YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Niles Fire Brick Company

Personal Experience

O.H. 1608

FRED SUTTER

Interviewed

by

James Allgren
on

November 10, 1994

FREDERICK SUTTER

Fred Sutter was born December 20, 1918 in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, the son of Daniel and Effie Frederick Sutter. A 1936 graduate of Niles McKinley High School, Mr. Sutter was employed by the Isaly Dairy Company until 1939, when he was hired as a laborer at the Niles plant of General Electric. In 1941 he moved to the Copperweld Steel Company until volunteering for service in the Army Air Corps in March of 1943. After training as a lab technician at Harrison General Hospital, he was assigned to stateside duty as a medical technician. After his discharge, he continued as a lab technician working for several doctors and Mullen Manufacturing, which produced mortar shells for the Army during the Korean War. In 1956, he was hired by John Clingan of the Niles Fire Brick Company, manufacturer of industrial refractory linings, to establish a product analysis lab. He remained with the company until its final shut down in 1975. A widower, Mr. Sutter married his second wife Ada in 1978. He is the father of one child, Carol. Members of the First Christian Church, Mr. Sutter and his wife are active environmentalists who enjoy sports, fishing, and gardening.

A: This is an interview with Fred Sutter for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Niles Fire Brick Company, by James Allgren, on November 10, 1994, at 1:20 p.m.
Mr. Sutter, you were born in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania?

S: Yes.

A: How did you come to live in the Niles area?

S: Well, back then my dad worked in coal mines. In the 1920's my family decided they wanted to come to Ohio. So that is how we came here. I do not know what made him pick Niles. That is where we came to in the mid 1920's. I think I was three or four years old when we came.

A: You grew up in the area then for all purposes?

S: Yes.

A: You attended Niles Schools?

S: Yes. I went to Roosevelt Elementary, Washington Junior High School, and Niles McKinley High School.

A: What do you remember most about growing up in Niles? What was your childhood like? What was a typical day like?

S: There was so much pleasure. I grew up a few houses up from Mosquito Creek right on Federal Street. Winter, summer, there was so much pleasure that we had. There were many ball fields in the area. There were so many sports: baseball, basketball, football, horseshoes, and ice hockey. The kids today do not have the pleasure we had growing up, and what they are missing. I learned to fish on that creek, I learned to swim on that creek, and I learned to ice skate on that creek. There were four ball fields right in that area where I grew up. You would play ball every day in the summer. In the wintertime, we had lots of sports. We tried skiing. They used to block streets off for sled riding in the wintertime. Are you familiar with Niles? Do you know where Washington School is?

A: Yes.

S: They blocked Clinton Street off and from Washington School on Hartzell Avenue. We would ride clear to Vienna Avenue on sleds. That is route 46.

A: That is quite a long way.

S: That is one mile. Well, almost a mile. I grew up on Federal Street. It was one mile from my house to Washington School. There was so much pleasure as a boy growing up.

A: Just something to do all of the time.

S: All of the time. Things were tough growing up then, but my dad always worked. We did not have that much, but we always ate good. We always had a big garden. I cannot ever remember running out of food.

A: Even during the Depression?

S: Yes.

A: What kind of work did your father do?

S: He tried to do mill work when he came to Ohio, but he did not like that at all. He was in the hot mill and he could not stand the heat. Then he worked at the Niles Fuel and Supply Company until he retired. In the wintertime, he made cement blocks for the foundation of houses, that type of block. In the summertime, he drove a cement truck. He was never laid off. He worked all of the time. Sometimes it would be maybe three, four days a week, so we never had a problem during the Depression.

A: What about your mother, she did not work then? I assume she was a homemaker?

S: No, just a housewife. There were five in our family.

A: You had brothers and sisters?

S: I have one brother and three sisters.

A: Where did you fit in, were you the oldest?

S: I am the youngest.

A: You are the baby.

S: I am the youngest. They are all alive yet. There is close to two years between all of us. My brother went to Ohio State and took up Pharmacy and owned a drugstore.

A: When did you graduate from high school?

S: In 1937.

A: Did you go right to work?

S: I got a job at Isaly's. You do know what Isaly's are don't you? There used to be Isaly stores all over the area.

A: Yes, I sure do. My dad, when he was a kid, used to run milk bottles for Isaly's.

S: Anyway, I got a job at Isaly's when I graduated. It paid twenty-five cents an hour. I worked there until I got a job at General Electric in 1938 or 1939. Then when Copperweld Steel started, I had an uncle who was County Commissioner. He got me in there when that started. I worked there until the war came along, and I went into the Army. I never went back after the war.

A: What kind of job did you have at Copperweld?

