

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Niles Firebrick Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1603

DONALD R. PALLANTE

Interviewed

by

James Allgren

on

November 5, 1993

DONALD R. PALLANTE

Donald Pallante was born April 23, 1921 in Niles, Ohio, the son of Joseph and Lucia Clemente Pallante. His grandfather emigrated to Niles from Bagnoli-Irpino, Italy and was employed at the Niles Fire Brick Company, manufacturers of refractory linings for heavy industrial plants. A life-long resident of that city, Mr. Pallante graduated from Niles-McKinley High School in 1940. He is a Navy veteran of the Second World War, having served on carriers in the Pacific Theatre for the duration. He received his Bachelor's Degree in education from Ohio University in 1948, and his Master's Degree from Westminster College in 1950. Mr. Pallante married the former Gloria Markle in 1952, and they are the parents of two children, Mark and Martha. He served with distinction as both a teacher and administrator for the Niles City Schools from 1948 until his retirement in 1990. He has remained active as a member of the Niles School Board, and is also active in Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Niles.

JAMES ALLGREN

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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NILES FIREBRICK PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: DONALD PALLANTE

INTERVIEWER: James Allgren

SUBJECT: Niles Firebrick Company

DATE: November 5, 1993

A: This is an interview with Donald Pallante for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Niles Firebrick Company, by James Allgren, on November 5, 1993 at 12:54 p.m.

You are a lifelong resident of Niles.

P: Yes.

A: What do you recall about growing up in Niles? What comes to mind?

P: The West End, Roundstown. Growing up in Niles has been a delight and a privilege; eventful. I can recall my grade school years. Walking to school took me about ten minutes.

A: Where was the school at?

P: Jackson School; the old Jackson school which is an administration building now. I

walked to the high school.

A: Is that the same high school that is standing today?

P: No, Edison Junior High.

A: That is the junior high school now?

P: Yes. I can remember my mother and father.

A: Can you tell me about your parents?

P: They never spoke Italian. Only when they wanted to hide something from us.

A: When they wanted privacy?

P: Yes. My mother was a type of person, was a home person. She did her shopping downtown. My dad spoke perfect English and you would not know from his diction that he was Italian. My mother carried a little colloquialism; She slurred her words a little bit and talked a little Italian.

A: So she had still a little bit of the accent?

P: Yes. I had six brothers and three sisters. We were a very close family. My brothers became my protectors.

A: You were the youngest; the youngest boy?

P: Yes. The youngest boy.

A: So, they would watch out for you in school and in the neighborhood and things?

P: Yes. I can remember growing up in the West end and stealing grapes from my neighbors and upsetting outhouses in the Halloween time. It was a lot of fun. At that time we used to play a game on the corner, counting the Fords and Chevrolets. You picked one and counted it for hours on end. We played Release.

A: What was that like?

P: One team would be the aggressor. The aggressor would be the team seeking the other team. We would play it for nights and days on end during the summer. One game might last for seven days, six days, five nights.

A: It was a good way to spend the Summer.

P: We were not poor by any standard. We always had food on the table during the Depression. My dad made a good salary. He was a property owner. He owned the house that he lived in.

A: Which house was that?

P: On Warren Avenue. He owned a store--a restaurant--which was originally a shoe store.

A: So they converted it from a shoe store to a restaurant, grocery?

P: No, not a grocery.

A: What kind of restaurant was it?

P: Liquor.

A: Was it like a sit-down restaurant?

P: Yes, booths and everything. It was called The Parkway. They had the name P-A-L-L-A-N-T-E across the top of the building. My dad built it there. We were not poor by any means. We were never rich, but not poor.

A: Never wanting for anything?

P: No, never. My dad worked for the brickyard and brought home a good salary during the Depression.

A: Do you think that was true for most of the people in Niles?

P: No.

A: Did the poverty really strike here, like it did in Youngstown.

P: Oh, yes. The mills laid off. My dad only had a job in the brickyard. The Depression hurt Niles immensely. The mills shut down, on two of days a week. It was a bad situation.

A: Was your dad a Roosevelt man?

P: Yes, definitely. He voted every chance he got.

A: You consider yourself very fortunate during that whole period then?

P: Yes, I do. My brothers always worked. We had paper routes. My dad insisted that we go to work, even if it was a paper route. My brothers Ralph, Paul, Bob, and myself always had paper routes.

