

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ku Klux Klan Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 311

NICOLA CRISCIONE

Interviewed

by

William Jenkins

on

May 8, 1984

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ku Klux Klan Project

INTERVIEWEE: NICOLA CRISCIONE
INTERVIEWER: William Jenkins
SUBJECT: KKK, Flaming Circle, Gangs
DATE: May 8, 1984

J: This is an interview with Nick Criscione by Dr. William Jenkins on May 8, 1984, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Ku Klux Klan.

Okay, your name is?

C: Nick Criscione.

J: How long have you been in Youngstown?

C: Seventy-nine years, seventy-eight years. I was born in Briar Hill on Alvin Street.

J: Were your parents from this country?

C: No, my parents immigrated from Italy.

J: Where about in Italy?

C: Caserta.

J: What part of Italy?

C: The next fifteen miles, on the other side of Naples.

J: What kind of jobs did you hold in the 1920's in Youngstown?

C: I was working on the Erie Railroad at that time.

J: What did you do for the Erie Railroad?

C: I was an apprentice helper at that time, boilermaker apprentice helper.

J: When did you first hear about the Ku Klux Klan coming into this area?

C: Around 1921, somewhere around there.

J: What did you hear about it, what kind of organization was it?

C: Well, I heard that they were against all Catholics, and foreign people, and they wanted to make a city of their own.

J: What did you do as a result of hearing that?

C: Nothing.

J: Nothing? You indicated before that some people formed another organization, what organization was that?

C: In the olden days there was always an ethnic group. In Briar Hill there was the Briar Hill outfit, then from Berlin Street to Hamburg were the Germans, and from Jefferson Street to Worthington were the Irish, and then from the West Lake crossing were the colored people, the black people.

J: Everybody lived separately?

C: Everybody lived separately. You had to fight your way in and fight your way out.

J: Were you ever in fights between the different groups?

C: Every day nearly.

J: Every day?

C: Many black guys.

J: Did you fight with the Irish or the Germans?

C: Irish and Germans. First it was the Germans, then the Irish, and then the black people. Then when we came back home it was the black, Irish, Germans, and then back home.

J: So as you walked through the neighborhood you had to fight to get through?

C: Every time we went to town.

J: Each group had its gang?

- C: Each group had its gang. There was a Smoky Hollow gang, that was quite Italian. I think it was part Irish. The Monkey's Nest was Slovak, Pollocks, Hungarians, and . . .
- J: Where was the Monkey's Nest?
- C: The Monkey's Nest was where Crescent Street is now. Where the East Ohio gas has their plant, down under the . . . That is the Monkey's Nest in there. Then they had Lansingville. The rest of them were mostly all woods, like North Lima, it was all farmers, and Canfield was mostly farm land. Even part of Youngstown up around Briar Hill towards Girard was all farm land.
- J: Were most of the gangs young people?
- C: Oh, young and old, but mostly young people were doing the most.
- J: Supposedly some people formed an organization to fight against the Klan coming into Youngstown, do you remember?
- C: Well, there was no organization, it was the paper that dubbed them that, but it was no organization. It was just a thrown-together outfit. The guys that got there first put in their licks.
- J: So they called them, in the papers, the Knights of the Flaming Circle? But you are saying there really wasn't such an organization?
- C: No, they called them that because what they had was a flaming circle. What we did was we got a bunch of tires and put them around a circle and burned them, or bailed the hay and put them around a big circle and burned them. They burned the cross and we burned the circle. It was a hit-and-run outfit. There were no heads of anything.
- J: There were never any meetings, no dues? People would just decide on the spur of the moment, the kinds of things they would do?
- C: That's right. Then when they heard that there was going to be a parade, by then we maybe put together a certain bunch and would try to disrupt it.
- J: Do you know why they happened to pick out a circle as the emblem?
- C: No, I never did find out why they burned the circle, but that's what they burned. That's what the first guys did, and that's what we did.

J: Well, there was supposedly somewhat of an organization formed in Stuebenville that was called the Knights of the Flaming Circle. Maybe what happened was that this area just picked up on that. But there were no meetings?

C: No.

J: Okay, could you tell us some of the things that this group did?

C: I know one time they had a parade there going to Canfield and they scattered tacks all over the road, roofing tacks all over the road. Everybody got flat tires.

J: Now, that was just the spur of the moment, too? A few guys got together and decided to toss the tacks on the road?

C: See, in those days they had what you called constables, and the constable was allowed to deputize as many men as he felt like. These Klan, with all these deputies and constables, you had to sneak around, you couldn't let anyone know what you were doing. It was always hit-and-run. There wasn't any meeting.