S: I was a chem lab technician. At Isaly's I started work at 4:00 and worked until 12:00. Every night they were open until midnight. After midnight when you closed, you swept the floor, then scrubbed the floor, then you rinsed the floor, then you waxed and buffed the floor. This would sometimes take three to four hours, but you did not get paid from twelve o'clock on for that. Another employee and I went to the manager to see if I could not get paid for the extra work. When he refused, we quit.

A: He did not want to pay you for the extra time, then?

S: No. After quitting at Isaly Dairy, I did not work for about two weeks. Then I got an idea to see if I could not get hired at General Electric which was down the street from where I lived. The plant was a three-shift operation. Day turn was eight to four o'clock p.m. My idea was to go there before each shift started and soon or later they were going to need another employee. So, I went over to the plant at seven o'clock each morning, three o'clock in the afternoon and eleven o'clock at night. Finally about three hours later, the plant manager came up to me one morning and asked me my name. He said he was going to get me examined to go to work. I started the next day. I think he hired me to get rid of me.

A: I could not imagine anybody today standing out front of a place for three weeks trying to get a job.

S: I went inside by the time clocks.

A: You just stood there. You got noticed though, it must have worked out all right. Was GE a union shop then?

S: I do not believe it was. They treated us good. I went from GE to Copperweld until I

went into the service.

A: I see you volunteered for the Army?

S: Yes. I was married and I had one child, but all my friends and everybody were gone by 1943, so I volunteered. I had to get my wife's signature to go.

A: You were assigned to the Air Corps?

S: Yes.

A: You stayed in until 1945?

S: Yes, from February 1943 to August 1945. I never left the country. I was always stationed in the states.

A: What places do you remember?

S: I took my basic training in Kerns, Utah. From Kerns I went to Indianapolis, which is where I went to medical lab school at Harrison General Hospital. From there I went to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. From St. Louis I went to Traux Field at Madison, Wisconsin and from there I went to Boca Raton, Florida. They had a big air radar base down there. That is where I was discharged from.

A: That is a lot of moving around?

S: Yes. Different special assignments, that is what took me around to these places when they had some project going on. I worked on a dysentery program in Florida and a Beta Streptococcus program with the German prisoners at Madison, Wisconsin.

A: So, after your discharge you returned to this area then?

S: I came back. I worked for four doctors in Youngstown for about five years because I had gone to lab school. That is why I never went back to Copperweld. In Youngstown, I worked for Dr. Firestone, Nidus, Zlotnic, and Rosenblum. I was their lab technician. I did it all. I did the blood work, the urine analysis, the heart metabolisms, the heart tracings, the EKGs, all the blood chemistry.

A: Actually, you wound up getting more out of the Army, probably more than a lot of people did?

S: Yes, I did. Since I was in Youngstown, I started going to Youngstown [State University]. I went to Youngstown State at night. I would go right from work there. I went three

years at night. I had 60 credit hours and decided to get a degree. So I quit working at the doctors and went to school all day turn. Then I took a job afternoon turn at Mullen's in Warren. So, for two years I went to school in the day time and worked afternoon from four to twelve in Warren at Mullen's Manufacturing. I graduated and got my Bachelor of Science Degree.

A: What did they make up there?

S: At that time, the Korean War was on and they had what they called a cold flow product. We made 91 millimeter and 105 millimeter shells.

A: Mortar rounds?

S: Yes, 105 millimeters and 81 millimeters.

A: So, you were working in a shell filling plant?

S: Yes. We made the hollow shell. They were filled at Ravenna Arsenal.

A: Was that in the lab as well?

S: Yes, we worked with a metallurgical lab. The job did not last that long. Then when I got my degree, I went to work for the fire brick. John Clingan hired me to set up a laboratory.

A: They did not have a laboratory?

S: No, they did not have a laboratory. He wanted a quality assurance program started.

A: How did you happen to come across the job? Did he come looking for you?

S: I went to Youngstown State and they have an employment service. I went in and talked to them to see what they had after I graduated. The Fire Brick job sounded good and I knew Jack Higgin's, who worked for John Clingan then as an office manager.

A: What kind of impressions do you have about John Clingan? What do you remember the most about him?

S: I admired that guy, but I will tell you, after he hired me, he was a wild man. He was a kind of man you had to be around him awhile and get to know him. I can remember, after he hired me and was showing me around and he said something about one of the kilns -- that is where they fired the brick at that time. They had a tunnel kiln and had these beehive kilns -- and he said something about we get better results out of this kiln

than we do out of any of the others. I said to him, "What is different about it?" Well he blew his top, you cannot imagine. He said, "What do you think I hired you for?" I had been there five days.

A: And he wanted you to tell him? (Laughter)

S: Yes. (Laughter) So anyway, I said well he is not going to catch me again like that. I went around and made notes on everything. Nobody would tell you anything, because they were all old timers. I went around and checked everything out. I made notes and I had a file on everything in the plant.