A: Do you feel it was more to teach responsibility?

P: Yes. Yes. Right . Teaches the value of getting along and earning your own spending money.

A: What kinds of things would spend your money on?

P: My mother insisted on us keeping our own money, but spending it on clothes and not foolishness. That's it.

A: Still yet, sometimes you had to spend on a . . .

P: My mother insisted not paying rent, but making sure I didn't waste it on [anything] foolishly.

A: And not taking your money and going to the candy store.

P: Yes. Living in Niles at this time was delightful.

A: Did you use to go to the pictures?

P: We used to go to the picture shows because we had a billboard in our backyard which means we got in for nothing. The whole family.

A: Was that because you had billboard for the theater in your own yard?

P: Yeah.

A: That must have been great.

P: The backyard. My dad had a garden. Must have been--just visualize it--now it must have been I would say, at least one hundred feet by two hundred feet.

A: That's a pretty large garden. Was he doing it more for pleasure?

P: No, my mother canned everything from soup to nuts.

A: Literally.

P: Cabbage, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, you name it she grew it.

A: Now you mentioned something about getting the grapes from the neighbor's vine.

P: We used to play a game. My dad had grapes and they would wait for me to go in the house, my brothers, and steal our grapes. And we would do the same thing for the neighbors.

A: Tid for tad, in other words.

P: Yes.

A: Were they using the grapes for wine?

P: No. My dad made wine for a couple years until my mother got on him and said, "No more wine!" He had girls crush the grapes and all the paraphernalia. He would make wine. My dad did it for a few years, but my mother . . .

A: Did you and your brothers ever used to get into it.

P: No, no. We were a non-drinking family.

A: It just seems like a mischievous sort of thing. So everything is very tempered.

P: Growing up in Niles was a delight because we had Waddell Park up the street.

A: Where is that located at?

P: About Warren Avenue, between Warren Avenue and Park Avenue. We used to play tennis everyday and baseball every morning. We had a nice life growing up, wasn't it?

A: That park was fairly new when you were growing up

P: Yes. The tennis courts, there were two ball fields, three ball fields, baseball fields, eight tennis courts. But anyhow, growing up in Niles was very delightful.

A: Now you'd mentioned going to the movies. You got to get in for free because of the billboards. I would have loved that.

P: We used to sit in movies sometimes on Saturday at one o'clock and be there until five o'clock. We'd see the movie over and over again.

A: What were some of your favorite pictures?

P: Buck Jones and Tom Mix.

A: They call those all those old serials and things.

P: Yes.

A: Showing a lot of Westerns and things?

P: Yes. And we used to go there and eat candy and spend the day there.

A: Where was this theater at, at the time?

P: Butler Theater was on Main Street and the Butler building still stands. It's white marble on front. The fact is the one of the first theaters Warner Brothers ever owned was in Niles. Warner Theater on State Street.

A: Is that still there?

P: No, they tore it down during the renovation of Niles.

A: Heck of a way to renovate something? That's shame.

P: The Warner Theater was the one of the first theaters Warner owned. Youngstown and Niles was the location.

A: There was one in Youngstown as well that's now the. . . Is that old Paramount or is that the Warner now that's the Powers Auditorium now?

P: Powers Auditorium.

A: That's right. Beautiful building. Now when you were growing up, is there anything that really stands out in your memory? You say you remember your school days.

P: Oh, yes.

A: What was a school day like?

P: It was very delightful. I hate to use that word, but there was a type of existence that the typical boy and girl could hope for.

A: It was really the American dream, wasn't it?

P: The schools in Niles were delightful.

A: Any teachers you remember?

P: Oh, yes. Grade school teachers, Mrs. Gillis who later on became Mrs. Bob Stemple, fifth grade. A lot of teachers. I was the president of a my senior class. We still meet once every three months.

A: What year did you graduate high school?

P: 1940

A: 1940? Right before the war.

P: I enlisted in 1942 in October.

A: Now before you graduated high school--not to sidetrack you because I want to talk about the war a little bit as well, as you were growing up especially in the 1930's we talked about the effect that the Depression had. A couple of things I'd like to touch on for instance, there was a lot of labor strikes going on in the 1930's, especially 1937 when they had the steel strike.