J: Okay, so many of the constables in the area were Klansmen?

C: Yes.

J: They could have arrested you or disrupted you?

C: They would arrest you, they didn't disrupt you, they arrested you.

J: Did anything happen as a result of those tacks on the road?

C: They would pinch a couple guys.

J: What other kinds of things do you remember the Knights doing?

C: That's about all, until they had the last parade. They had that up in Niles.

J: Did you go up to that?

C: Yes, we were up there. Most of that was done by the Niles outfit. They had all the roads with constables and policemen and stuff like that and their deputy blockaded. A bunch of the fellows went there the night before and stayed there all night. Some of the guys, like me and a few more others that had cars, we drove

down to one of those side roads and we went across a field and two orchards and got there.

J: And got in. So you were at the scene of some of the riots then?

C: That was the only scene.

J: Were you at North Main and Federal by the glassworks?

C: Well, we were up farther than that, up at McKinley Heights.

J: On Robbins? Coming off Robbins Avenue?

C: Where you go into Niles there. Not Youngstown Road, that's Youngstown Road, that was a dirt road, I think, at that time.

J: Yes, where I am thinking of is the Robbins Avenue entrance.

C: Yes, Robbins Avenue.

J: Up near the church, near Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

C: Yes, up around in there.

J: That's where you were located?

C: Yes.

J: Well, what did you see, or what did you do that day?

C: What we saw was a lot of cars tipped over. Well, first of all there was a lot of Klansmen, not a lot of them, a few of the cars had Klansmen in them with sheets and hoods over their heads, and some of them had shotguns.

J: Some of the Klansmen had shotguns?

C: Some of the Klansmen had shotguns. Some of them, the ones on foot, had side arms, like pistols, but they didn't get a chance to use them.

J: So there were some Klansmen also who were walking to this parade, or this attempted parade?

C: They got hit so sudden that they didn't get a chance to use any of them.

J: What would happen to a car with a Klansman who was coming into Niles over Robbins Avenue?

C: Well, he would just tip the car over.

- J: Okay, so they tipped the car over and stopped them from coming in?
- C: Stopped and broke up the parade. Word came in that the National Guard was coming, so everybody scrambled. That was the end.
- J: Do you know why the Klan was trying to march in Niles?
- C: Well, the reason I think the Klan was trying to march in Niles, they had mostly everyplace but Niles. They had Girard, and they had Youngstown, quite a few Klansmen, and they had Canfield and North Lima; they had mostly all the farmers around. Niles was the place that they had the most trouble in, and I suppose they were trying to break that up in there so that they could parade, you know. They would get their permits and then they would have the police protect them. Like us, we would have to be on the run all the time.
- J: Did you participate in the stopping of cars, or were you just an observer?
- C: Well, I was there. No, I didn't turn any cars over, but I was just there.
- J: Did you know anybody who was kind of heading up that effort to stop the cars?
- C: No.
- J: They were Niles people?
- C: Mostly all Niles bunch.
- J: Either yourself or other people who are in this group, what did you feel the Klan was going to do if they got power or control? What kind of things did you feel were going to happen?
- C: They were already doing it. Like, for instance, Girard, you couldn't go through Girard. They called it the "Holy City". Every time you went through Girard, even if you spit on the sidewalk, they would throw you in jail. If you weren't a Klansman, or if you were an ethnic group, they would throw you in jail.
- J: You think that the police picked on the ethnic group?
- C: Everybody made wine. Most of the Italians made wine, and up there they were throwing the guys in jail for making wine and fining them one thousand dollars.

- J: Okay, so some of the people were making wine and were getting arrested, particularly many Italians, because they were used to, obviously, having wine, drinking wine.
- C: They made wine at that time. They weren't selling it, they just made it for home use. Like us, my dad, he made wine all of the time. Nobody ever bothered us with our wine.
- J: Some of the Klan, though, were talking about some stuff I read, about prohibition, enforcing the prohibition laws. They were contending, I guess, that some of the people were selling it. Were there any people selling it?
- C: Yes, at that time the bootleggers were starting to get bold. They were just coming out at that time, the bootleggers were coming out of the woodwork. That's the reason they had these, what do they call, dry squads. Every one of those dry squads had a John Doe search warrant, and didn't need any name, nothing, they just knocked on your door and just walked in and went through your house. Some of the time, if you didn't watch them, they even planted whiskey on you.
- J: Did you have any incidents happen to you of that sort?
- C: Yes, every time they used to raid around the neighborhood they used to come to our door, and we never made it, sold it, or had it. But that's the first place, our place, they would hit. One time there was a guy who came with a whole basket full of whiskey and he wanted to look through the house. We wanted him to set the basket of whiskey outside. He said no so we had to watch him. We walked him all through the house, him and the bottles of whiskey.
- J: You were afraid that he would plant it?
- C: We were scared he would plant it because they had been planting them. The fine was one thousand dollars and they took you to Canfield. They didn't take you to Youngstown, they took you to the mayor's court in Canfield. That was a standing fine. They wanted the bootleggers that made the whiskey, and when they caught them they said, "Okay, mister, go back and make some more whiskey, but come next month we'll get you and it will be another one thousand dollars.
- J: They arrested the bootleggers then too, as well?
- C: Oh, yes.
- J: They tried to get them too? They didn't let them off?