A: You knew how the whole plant worked?

S: Yes. He was not there too long. The company was sold to Mexico Refractories after about eight or nine months. He and I became good friends. He used to send me a Christmas card and he always had fifty dollars in it until he died.

A: I heard a story that Mr. Clingan never liked to have old money, and he would go to the bank every day?

S: He was a stickler for cleanliness. He used to wash his hands constantly.

A: Why did the company sell out? You were only there for nine months?

S: He was there about nine months after I started.

A: That is what I am saying, then it got sold.

S: He just sold it because he was getting up in the years. I suppose the family was forcing it. They sold out to Mexico Refractories, which in turn was sold to Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation.

A: As far as the plant itself goes, you made notes on everything that went on inside of the plant?

S: Yes, so I would know what these kilns were like. There were a lot of differences in some of them. I wanted to be prepared for when he said, "Why do you think I hired you?" Like I was supposed to know why that kiln was different from the other ones.

A: What were some of the differences?

S: Just in the heating and the location. The air settings, firing schedule, everything was done before I really knew enough to take over. Every day I used to go and see the

changes on each one of these kilns because we always would have five or six on fire. I really learned that business by just going around making notes of all the changes until I knew the whole procedure there. Let me tell you one more thing about John Clingan. Now this was "here say" I never saw any of this, but twice I heard he fired -- others had told me -- that he had gotten so mad at the workers, he fired the whole plant. Then he would hire them all back. Like I said, we got to be good friends. I would go down on Saturday's and he would show up and he liked that. I would just go down and look around and see if everything was all right. I admired him. Ray Wright probably told you a lot of this. He had vision that you cannot imagine.

A: A good business sense.

S: He had clay deposits down in Kentucky and over in Pennsylvania. He had leases on the properties over there. Ray Wright was probably as instrumental as anybody in lining up these leases and gravel deposits up at Nelson Ledges. You know where Nelson Ledges is?

A: Right.

S: He had deposits over there and a mining operation. Did you every hear of Sidley's?

A: No.

S: Well, they have a cement and gravel place on the outskirts in Warren going into Cortland. All the gravel deposits Mr. Clingan had up around Geauga County there were sold to the Sidley Company. After we got out, after we had sold them, Sidley used to supply us down at the plant in Niles with the gravel. That is what we made silica brick out of.

A: What kind of different things are you going to put into a brick?

S: Well, if it is a silica brick, I can only talk about the brick we made down there or we should confine it to that. On a silica brick we used silica dioxide, which is known as the lucky stones. Silica dioxide was the main ingredient. It was 99.9 percent pure. You ground that up and you screened it after it was crushed. We had big crushing mills there. As it came over the series of screens, you saved different particle sizes. Then you took a percentage of all of these different sizes and you mixed them up with lime and iron ore and a binder. The binder was a bi-product of the paper industry. I cannot think of the chemical name for that. Lignan liquor it was called, but there was a chemical name for it. But it was a bi-product of the paper industry. It would hold the brick together after they were pressed and dried.

A: Did they use a machine to press them?

S: Yes. We had drive presses. They were under extreme pressure. We would make as many as five at a time.

A: No heat or anything?

S: No, we just pressed them. Then you dry them. They went through a dryer, then you fired them in a kiln.

A: Is it a different process if you are making clay brick?

S: Yes. On clay brick, all you had was clay. You put a little water in and mix it in a big mixing pan. You just made the brick from the clay. Different types of clay were used: a plastic clay, a semi-flint clay, and a hard flint clay. All these clays, Jim, had to have a high melting point. It is a different clay than they make building brick out of. It is a much purer grade.

A: I have seen them, they are kind of yellow.

S: They can put dye in and give it any color they want.

A: So there is a difference in grades?

S: Yes, you had to have good clay deposits. And before we ever tried new clay we would find the melting point of it. At what point is that clay going to start melting out? That is the whole idea of refractories. Refractories are heat containers. Anything that is inside a furnace, like the bricks that line the furnace, has to have a higher melting point than what you have inside. Like steel, you have to have brick that has a higher melting point than steel so it can contain the hot metal.

A: If you are building something, for instance, and you are going to use different grades or different types depending on how hot it is going to be in a particular part?

S: You want to make sure that the refractories you use will contain your product.

A: So, would you use a silica brick for something different than you would use a clay brick?

S: Yes. We sold a lot of silica brick to the glass industry. Different industries would use the silica brick. Glass companies generally bought silica because glass is mostly silica and it did not matter if it chipped off when it is hot. The silica just becomes apart of the product.

A: What companies were buying a lot of the product outside of the glass companies?

