there are not too many of us left. Like I told you, the Class of 1926, three boys and three girls are still living.

K: From Campbell Memorial.

V: Yes. That was sixty years ago.

K: Did you have a reunion?

V: Never. We never had a reunion. What happened in our situation . . . the girls got married, went different ways. Some of them died. Some of the boys went to different places, and they died too.

K: Would you like to add anything else before we finish up here?

V: I can't tell you very much because if I started, we'd be here for a week. I'll be glad to help you along sometime in the future if you want to come back.

K: Okay, thank you.

V: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

JOSEPH A. VRABEL

Joseph A. Vrabel was born on August 27, 1907 in Vanderbilt, Pennsylvania. He is the son of Stephan and Vera (Kornick) Vrabel. Eventually making their way to Campbell, Vrabel's family settled on Oxford Street. Joe attended Fairview and Gordon Elementary and Penhale Middle Schools. Mr. Vrabel was a member of the first graduating class of Campbell Memorial High School in 1926. He attended Youngstown College for one year in 1926.

In 1926, Joe went to work for the Youngstown Sheet & Tube in Campbell. During the Depression (1930-1939), he worked for A & P Tea Company as a store manager. Mr. Vrabel was able to give reliable information concerning food prices during the 1930's. During World War II, he was employed by the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company. He stayed with the Sheet & Tube Company until 1948. From the late 1940's, Joe and his family operated a number of small businesses (stores and bars) in Campbell.

During the Post World War II years, Joe served two years as a city ward councilman. He was elected Mayor of Campbell in 1960, serving until 1965. It was during this time that Campbell experienced its Urban Renewal. From 1970-1976, Joe served as a Treasurer and Clerk for the Campbell Board of Education.

Joseph was married on January 13, 1929 to Nancy Kennedy. He has three sons and two daughters: Joseph K, age 55; Gerald M., age 44; William, age 53; Patricia, age 34; and Alma Jean McCullion, age 58. Mr. Vrabel's special interest is enjoying his children and grandchildren.

Presently Mr. Vrabel resides at 2271 Cordova in Youngstown. Joe belongs to the St. Michael's Catholic Church in Campbell. He is very active in the Baseball Old-timer's League. Mr. Vrabel is still very active, planning and assisting where his help is needed. He attributes his long life to living a clean life.

- William M. Kish