- C: No, no, they didn't let the bootleggers off. They got a lot of innocent people, that's one of the reasons they did away with the constables in the state of Ohio.
- J: They had too much power, particularly these John Doe warrants that you mentioned?
- C: John Doe warrants. They could swear in as many men as they wanted. They would pick anybody, like they would say, "You and you and you, come with me." They would say, "Hold your hand up. You come with me." They would come and raid your place. They would show you the warrant, the John Doe warrant.
- J: Where would they get the warrant from?
- C: From the Canfield mayor's court.
- J: Back to Niles, were any people killed at Niles to your knowledge? Did you see anybody killed?
- C: I didn't see anybody killed, but the rumors were that there were people killed, and people injured, and people missing. Rumors are that there are still people missing, that they never did find them. I don't know for sure, but . . .
- J: I know in reading the newspaper that the National Guard, after they came in, did go through the creek, Mosquito Creek, but they didn't find any bodies.
- C: Mosquito Creek swamp too. There was a swamp there.
- J: Whereabouts was the swamp in relationship to Niles?
- C: In Mosquito Creek the water flowed in, but there were swamps all over the place. That's where Mosquito Dam is today. That was all a creek and swamp land.
- J: Did you ever see some of the leading Klansmen in Youngstown, like Colonel Watkins or Clyde Osborn, people of that sort?
- C: No, you didn't see them because they always wore hoods. The reason the Klan broke up is because they stole that roster, the Klan roster. Somebody put some sheets out. They didn't put the book out, they put some sheets out with the people's names and how much they donated to the Klan. They had this guy donated five dollars, this guy donated ten dollars, this guy donated twenty-five dollars, and it was even one or two businessmen from Briar Hill that donated to the Klan. They went out of business in a hurry. (Laughter)

- J: Do you remember who some of those businessmen were?
- C: What I mean, they didn't go out of business, nobody bought from them.
- J: They boycotted them. Do you remember who some of those businessmen were?
- C: Oh, I don't like to repeat that. (Laughter)
- J: Besides the list, you were aware that the list was published and sold on the city streets. Besides the list there were also these sheets of contributions that people had made as well.
- C: There were rumors of certain guys belonging, too. Like when Mayor Scheible was supposed to be endorsed, and he was supposed to be a Klansman. There were rumors, but nobody could prove it because they always wore sheets and hoods over their heads. I say that's the reason they broke up, because a lot of those guys got unmasked.
- J: Now that was one of the tactics of the American Unity League of Chicago, to get people of a local area to steal the Klan list and reveal it. Do you know anybody who was involved in that, in that stealing of the Klan list or publication of it?
- C: No, just like I say, we didn't have any organization there, just ethnic groups, that's all.
- J: In terms of the Klan becoming a big thing locally, obviously it elected the mayor that it endorsed. It elected six out of seven councilmen and people in other cities as well.
- C: It had judges and had prosecuting attorneys.
- J: Why do you think it became so big here? People often think of the Klan as a southern organization. How come it became so big, particularly when there were so many immigrants around here at the time?
- C: Well, trouble was, the ethnic group was starting to give them trouble. I have to laugh at the black people, they say they've been in the ghettos and treated bad and stuff like that. They don't know what the ethnic groups went through. You know when you went for a job, if you were Italian or a foreigner or something, if you weren't a Welshman or something like that, you were a laborer. When I started on the railroad the labor paid ten cents an hour. You worked ten and twelve hours a day. That was way back in 1916, 1917, 1918, and 1919. In 1919, after the First World War, that's when wages started

going up a little bit. That's when they started getting unionized.