S: Pittsburgh Plate Glass, almost any glass company. Corning Glass, Owens-Illinois. I mean just any glass company you can think of. We sold to them General Electric. We sold to all of the steel mills.

A: Mostly local ones?

S: We shipped to Buffalo, Alabama, Canton, Massillion, and Cleveland. We had export business too. It was a good business. It was a lucrative business, too.

A: You were actually exporting over seas as well?

S: Yes, we shipped to different places. I can remember shipping to Czechoslovakia. Anywhere there were steel mills or glass companies if we could compete with their suppliers.

A: What kind of competition was there in the business? Was it pretty stiff?

S: Yes. There was Harbison Walker and General Refractories. There were lots of refractories. The biggest was Harbison Walker, then there was General Refractories. They [General Refractories] had a plant in Warren up here by Copperweld. Harbison Walker had a plant over in Windham, locally around here. Then there was Kaiser Aluminum in Niles.

A: I had no idea Harbison Walker was that close?

S: Yes, they had a plant up in Windham. I do not know if it still there or not. I know General just closed their plant up by Copperweld in the last few months.

A: Right, I saw it on the news. The thing about Niles Bricks, as far as we can discover, that they had an outstanding quality above everybody else's?

S: Yes they did.

A: Why do think that was?

S: I would have to give John Clingan credit for that because he would not accept an inferior product.

A: Was there much of a change of the way the plant ran after the sales of the company to Mexico and then to Kaiser?

S: After Mexico bought it, Mr. Clingan stayed on as an advisor for about six months I would guess, then he left. I am guessing. I do not know the exact times there. It was roughly

six months. To my knowledge, it was around six months.

A: After Kaiser bought the company, how long did it stay in operation?

S: That plant stayed in operation until -- I went down to the Columbiana plant in 1968 -- it was about a year later, about 1969. We had warehousing facilities there that we used to ship from. What killed that plant was changing technology. When they started putting oxygen lances in the steel mill furnaces, the brick that we made would not withstand the temperatures that required. The basic brick did withstand the higher temperatures. Now Kaiser had a plant down in Columbiana that made basic brick. Rather than trying to convert our plant in Niles to make basic brick, it was close enough to increase production down in Columbiana, so they shut this plant down. Changing the technology is what killed us. The clay brick and the silica brick would not take the temperature. Mills sped up the operations by the use of oxygen lances. It used to take four hours for a heat in the steel mill. Now, they were pumping them out in ninety minutes. You know what I am talking about, an oxygen lance?

A: Right. We did a tour of WCI a couple of weeks ago. With the new BOF they got out there, they can crank out a heat in roughly twenty-five minutes.

S: I have been gone for a while, but when they started using lances, I think it was around ninety minutes they used to kick one out. To be competitive, our brick had to keep up with other companies.

A: While you were at the brick plant, who were some of the folks you used to work with that you remember fondly or even those you remember not so fondly?

S: I loved that plant and I loved those guys. There were only a few bad apples, but the dedication they had to the plant was amazing. I can remember so many of the good people. I could read you off names of the set crews. If you want them, I could give them to you.

A: The set crews?

S: Yes. They set the bricks by hand. They had setters and they had tossers in the beehive kilns. Another name for the beehive was down draft kilns. They worked in crews and they were all on piece work. For each crew there were two setters and two tossers.

A: Which kind of brick were they working on?

S: These were the silica brick.

A: So you had four guys on a team?

S: On a crew. We had three crews working every day.

A: What is the difference between a setter and a tosser?

S: The setters would set the bricks and the tossers would throw it to them. You made the brick on the presses. Then we had rack cars that would sit by the press and as the bricks were pressed they would come out on a pallet. The press employee's would pick up the pallet and put them on a rack car. To give you an idea, there used to be five hundred and twenty bricks on car of nine inch long brick. From the press, after the car was full, other employee's would pull the car and put it in a dryer. They would be in this dryer for a couple of days until they dried. Then the set crews would pull them out of the dryer and take them to the kiln that was in the process of being set. The loaded cars were moved from the dryer to the kiln with the electric trolley. There was a series of rail tracks from the presses to the kilns.

A: I have seen a photograph.

S: When the cars reached the kiln, the tossers would take the bricks off pallets and would throw them to the setters. They had to be pretty good, which is why they were incentive workers. They could make money.

A: So they stayed on piece work?

S: They were always on an incentive base all of the time I was there.

A: The setters inside, had to put them in the right spot?

S: There was a certain pattern that was followed. The setters started by building a flat, even base out of the fired brick. The base had to be 30 inches wide and extended to about two feet from each side of the kiln. The setters then started to set the brick on these 30 inch bases as the bricks were tossed to them. They continued to set these tiers to a height of about twelve feet until the kiln was loaded and ready to be fired. We made from nine inch brick all the way up to 30 inch brick. Now that is long. Generally they were six inches wide and three inches thick.

A: I have seen the examples of the nine by six. What kind of other operations went on in the plant besides the setters and the tossers?

S: We had what they called hand molding. They made special shapes by hand. Then we got an impact press later on.

A: Impact press?

S: Impact press. It was like a little hammer mill. If you are familiar with some of these shapes, it is kind of hard to explain if you have never seen them.

A: I have seen the wedges and arches and things.

S: Those are made on the presses, these are special shapes. Generally, depending if they had to go around pipes or something like that. You get some odd shapes. Companies would send us a print, and say "Could you make this? Give us an estimate of the cost." They were some of the weirdest shapes you ever saw. You really did not know what the intended use was, but you knew they went somewhere where they had to contain heat. So we got some real odd ball shapes. We made those by hand until we started making them by an impact press. That was like a hammer mill. If you could imagine, maybe you would have a triangle type brick with a hole in it. Special shapes we call it. With the impact press, there would be a mold on the bottom, then the top would have a dye the same as the mold on the bottom. Then by constant pounding by impact, the shape was formed. It was like a hammer mill, it kept pounding the shape down to make it better than if you made it by hand. It was a better brick is what it amounted to. You could get better density in it.

A: Because of the hammer and the compression?

S: When you made them by hand, they used to have a big paddle that would pound the material in the mold. You could only get so much density in it, then you could not get anymore. But if you had a hammer mill pounding them, you could get them a lot denser. So we made a better brick.

A: So the company was not opposed to technological improvement?

S: No. We had a research center out in Pleasantant, California. Any problems we could not handle, is when Kaiser took over.

A: Is that the same Kaiser Aluminum that is a subsidiary of Kaiser Steel?

S: Yes. Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation had Kaiser Steel and Permanente and Kaiser Refractories was part of the chemical division. We were a division of Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation.

A: I worked at the Steel Museum part-time, and we got some drawings down there from Kaiser that are of the inside of furnaces and things.

S: Is that the refractories division?

A: Yes.

S: Yes, they had a steel mill out in California, I do not believe they have that anymore

A: As a matter-of-fact, if I am not mistaken, that is the steel mill that they just got done cutting up and shipping to China.

S: I had a cousin who worked for them. He lived in Alliance. He was quite ambitious. He took a job in Florida and he did not think he was busy enough down there, so he went to Kaiser Steel out in California. I went out to visit him once. I think they shut that plant down. They had Permanente Cement, and they had a big chemical division. They were pretty well branched out. They had refractories in Australia, and in Canada. In fact, in later years they wanted to send me to Australia. I was the last one in the company who knew anything about silica brick. Ada and I just got married and this was in the later seventies. Before I retired, they wanted me to go to Australia. I said, "I do not want to go down there." I said, "Why don't you send somebody up here to see me." The sent two guys up, and God, they were with me for little better than two weeks down in Columbiana picking my brain on silica bricks. Their breakage was high. I knew damn well what the problem was. So they sent two guys up and we talked for better than two weeks over the making of silica bricks.

A: Is that Columbiana plant down by American Fire Clay?

S: No. America Fire Clay is a different plant and company all together. Now the Columbiana plant is National Refractories. The employee's bought it. Kaiser sold all of their refractories. The employee's bought that plant in Columbiana plus some others. If I would have still been working, I would have gone in with them. They did very well, I heard thirteen of them went together and got the whole refractories division.

A: At the brick yard itself, you told me about the setters and the tossers. What other kind of jobs were there?

S: That was just silica brick. Then you had to have the people that unloaded these kilns. This was the shipping crew. They were incentive workers also. They had the wheelers and tossers. As they unloaded these kilns, the tossers dropped the brick down to the wheelers to load on wheelbarrows. They would catch the brick as they would be dropped down from the top of the kiln, until they gradually got down to the bottom. When the wheelers got a load of brick, they would wheel them into the warehouse and put them on pallets. They were incentive workers, too. You asked what kind of jobs there were. The bricks were all made on presses. We had six presses there that we used all of the time that were turning out these silica bricks. Then we had three clay presses that were making clay brick at the same time. Only they loaded these directly to a car that a truck pulled. Clay brick all went through a tunnel kiln. This was automatic. They put them in one end and took them out of the opposite end. Do you know what a tunnel kiln is like?

A: I have seen a photograph of the outside of one. It kind of runs them in.

S: It is just like a long tunnel with a rounded top. You had to maintain your heat in there at certain temperatures depending on what you are making. The clay brick went through a tunnel kiln. The silica bricks were put in these down draft kilns. These were the beehive kilns. We had fifteen of those down there.

A: Why so many?

S: We had them full most of the time. You had them in different stages all of the time. You are unloading some and you are always setting some, and others were being fired or cooling down.

A: I understand.

S: So you were loading one, and half of them would be on fire. Somebody would be unloading the rest of them. The shipping crews would be unloading them. The setting crews would be setting them, and the rest were on fire.

A: So they rotated it?

S: Yes. The tunnel kiln was continuous. It never stopped.

A: You just kept loading it and pushing the brick slowly through. By the time they got out the other end, they would be baked properly?

S: Sure. You gradually increased the temperature. You were drying them as they went through the tunnel kiln. We started out with a low temperature. Then you would gradually increase the heat of the kiln. You would have them about 2200 to 2300 degrees at the center. The clay brick will melt out around 2700 degrees.

A: What kind of temperatures are you talking about in the down draft kiln?

S: We took them to 2700 degrees F. When we reached 2700 F, we would shut the kiln down. We would take it off of the heat. Then the brick would gradually cool down. They would be on fire for about eight to ten days. These down draft kilns were different sizes. Some kiln capacities were smaller than others. The bigger they were, the longer it took to fire them

A: You have unsolved very many great mysteries today. You said there was a lot of worker loyalty?

S: Yes, there was.

A: What would you attribute that to?

S: Even though he [Clingan] was a hard man to get along with, he was fair. If one of his workers had a problem, it became his problem. If one of those old time employee's would see a light on that should not be on, they would say "That light should be turned off." They did their damndest to make sure that plant was going to be a success. I think they were conditioned by him into this kind of attitude.

A: Did you ever hear the old timers talk about the Thomas'?

S: To a degree.

A: I wonder if perhaps that is where Mr. Clingan got it from, because he was related by marriage?

S: I did not know any of the Thomas', so I cannot relate to that.

A: Mr. Clingan's wife was a Thomas.

S: He never married.

A: He was a grandson or a son of one of the Thomas'.

S: When I started to work there, he had a nephew working who was not worth a damn. Jimmy Wick was his name. He was not much good. After I had been there a while, I said to somebody, "What is Jimmy's capacity around here?" The answer was, "John Clingan's nephew." He would get in the way more than anything else. He did not really have a job.

A: I am trying to remember the genealogy. I think John Clingan was one of the Thomas'. His mother was a Thomas.

S: Yes. She married a Clingan.

A: So he was a very frugal, no nonsense man?

S: Yes. He had so much vision. They used to make brick by hand all of the time. He was the first one to make a brick with a press.

A: Making them all by hand, I cannot imagine the capacity.

S: Of course, you could not make too many because you had to have dryer ingredients start smoldering and the floor would start to burn because the bricks were so hot. Some of the

setters and shippers would wear leather gloves. Others had just a leather pad that had a slot in it for a finger and a thumb so they could hold onto the brick. The strangest damn thing I ever saw when I first started there, was how that piece of leather would stay on their hands. I think they used the slit with the middle finger and another for the thumb. The leather pads made it possible to handle bricks that hot.

A: Most of them were running pretty good then. So they used them for everything?

S: Yes. They used them to unload kilns and to set kilns because the bricks were hot coming out and hot going in.

A: Somebody was telling me that they had a relative that was in the Navy during the second World War and were surprised when they went into the boiler room. They were from this area and were surprised to find that the boilers in the ships were lined with Niles Fire brick.

S: We come across them periodically. We will see some old brick in different places. They are liable to be anywhere. In fact, my wife and I found some up at the lake in Ashtabula. There was a lot of erosion taking place, if you recall, along the shoreline of Lake Erie. Old concrete and old brick were used to shore up the banks until they could do something better. We came across some old brick up there that said Niles Fire Brick. I do not know where they came from, but they had to be made at Niles Fire Brick Plant.

A: I know there is a bunch of them out right now lining Mike Patrone's garden.

S: You know Mike? Did he give you any hot peppers?

A: Yes. I have to stop out and see him this afternoon as well.

S: Do you like hot peppers?

A: Yes.

S: I will tell you what I am going to do, I can some too. I will give you a jar.

A: I would appreciate it. We got a lot of good information here today. You have unlocked the keys to many mysteries that we did not understand.

S: Time erodes your memory to some degree.

A: Did they ever have any union trouble out there?

S: Not while I was there. During my tenure, I was plant manager, and right up until the time

the plant shut down, we had no problems. It was not until the last six years and before that I had other jobs. I was in charge of production. We never really had any labor problems. We never had a strike when I was there. We did when I first started, but not when I was plant manager. We never had a strike.

A: Well, with the 1956 strike you might have walked out?

S: No. The salaried people continued to work.

A: That was the big one.