P: I remember that steel strike vividly because the person across the street worked at the steel mills. The Warren situation was terrible. Niles had the Republic Mills. It was terrible. But growing up at that particular time in 1937, I was fifteen years old, and I remember vividly the strife and stress on the individual families..

A: Did the strike have any kind of effect on the brick yard?

P: No. They laid a few men off, but they kept working with most of the force.

A: That probably had more to do with no orders, because every place was shut down. But they didn't really have any labor trouble there?

P: No, not that I remember. My dad never talked about it. I remember going to pick my dad up with my brother Joe, in a car. He used to smoke stogies and the reason I say nobody ever smoked in the family was because my dad cured us.

A: Tell me about it.

P: He smoked in the car with the windows rolled up and the smoke from the cigar made us so sick, we decided not to smoke.

A: That's wonderful, that's absolutely wonderful.

P: The strike had a little to do with the brickyard. They laid off a few people, but my dad kept working.

A: So, they slowed down, but they really didn't have to shut all the way down.

P: No.

A: I see. Now the whole time, while this is going on, at the same time there are a lot of events going on in the world. A lot of stuff going on.

P: Hitler. . .

A: . . . just come to power. When a lot of that was going on, especially if you can recall any of that, like 1936, 1937, before the War started.

P: I was in school. I remember my dad's concerns about Hitler and Italy. Mussolini was at the time, dictator of Italy, and my dad often said, "There's a man whose going to cause trouble."

A: He said that about Mussolini.

P: Yes, he did. Finally, he did.

A: We were talking about what was going on at the time in Europe and everything.

P: Yes, my dad worried about the situation because there so many boys in my family. Four of the Pallante brothers were in the service. Two in the Navy, myself and Paul, and Larry and Bob in the Army. A result of Hitler and Japan and the war.

A: Now you enlisted shortly after Pearl Harbor?

P: Not until 1942 and I made up my mind that I was going to join the Army rather than be drafted. So I joined the Navy in late 1942.

A: Now you joined the Navy just to stay out of the Army?

P: No. I envied my brother Paul because he was always talking about the sheets and food that he got. My brother Bob and Larry always complained about the food in the Army. So I thought the Navy for me.

- A: I think that motivated a lot of people to go into the Navy, the good old Navy chow. Where did you get your basic training at?
- P: Great Lakes. I became a torpedo expert in a gyroscope. I was sent to two schools for gyroscope.
- A: What did the gyroscope do?
- P: It directed the torpedo in the water. That's the direction and height of the gyroscope in relation to the speed of the torpedo.
- A: After you completed your training and your schooling you were assigned.
- P: I was assigned to San Diego. Then I came back to Philadelphia and put the Cabot in commission and I went out in that Cabot, which is an airplane cruiser type flattop.
- A: So it was like a jeep carrier I think they called them.
- P: No, it larger than a jeep carrier. It a cruiser type ship with a flattop on it.
- A: Which ship was that?
- P: The Cabot. Then I was in the Marshall Islands aboard ship. I was sent back to Providence, Rhode Island after I went to gyro school, gyroscope. I was then commissioned again on the Shangri La.
- A: What year was that?
- P: January of 1946. I spent almost three years and seven months in the Navy.
- A: Did you see any of the larger battles?
- P: Yes, I saw a lot of the battles. The Cabot took a bomb at Coral Sea, I think, down the flight deck which is attached to the torpedo room. I lost a lot of my friends on the Cabot even though I wasn't there.
- A: Now you were working on the torpedoes on an aircraft carrier. So you were setting the torpedoes for the aircraft. You were working below the decks in the aircraft tank.
- P: The gyroscope became my expertise. I would set them. Only the pilot only set them for depth and direction. I made sure they were in working order.
- A: I see. What kind of aircraft were they using at the time?

P: Shangri La. We had over 2,300 men aboard that Shangri La. We had our own ice cream factory. We had an all new barber shop. It was like a little town. The Cabot, the first ship I was on, had less than 700 men.

A: So the Shangri La was a pretty large ship.

P: At the time.

A: I've seen pictures of it. It's a beautiful ship.

P: When I was discharged I went to Ohio University and I was discharged in January of 1946. In February, I went to Ohio University. I graduated in two and a half years.

A: Did you go on the GI Bill?

P: Yes.