- J: One of the things that I tried to track down in regard to the Klan being so successful was the voting, particularly of immigrants. The board of elections, unfortunately, their records are all burned, some fire back in 1940 or 1950, somewhere around there. Did many of your relatives vote at that time?
- C: Here is another thing, in the olden days you voted as your bosses and your superintendent or your owner said, which in those days was Republican. You voted Republican. You will see that mostly all your mayors and everything were all Republican in those days. If you didn't vote Republican, the next day they knew just how you voted. Now those folks were really dumb or something like that, they let the people know who they voted for, or some way or another they found out how they voted. Once they found out how they voted, the next day they didn't have a job.
- J: Let me ask you further, when the Klan ran were they also telling you to vote for the Klan at that time?
- C: No, no.
- J: They didn't go that far?
- C: They didn't go that far, but they had the top. You know what I mean? They had the most people.
- J: Now that's true.
- C: The other groups were always splintered, do you know what I mean? The other groups were always fighting among each other. Just like the black people today, they're fighting for power. Like Jessie Jackson, he's fighting for power, and the other blacks are fighting for power, and they're splintered. That's the way they were.
- J: So there was a rivalry among the different ethnic groups?
- C: That's right. If an Italian guy ran for office, why he never got elected. He never got elected because everybody was against him until Spagnola ran, and then he was the first mayor that was out of the ethnic group, from the ethnic groups that got elected.
- J: That reminds me of one man who ran for mayor, Joseph Heffernan, who came after Schieble. Do you remember him at all?

C: Joseph Heffernan, yes.

J: He was anti-Klan, from what I have read.

C: Well, that's when the Klan broke up. Heffernan came in after the Klan broke up.

J: Do you remember Heffernan? Was he active at all in some of the anti-Klan stuff that you knew of?

C: Not that I knew of, no.

J: What about Canfield? What was it call and . . .

C: Canfield was called "Klan City" because that's where they had all their big meetings and everything. The policemen and stuff over there, if you just spit on the sidewalk they would throw you in jail.

J: Now the Klan at one point formed kind of a side organization called the Ohio State Rural Police. Colonel Watkins started that. Did you ever hear of that or anything about that?

C: No.

J: Do you have anything else in general that you remember about the Klan at that time or about the Knights of the Flaming Circle?

C: You covered about all of that.

J: In regards to the Klan, the Klan in the south, for example, it did harass people, it lynched some people. Did the Klan do anything of that sort up here to your knowledge?

C: To my knowledge, no.

J: Other than just having the cross, and burning the cross, and holding meetings, and saying some of the things that they said?

C: The only trouble they would give you was through the law. With the law they would try to push you to do what they wanted you to do.

J: Well, they were very big on law enforcement. As a matter of fact, I think you said they ran for prosecuting attorney, they tried to get control of the sheriff's office.

C: They did control the sheriff. They controlled the sheriff, the prosecutor the judges, the mayor

the chief of police, and even some of the policemen.

J: Your experience was that they were at times unfair to people who were not Welsh or German or Klansmen, in terms of arresting them and fining them and putting them in jail?

C: That's the reason they had their troubles. I would imagine they would still be if they hadn't been unfair to the other ethnic groups.

J: If they hadn't harrassed them. The Knights of the Flaming Circle, was that name accurate?

C: What?

J: Was the name Knights of the Flaming Circle an accurate name? Was that actually the name of the organization?

C: No, the newspapers dubbed it Knights of the Flaming Circle because the Ku Klux Klan were the Knights too.

J: Were there any special things that the Flaming Circle wore? Did they have any badges or clothing of any special kind.

C: No, nothing special.

J: In regard to Girard, could you go through Girard?

C: When we wanted to go past Girard we would go up Trumbull Hill and across Belmont and down Church Hill, or we went as far as McKinley Heights and came down.

J: You couldn't go through the city, or you were afraid to go through the city?

C: Yes, we were scared to go through the city.

J: Possibly of being arrested? Did you know some people who were arrested and put in jail?

C: Yes, one fellow in particular, he had a hard time. He was driving through Girard one day and he got sick and he stopped on the road side and was throwing up and these constables came around. His name was Stanford and his deputy, Big Mac and Little Mac. They said he was drunk and they threw him in jail, and the poor guy had a heck of a time.

J: He was sick in jail then? They didn't give him any care?

C: They didn't give him any care or anything, but they put an awful fine on him. I forget what the fine was. I

think if you look in the Vindicator you'll find that in there too.

J: In the Niles riot some of the leaders, it appears, were some of the leading bootleggers. What happened with them after the riot?

C: Well, after the riot, and after things had settled down and stuff, a lot of them were bootleggers and a lot of them were gamblers, and some of them ran bawdy houses.

J: Do you think the Klan had a legitimate concern about some of those people or not?

C: No, I think the Klan was out to prove that they could parade in Niles.

J: Was the Klan itself strong in your area of the city?

C: No, no klansmen lived there.

J: Where did the klansmen live in Youngstown, where did they seem to be from?

C: Well, mostly over in the south side.

J: Were the klansmen poor people, were they the mill owners? Do you have any idea of what type of people joined the Klan?

C: Mostly klansmen were middle bracket, at that time, middle bracket and the rich people.

J: Middle bracket and the rich?

C: Yes, because it's all laborers. They didn't have good jobs.

J: Were the mill owners in favor of the Klan? Do you know? Did you get an impression of that? They were the ones who obviously were bringing these people over to work in the mills.

C: No, not the mill owners, they weren't, but the people they had working for them, not the higher-ups, but some of their superintendents and some of their bosses and stuff like that. No, because during the war in 1919 Jim Campbell went down South and he brought in a couple of carloads of black people up there to Youngstown to work in the Campbell works.

J: Do you think that that in itself precipitated the Klan arriving? The Klan has always been associated with being against blacks.

- C: No, no the blacks were a real minority, they were really small.
- J: So people weren't really concerned about the number of blacks in Youngstown? It seemed like a lot of the churches supported the Klan in Youngstown. Do you remember any of that?
- C: Churches? Oh yes, a lot of churches, most all of them.
- J: Do you think then that religion played an important part in the development of the Klan in Youngstown?
- C: It played some, yes.
- J: Do you think that if we separated out some issues like religion and law and order, would you say that the religious issue was stronger or the law and order issue was stronger in Youngstown?
- C: Well, I'd say they were about even.
- J: There was a lawyer named Jack Wilson who ran for mayor in 1923 who was very against the Klan and he had the Vindicator's support. Do you remember who the ethnics voted for in 1923 when Scheible ran for mayor? Was there any special candidate that they favored or anybody they were trying to get in?
- C: I don't remember who ran against Scheible.
- J: Thomas Muldoon was an Irish Catholic who ran and Frank Vogan was another candidate. Jack Watkins also ran for mayor. I was trying to determine if there was any kind of political movement on the part of the ethnic groups who didn't like the Klan to get a candidate in. You don't recall any real activity to unite behind a candidate?
- C: No, in those days quite a few of those, especially the Italian people and stuff like that, they weren't citizens.
- J: Many people weren't naturalized yet. Somebody once told me that a lot of the people did not realize that you had to go through naturalization to become a citizen. Do you think that was true?
- C: Most of those naturalized didn't know enough to go down to register and vote, and some of them couldn't vote. I remember one time we had an Italian run for councilman and he lost by, I don't know, three votes I think. His name was Charlie Parella. He lost because most of the Italians worked on the wreck train, and the wreck whistle blew that night. They worked from, I think, six in the morning until six at night. I think they

worked twelve hours. Anyhow, by the time they got home and ready to go to vote, the wreck whistle blew. When they got down to work they fooled around here and there and then they sent them home because there was no wreck. This guy lost because of the wreck train.

J: You think this was a set-up?

C: It might have been, I don't know. It looked like it.

J: The newspaper, the Vindicator, in 1923 when the election was being held and people were registering, claimed that some of the foreign-born people were being told by the registrars that they couldn't vote. Did you ever have that experience or anybody that you knew have that experience in 1923?

C: I, myself, wasn't old enough to vote at that time. I was 17 or 18 at that time. Like I say, these bosses, that guy that knew their voting rights, their bosses got at them and they were scared and voted how the boss said.

J: The Italians in Youngstown that came over from the old country tended to live in the same neighborhood?

C: Yes.

J: Did people of the same villages group together, or was there a mixture of Italians from different parts of Italy?

C: A mixture.

J: Were the Italians strong in their practice of Catholicism at that time?

C: No, not too strong. Mostly the women, but not the men. The Irish were the most Catholic of all.

J: Did the Italian men like the priests or the Pope? How did they feel about them?

C: Well, as far as the Pope, he was all right, but they didn't care much about the priests.

J: Were the priests usually Irish in this area?

C: No, in Briar Hill there were always Italians, and there was only one German.

J: They tended not to practice Catholicism or be interested in Catholicism. The point I'm trying to get at is that the Klan is coming in and claiming that these people are going to bring the Pope over, for example, that was one of the rumors.

- C: As far as the Italians bringing the Pope over, they had no intentions of bringing the Pope over. They never had their minds set on that. They figured they knew how good the Pope was well off in Italy without him coming here, getting into trouble here.
- J: Why do you think that the Klan wanted to control the other immigrants other than the Irish? What were they trying to accomplish?
- C: Well, they wanted to have the power, they wanted to be just like, I suppose, a dictator is today. They wanted to tell the people what to do.
- J: Did the Klan want to Americanize these people, whatever that meant? In a sense, were they afraid they weren't very good Americans?
- C: No, what they wanted to do was keep them down. See, the people were getting too smart, the ethnic groups were getting smart and they wanted to keep them down. Now you take for instance my street, where I came from, Dearborn Street, there are more professional people that came out of Dearborn Street than any other street in Youngstown. I mean professional people, doctors, lawyers, surveyors, and I don't mean storekeepers and stuff like that. There are more people that came off of Dearborn Street. Why? Do you say, they're smarter up there. No, they had to come up the hard way.
- J: In the 1920's, were many Italians able to get into professional jobs or did it take a while before that occurred?
- C: No, it took a long time after that to get into professional jobs.
- J: When do you estimate the Italians started to arrive in the sense of moving up in the social structure in the Youngstown area, 1930's or 1940's?
- C: Oh, I imagine in the 1930's.
- J: Was this the result of people emphasizing education? In other words, did they send their children on to school?
- C: They sent their kids on to school and on to college and stuff like that. They educated their kids the most. They could make a better living because their wages were a little higher and they were able to move into a higher paying job. They didn't have to stay in labor.
- J: Those Italians who were laborers, were they able to get into the unions of the 1920's?

- C: No, you couldn't get in. If they knew you belonged to a union they would fire you.
- J: Are you talking about the railroad or at the mills?
- C: Any place.
- J: Any place, okay. This was a closed town as far as unions were concerned?
- C: Your unions started to unionize in 1919. In fact, when I was fourteen years old I told them I was eighteen and I started on the Erie Railroad. I was a charter member of Local 49 of the boilermakers, and the first 75 charter members of the boilermakers Local 49 in Youngstown. That's when they started organizing. Before that they tried to organize the Briar Hill Sheet & Tube. It was the Briar Hill Steel, that was the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] that tried to organize them, but they couldn't organize them. When we started organizing the boilermakers in 1919 in Youngstown, you could either belong or not belong, but you couldn't tell the management you belonged to a union. They didn't recognize you; you just belonged to the union and they didn't recognize you until McAdoo got ahold of the railroad, then he started recognizing the union.
- J: Right, when McAdoo organized the railroad during the war, he recognized the unions. Did the union continue after the war was over in the Youngstown area, the Local 49 of the boilermakers?
- C: Oh yes, the Local 49 was there for a long time until the railroad started dieselizing. When they started dieselizing, that is when the Local 49 broke up.
- J: Now was the IWW involved at all with the boilermakers, or just with the steel?
- C: No, the IWW started to organize the steelworkers in the Briar Hill Sheet & Tube. That was before the Local 49 came in.
- J: Do you remember what the attitude was of Youngstown, in general, towards unions at that time?
- C: Poor.
- J: They didn't like people who joined unions?
- C: When the unions started, they started really organizing it in 1937 when they had their "Little Steel Strike". In 1919 they had a strike in Campbell. They had a big strike in Campbell, and they sent the National Guard

in there. The National Guard looted. They were a bunch of bums. They looted Campbell and they set half of Campbell on fire. They had to send the United States Army in here and put them under arrest; they pinched them.

J: Yes, I think that was the 1916 strike in Campbell. They burned down some of the city blocks.

C: Half of Campbell. That is when the IWW was in.

J: Do you think that some of the people who joined the Klan were against the ethnic groups because they were involved in some of the unionizing? In other words, do you think that was a cause of conflicts?

C: No, I have to tell you, this ethnic group would start moving, it was getting smart. What I mean, getting educated and starting to learn the ropes, trying to read and write and know their rights and stuff like that. They wanted the power to keep them down. Just like I said, they had the law, they had the judges, the police force, your mayor, everything.

J: In terms of Youngstown and its politics and its police force at this time, were they honest during the 1920's? We talk a lot about some of the dishonesty in politics, but back then was it honest, other than, obviously you've indicated they were somewhat prejudiced, but were they honest? Did they deter the criminal?

C: How could you say they were honest or how could you say they were crooked when they pinched you and fined you one hundred dollars? Where did that money go? Who took it? They split it amongst each other, didn't they? Then go to the state. I ask the question, how do you think these judges and these mayors and stuff have all these big homes? They play the stock market. In those days they used to play the stock market. Didn't anybody give you a tip? How much money are you ever making on the stock market? All the guys I know, all lost money. They play the stock market because they have too much money and they don't want to pay the income tax, so they lose it in the stock market.