S: When they were on strike, we salaried people had to take turns guarding the plant. On midnight turns I could remember making my rounds every hour. I stayed in the watchman's office down there and I would go over and check the main office. The first check was at one o'clock in the morning. I went over there one night and found the back door open. When I saw the door open I thought, "Jesus, I better get some kind of weapon," because I was going up to look around. I did not know whether somebody was up there or not. So I looked around and got me a club and started up those back steps. There was nothing up there. Somebody just left the back door unlocked and open.

A: There was nothing up there?

S: I was scared, to tell you the truth, because I didn't know if somebody was up there with a gun.

A: You caught me off guard, I was waiting for a guy to come around the corner at you. (Laughter)

S: No, there was nothing. I went up there one step at a time and real slow. I was listening and I did not hear anything. I was not about to go rushing up there and have somebody shove a gun in my back.

A: It sounds like too good of a job for anybody to complain about?

S: There were dirty operations from the clay and silica. Both of these had to be ground up and screened. Until Kaiser Aluminum took over there were not too many things in place that would take care of dust. Kaiser really made a big difference.

A: Clean up shop afterwards?

S: Yes, and they had exhaust fans that were much better to keep the plant dust free. Most private companies were like that. I do not think in those days they had too much emphasis on safety before government regulations come in. The plant was safety

conscience. They had to wear their safety shoes, safety hats, and safety glasses. A funny thing, when we started putting the safety program under effect, the guys hated the safety glasses more than anything else. If you did not wear glasses, you hated them. I know this one guy, he squawked and moaned and then all at once he quit complaining and he had the glasses on all of the time. So I got suspicious, "Now why the hell is he not complaining like he used to all of the time." I used to write him up every time I saw him without them. So I got suspicious. While I was talking to him one day, I was looking at his glasses. I thought his glasses looked funny. I said, "Let me see your glasses." He said, "Why do you want to see my glasses?" I said, "Let me see your glasses." He did not have any lenses in. He took the lenses out. (Laughter) He did not have the lenses in, just the frames on his face.

A: Who does he think he was trying to kid?

S: He was wearing those safety glasses.

A: He just did not like having them on his face?

S: No. Getting back to John Clingan, to me, he was something.

A: I can now go back to everybody that is working on the project and brag to them that I know how to make the bricks and they do not.

S: In later years after I got there, we installed probes that would tell us the amount of moisture in each batch of mix. Every time we would mix a batch, we had a much higher degree of accuracy and consistency than they had previously.

A: You probably had to just do it by sight?

S: Yes, or feel. They would feel it. I said, "Christ, I am not going to feel that any more, we are going to put some meters in here so we know." They put a can of this and a can of that. We started to use measured volumes of all additives.

A: Do it right.

S: You do it right so we know every batch is consistent. If we want three percent moisture, I want every batch three percent.

A: Not two and a half.

S: That is right. Mixer operators would say, "Well, we will make the next batch a little wetter." Nonsense, no way, you are not going to do that. I want every batch the same. We had good workers with a few bad apples. When I was in charge of production, an

employee -- his dad worked there too -- every weekend the son was in some kind of trouble. He got stabbed a couple of times. I said, "What the hell are you doing fooling with a guy with a knife?" He said, "I had a tire iron."

He would come late. If he was not there, I had to put somebody in his place. Then he would come in about ten o'clock and want his job. I said, "You want to work, you have to go to labor. I put somebody in your place." He said, "That is my job." I said, "Hey, Tom, we start work at eight o'clock around here" We would be eyeball to eyeball. To make this short, he was in trouble all of the time. Then he left and took a job over in New Jersey. He called me up one time and wanted to know something. I was at work and he said, "Fred, you are not going to believe this" he said, "they made a foremen out of me." He said, "I am just wondering what am I going to do when somebody pulls what I used to try to pull on you." He said, "How am I going to handle it." I said, "Tom, you handle them just the way I handled you." You do not give in. Be firm but fair.

A: What were things like? I know, especially at a lot of the steel plants, at least until right after the war after the sixties, you would have racial and ethnic tension. That kind of thing did not happen out there?

S: No, we never had that. That might have before I got there. I hear stories that some of those guys used to come to work with guns in their belt. No way would I put up with that.

A: Some of those guys might have been afraid of the Klan coming.

S: Some of those guys were pretty wild. They got away with a lot of stuff under Clingan that Kaiser would not put up with. Like drinking, no way, do not bother picking up your check. We will send it to you if we found you drinking.

A: They used to let them drink in the plant before Kaiser got there?