A: That was a pretty good opportunity for you.

P: There were a lot of GI's down there. The school had 7,000 people.

A: As far as education is concerned, if I can touch back on something, you say your parents encouraged you to work, but at the same time you were encouraged to pursue your education as well.

P: Oh, yes.

A: Do you feel that you would have gone to college regardless?

P: Yes, I was set to go to Youngstown. I worked at the G.E. for a year, to earn some money, so I could go to Youngstown. When the war broke out I decided to enlist instead of going to school. But the GI Bill helped immensely.

A: Everyone took advantage of that in your family, like your brothers as well?

P: Larry was in the college before the war. Paul was two years in education. My brother Bob was one year into his education. They took advantage of the GI Bill.

A: Fortunately, everybody got back. That's the main thing. When you went to Ohio University, it's still a small school.

P: Yes, only 7,000. Now it's 23,000.

A: What do you remember about it? What strikes you?

P: I worked hard and graduated in two and half years.

A: On a four year program?

P: Yes.

A: So, you didn't have time to enjoy yourself.

P: No. I went summer to summer and fall to fall. Where I gained the advantages. When I went to school it was mid semester in February.

A: What courses were you studying down there?

P: Economics, English, sociology.

A: What was your major at the time?

P: Economics, Pre-law.

A: So you got out of there in two and a half years. Did you think you were going to go to law school.

P: I went to Ohio Northern for two weeks. My dad became very ill in the Summer of 1948. I decided I had to go home to see him because he was going to die. I quit law school and went back home.

A: You started teaching school then?

P: Yes.

A: Here in Niles?

P: Yes, 1948 and 1949.

A: What were you teaching?

P: Economics, sociology, and World History. Back to the Egyptians. . . The courses for college bound students at the time.

A: Was this the high school?

- P: Yes.
- A: You continued teaching there?
- P: Yes.
- A: For how long?
- P: I went, 41 years, from teacher to principal, until 1989.
- A: How was the transition from teaching to administration?
- P: Transition was difficult because I was close to the teachers. I have always been very close to the teachers, fortunately.
- A: It was kind of hard to do.
- P: Sometimes, it was difficult to judge them. I lived through it. I was the assistant principal for nine years and the principal for eighteen years.
- A: This was all at the high school?
- P: Yes. I was the visiting teacher for three years, and the rest of the time I taught in a classroom.
- A: What kind of memories do you have about the teaching? What were some of the more rewarding aspects of it?
- P: Some of the rewards of teaching are really-- I can't see any up front. You used to see kids graduate and leave school, and enter college and become professionals where they made more money than you. (Laughter).
- A: But at the same time, that is a good feeling, isn't it? They became successful and you helped them.
- P: Yes.
- A: You taught school for a long time. Over the years, what were some of the bigger changes that you saw?
- P: There used to be a set or limited curriculum. Geometry, Algebra, language, world history, English. We now give them a choice. Kids are now taking a course in shop. We

used to make them take a set pattern. They are no longer required to do that.

A: Do you think that is a disadvantage?

P: Yes. Especially for the brighter kids. I feel that in even interesting courses, some of them are too easy. Home-Ed. If you wanted to pursue the academic courses, you took an academic schedule. Up until seven years ago, they used to have what we call the academic diploma, scientific diploma, commercial diploma, and a general diploma. General diploma includes all the home-ed and shop. Science would vary. Academic required you to take three years of a language, chemistry, physics, biology. If you pursued the academic diploma, when you come out, you come out smelling like roses. If you pursued the general course, you come out smelling like manure. The brighter kids taking the general courses had a difficult time in college. They had to make up the English.

A: We were talking about the curriculum changes.

P: I believe the child does not know what he wants to do when he is in high school. If he had the ability to do hard work, he should pursue it. If he doesn't have the ability, he should do vocational or something else. Which is not bad for a living. I believe in freedom of choice, but I believe we should pursue a set pattern in school.

A: You've been on the school board?

P: Yes. They are making them take competency tests and that is the trouble with the kids, why they are flunking. They don't have the background.

A: Too many specialized programs.

P: No, too many goof off. Too many goof off subjects. Not enough basic. . .

A: What has been the biggest change in the kids over the years?