J: You think their hands were a little bit in the till?

C: Yes. A little bit? Quite a bit! (Laughter)

J: Going back to the notion of different ethnic groups being very much in their neighborhoods, was there much intermingling at all? What about intermarriage, for example?

- C: Oh no! Oh no! If an Italian girl went over to Steel Street or Monkey's Nest and fooled around with one of those Slovaks or Hungarians, well, you got your head kicked out of you unless you went with a gang. That happened to one of us. One of the fellows went over there. Three of us used to go and see girls over there on Steel Street. One night this guy went by himself and they jumped him; they knocked the hell out of him. The next day we picked up a gang and we went over to Steel Street, went downstairs over there and each one got around the pool tables there and asked for a certain guy. They said, "He ain't here." "Well, if he ain't here we start wrecking this place." Well, the police came and wanted to know what the trouble was. They got us into a corner and talked to us. "If we ever catch you in here again, you'll be thrown in jail." It wasn't too long after that, though, when they started intermarriage. It was a long time. You didn't intermarry. The Italian girls didn't marry an outsider.
- J: How about the Italian boys? Could they marry an outsider?
- C: The Italian boys too, they didn't marry outside either.
- J: What do you think about intermarriage? In other words, what happened that the ethnic community didn't demand that people stay within their group anymore?
- C: Well, they got educated, people got educated. They found out that there were good people in every ethnic group. You know there are good people in any group; there are good people in black people and there are bad people in black people. There are good people in Italians, good people in every group. They found out that there are good people and there are bad people, so you have to take the good and the bad. Just like when you draw a card, you draw a good card and you draw a bad card.
- J: Do you think the Klan, when it appeared in Youngstown, caused the groups to be more polarized? In other words, did it make the situation worse or the feelings worse between the different groups?
- C: No, I think it brought them a little more together than it scattered them, as far as that is concerned. They still didn't mingle too much among each other. If there was a Klan doing and they had to do something, well, then what had to be done was done.
- J: The Italians and the Slovaks, whatever, would go off and throw tacks on the road or go up to Niles?
- C: Do what they had to do and that was the end of it.

- J: In terms of gangs, were they criminals or just . . .
- C: Gangs were not criminals. They fought, but they never robbed or did harm to people or anything. They just fought for their rights, that is all.
- J: Generally, they were young fellows who were trying to protect their own people?
- C: That is right.
- J: Do you remember when the Klan paraded in Youngstown after the election of Mayor Scheible?
- C: Yes, they paraded through Youngstown, but nobody did anything there because they had too many guards.
- J: Were their guards armed, did they have guns?
- C: They had armed guards, shotguns, and side arms.
- J: Did these guards walk along beside the parade or were they ahead of the parade, or how did they work?
- C: They walked along the parade, with the paraders.
- J: With the parader, okay. No one felt that they could actually interfere with the parade without getting hurt?
- C: Right.
- J: Now in Niles there is an indication that there were similar guards. Did you get any idea why the people in Niles were willing or ready to go there to face them and fight them if necessary, even though they knew they were armed?
- C: Well, I think the Klan got caught off guard. They didn't think there were that many people there to stop them and they figured that maybe the National Guard would be there to help them get through.
- J: They thought they had enough power to get through?
- C: They thought they had enough power to get through. Something happened to the National Guard; they didn't get up there until, I think, about six o'clock at night or something.
- J: It was the middle of the afternoon, I think, before they finally got there. Quite a few people had been injured by that time.
- C: Yes, they got up there late anyhow.

J: In the mills and the railroads at that time, you said already that the workers or the Italians were usually the laborers. Were the supervisors usually Welsh or German?

C: Yes.

J: Were there any Irish who had risen to those positions at that time?

C: Yes, some of the Irish, shanty Irish.

J: Shanty Irish, not lace curtain Irish. (Laughter) Did the Italians and the Irish get along?

C: No.

J: Did they fight a lot?

C: Yes.

J: Why didn't they get along? Do you have any idea? Was it just that they had been that way and it was going to continue?

C: They Irish were so hardheaded, they thought that the Italians were one class below them.

J: Some of the Italians got a higher job, they had to change their names. Now we had a couple of guys in particular. One fellow, his name was Ingerlot, he had to change his name to Joe Cobert to get a job as a machinist. Another guy was named Bill DePiero. He had to change his name to Bill Wallace.

J: For Italians to get jobs, did they have to work through fellow countrymen, people who were called padrones?

C: Yes, they always had a middleman and he was the guy that, before they had a union, stood in the middle and he collected so much a month to give to the boss. Like five dollars or ten dollars a month we would give the boss so the men would work.

J: The padrone paid the boss to hire his people?

C: Yes.

J: Did the padrone get a cut of that money? In other words, was the money being paid to the padrone by his people?

C: No, only he got his favors.

J: He got favors from whom?

C: From the boss.

J: From the boss. What kind of favors might he get, money or . . .

C: He got favors by bringing a guy over and saying, "Hire this man," or something like that. He was about the laziest man in the gang; he didn't do anything. He just looked wise.

J: Just looked wise?

C: The old saying around the shop was, "Did you put the basket on the back porch last night?"

J: And what does that mean?

C: That means did you bring the basket with the jug of wine and the goodies at the boss's house and put it on the back porch?

J: Now, was the boss called padrone? What did they refer to him as?

C: They just called him the boss, that is all.

J: Straw boss?

C: No, no.

J: Just the boss?

C: The boss, they went directly to the boss; they didn't fool around with the straw boss.

J: The anti-Klan forces, did they retaliate very much against the Klansmen in any way, or did they just harass them at parades?

C: They just harassed them at the parade because they always bragged that they were going to parade, and they were going to parade if the people liked it or not. They got the officials to back them up.

J: It was just a contest of power over the parades?

C: That is right.

J: Did the anti-Klan groups ever, other than Niles and the parade, did they ever visit individual homes or harass individual Klanspeople or beat them up?

C: No, never. Not that I know of.

J: Did they boycott some people? Did they do that?

C: Yes.

J: They did boycott some people, people whose names were on the list. They wouldn't buy from them. That was as far as they went?

C: When they unmasked the people, some of them got boycotted.

J: At the parade what kind of harassment occurred?

C: At the parade some of the Klansmen would get their hoods pulled off.

J: In Youngstown, at the parades, did they ever pull the people out of the parade and beat them up, or were they . . .

C: No, they couldn't because of the guards . . . too much guard power.

J: What about the blue laws in Youngstown?

C: Well, everything was closed on Sundays, even your stores, grocery stores, and everything. The people, to have any enjoyment, would go out to Milton Dam. They used to have dances out at the Milton Dam. Every once in a while the sheriff would go out there and raid the place, close it down.

J: How did the ethnic groups feel about the blue laws? In the old country, or even in the new country, did they believe in the blue laws?

C: They didn't believe in it because the ethnic groups didn't have any freezers or iceboxes. Nine out of ten didn't have an icebox and they couldn't keep that stuff overnight, so they had to buy the stuff every day. Like your meats, you couldn't keep meat overnight in the summer-time.

J: They wanted the stores to be open on Sunday?

C: Sure, they liked to have the stores open on Sunday. Until the Klan got on them a lot of stores used to. On Sunday mornings you could go over there and get your meat. It was already bought on Saturday, but you could get your meat on Sunday mornings so it wouldn't spoil over Saturday. Then the law started closing them up, started fining them.

J: The ethnic people didn't like the effort to enforce the blue law?

C: That is right.

J: Another issue I just thought of that the Klan brought up at that time was the issue of the public schools and the Catholic schools. Did most of the Italian children that you knew go to the public schools?

C: Sure. I went to public school. Very few of them went to Catholic schools. St. Anthony's only had one room.

J: Only a small number? In the public school, how did the teachers react to the ethnic groups or the Italian and the Slovak? Did they welcome them?

C: They didn't give you too much education. They didn't care if you learned or not, although they took care of their kind. I know one principal in particular who used to go over to the people's house and even teach them at their home.

J: Which schools did you go to, the names of them?

C: I went to Tod School and Briar Hill School.

J: Briar Hill School?

C: Way back in 1914 when I was going to Briar Hill School, there was a German school up on top of Funston and Berlin Street. The German kids jumped one of the kids from the Briar Hill School there and the first thing you know the whole school went over there and started fighting with the German kids.

J: You mentioned something about Milton Dam and a dance. What happened at that particular dance to cause a fight?

C: Well, this one fellow slapped this one guy who was dancing with a girl and stepped on her foot. This girl slapped him in the face and he hit her and knocked her down, and the fight started.

J: Were these different ethnic groups or were they all Italians at the dance?

C: Mixed up.

J: Mixed up? Was it an Italian fellow dancing with an Italian girl?

C: I don't know which was which. I don't remember.

J: When the Welsh and the German people who had settled here earlier talked to the Italians, did they call you by your first name?

C: No, they never used to call you, "Hey Nick, hey Joe, or hey Pete." They used to call you, "Hey Guinea, hey Dago, hey Hunkey."

END OF INTERVIEW