S: No, they would not let them drink openly. If somebody came out to work and you knew they had been drinking, they were to be told go ahead and work. We would not put up with that. Have I ever told you this? If we had extra work, we would say to workers "Do you want to work Saturday's?" Some would say yes. One time we were painting all of the kilns when I first started and was in charge of them at that time. I see these guys with paint all over them, some had paint dabbed on their shoes and I got suspicious and started watching them. I would see them crawl under a kiln one at a time. One guy would go under there, then in twenty minutes or so another would go under and the first one would come out. What the hell are they doing? Under each one of those kilns where the fire was there was a pie shaped kind of an air space going in eight sections. There was room enough for one person to crawl under there. So I said, "What the hell are they doing?" I crawled under one side to see why they were going down there. There were two bottles of whiskey. One had not been opened, and one was about half gone. I came back out

with both bottles. I said, "Who do these belong to?" There was no response. I said, "Nobody?" Again, there was no response. I said, "I might as well get rid of it." I emptied out the bottle that was half full. I said, "Nobody is going to claim these?" No response. The full one had not been opened. "Still does not belong to anyone?" You should have seen them, they were looking and looking. I poured the whole fifth out. It was a fifth and a half and I poured them out. I knew it was their's.

A: Still you would not get them.

S: There was no way I could have made it stick. I do not know anything about it. I did not find it on them. If we would have gone to arbitration, they would have beaten me.

A: Because it was not in their possession?

S: They were not in their possession. So, I poured them both out.

A: We are finding out a lot of amazing things about that plant and just the way things worked.

S: The loyalty of over ninety percent of the workers is what amazed me.

A: Do you think it was a mutual feeling?

S: I think they had been conditioned into that, because if somebody had a problem, they could go to John Clingan and he would help them. If somebody said they were going to lose their home or something like that, hell, he would give them money.

A: Do you think that is all apart of the family tradition?

S: I would think so. That family, over the years, has been extremely generous. Down there in Youngstown, do you see where Dr. Cochrane is moving into? Do you remember what that sign said before?

A: Clingan-Waddell's Hall.

S: I remember when he gave fifty thousand dollars to the university to buy that building.

A: The Clingan's and the Waddell's are both related

S: Yes. I think one of the Clingan girl's must have married a Waddell. The Thomas', the Clingan's, and the Waddell's are related.

A: They are all intertwined?

S: I think that is the relationship. He knew how to make money. It was handed down to him because he did not start it. Thomas' started it.

A: It would have been his grandfather.

S: To be born in that wealth, most of them would be, "Hey, why should I break my ass here." Not him, he was there all of the time. He did not come in at nine o'clock or eight o'clock, he had to be there at six o'clock. He was not married. He was at the plant most of the time. When everybody else was gone, I would still see him. I would see his car still there. I never left early. I would not go home until six or so.

A: I understand he was not very flashy with his money?

S: No. You would not know. The way he dressed, you would not have guessed. He was very modest. The car was not an exceptional car, it was just average. He always went to Cleveland. He did not want anybody to know his business. If he had women in Cleveland, I did not know. He always spent a lot of time in Cleveland, not through the week, but on the weekends. When he was mad, he would throw his hat on the ground and jump up and down on it. He would lose his temper easily. Everybody would stay out of his way when he got in one of those moods. If something went wrong, which he thought should not have happened, God he threw his temper.

A: I have had bosses like that.

S: After the initial onslaught, he and I became good friends. He would always a big smile when he came up to me. I liked him.

A: It looked like everybody felt that way.

S: I liked him - most workers did.

A: That is just the impression I got from Mr. Wright, too. Everybody just seems to think he was the greatest.

S: He was. I liked his vision.

A: I think we have a lot of good information to go along here. You have been so incredibly helpful.

S: Like I said, I would go and see him every once in awhile. He just died in his sleep. He was found dead in the morning, so I imagine he was asleep, I think in a chair.

A: What year was that, do you recall?

S: No, I do not remember?

A: I will have to look it up.

S: I would guess the early seventies.

A: I would like to do a check.

S: Maybe it was before that. It was not that late. It had to be early sixties, may be sixty, sixty-one.

A: I can look that information up. I will have to see, because I am interested in knowing.

S: Kaiser Aluminum bought Mexico Refractories in 1959. I think he was alive then.

A: Maybe shortly thereafter then.

S: That would be interesting to see the background. There are so many of us fellows who could give you more information than me. I can only give you my impression.

A: That is exactly what we need.

S: What I got from the ones that were there.

A: That is the beauty of how things work out, because I got your perspective, and I got Mr. Wright's perspective.

S: Wright was there a long before I was there.

A: This is really good stuff you have given me today. I appreciate it. Do you know anybody else offhand that is still around that we might want to talk to?

S: Have you ever talked to Ed Gilbert?

A: I do not think so.

S: He was in Cortland. He would not know anything about the brick end because he was never out in the plant. He was like a sales correspondent. Then he worked in shipping. So he could give you that end of it.

A: All ends are good ends.

S: I can even give you his phone number if you would like to talk to him.

A: Yes, that might be helpful.

End of Interview