P: I think the kids. . . The kids haven't changed. Times have changed, the social conditions have changed. Kids are the same. They want to be treated respectfully. They want equal opportunities. Most of them are good kids. I don't think kids have changed a bit. I think the times have changed.

A: Just the environment that you have to exist in.

P: Yes. I don't think kids today are any different than we were. Their values are different today. That's because we set the values. The adults set the values.

A: There has to been some kind of a change somewhere along that line.

P: I think when you arrived at home and your dad was there eating dinner or supper, he was exhausted. He worked all day, a hard day working. Today, the average father has to be a jack of all trades. He has to come home, entertain his kids. Values have changed.

A: The rules have changed. When you were growing up, you didn't expect there were certain defined roles within the family.

P: Oh, yes. My dad was the boss. My mother was the keeper of the house. What she said during the day went as gospel. She would say, "You do it or else." She meant it. Today, they're out working. It takes two to make a living, today. Parents have changed, homes have changed. I don't know. The kids are the same though.

A: Do you think the environment when you were growing up was more stable?

P: I don't know. I went through a depression, went through the Ku Klux Klan episode. I went through a period of honkie, dego, wap.

A: Did you have to put up with that.

P: Sure.

A: Where would you get that from?

P: From our neighborhood.

A: You lived on the west end?

P: Yes.

A: That was not a predominately Italian neighborhood.

P: We were the only Italians in there until the Ross' moved in.

A: Did you feel you were resented?

P: No. They had to get used to us, and we had to get used to them. They didn't know what Italian meant and we didn't know what German meant.

A: At that point in time, the west end was mostly all the . . .

P: English and Welsh and Germans. Mostly non-Italians.

- A: When you first moved into the neighborhoods, there was a lot of animosity?
- P: Yes. My dad used to tell about when he moved into the neighborhood, he was resented because he moved in Italian. They were not more respected than the Negroes, at that time. I don't resent them being that way because they had to get used to us and they had to get used to them. A lot of Welsh.
- A: Eventually that subsided?
- P: Yes.
- A: At the time, especially when you were growing up, you had to put up with that? Especially from kids in the neighborhood?
- P: A little bit. By the time I grew up it was mostly over. I felt at the time, there was a little resentment, but I accepted it.
- A: At the time, you were awfully young when the things were going on with the Klan
- P: Yes.
- A: I'm sure there were. . . Your brothers or your parents must have. . .
- P: My dad helped build the Mt. Carmel Church. He was a front row catholic. Which means he was very active in church. I can remember him telling me about certain families later on in life that he became friends with. At the time, they were all on different sides. Like the Kiplers and the Wingers. A lot of the families on the west side became very friendly. We grew up together.
- A: Before that all died down, at the same time about that animosity. Like we said, it eventually faded.
- P: Oh, yes. I felt when I was growing up in high school there was a lot of it left over. It never bothered me.
- A: What do you think would motivate somebody to have an attitude like that towards...
- P: I think in the first place, the customs. We were a lot different than the people down the street. We were church going people. We had customs different from them. I think they resented the fact that we were a stranger in their mist.
- A: It was fear, maybe.

P: Fear of competition, fear of unknown, fear of. . . The most thing they feared was the Mafia. At the time of the great Italian migration, the Mafia was rearing its head in Sicily and in other parts Italy. They figured we were all gangsters. We weren't.

A: That is interesting. I could see where they would. . .

P: I could understand them. Looking back at it now, I can understand that better than I did at the time.

A: That is fascinating. That all, of course, eventually subsided though.

P: A little bit of it still remains. There is still a little bit of hesitation on the part of the mixed marriages and the. . . You know that yourself.

A: Right.

P: You have to be broad minded and except that. About being prejudice. . .

A: Your earliest memory?

P: The earliest memory I have was the kids in the neighborhood--I must have been four or five or six, running up and down the street singing, "Honkee, dego, sheene, wop. Eat spaghetti with snakes on top." That is the first time and I can remember that.

A: Were they directing it towards you?

P: No, just doing it out of silliness. Before they had directed it at my older brothers. The first thing I heard, I can remember. That is why I am so tolerant to other people.

A: That's a good way to be. The west end, your family kind of infiltrated the west end, didn't they?

P: Yes.

A: They were followed by the Ross's.

P: Yes, the Ross's. We were the only two families over there for a long time.

A: Is there anything else you would like to add?

P: No.

A: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW