

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Depression Project

Personal Experiences

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RUSSELL BANNER

Interviewed

by

Dolores Margiotta

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: RUSSELL BANNER

INTERVIEWER: Dolores Margiotta

SUBJECT: Farming and area problems, cost of living, wages, unemployment, Ohio State University, politics

DATE: May 20, 1976

M: This is an interview with Mr. Russell Banner for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Depression, by Dolores Margiotta, at 4115 Shady Run on May 20, 1976, at 4:30 p.m.

B: My first recollection of what we considered as hard times was when we were farmers and my parents were producing milk for a market. The dairy where we were selling the milk paid us, at one time, less than 90¢ a hundred pounds, which is approximately 12 gallons of milk or 48 quarts. This was kind of a low price. At that time, they decided that they would keep the milk at home and separate it and either sell the cream as sweet cream, or churn it into butter. That's what we did. Out of that we built a milk route over the years and by the time I was out of high school in 1932, we were selling some 50 gallons of milk a day.

M: Where was that located, Mr. Banner?

B: The dairy was located in Liberty Township. The milk route was located in Youngstown and Girard. We had some customers in Girard. Milk was sold for, as I recall, 10¢ a quart or sometimes as well as 25¢ a gallon for people who used large quantities of it. Compared to today's prices, that was kind of cheap, but it still was more than we got from the dairy. We continued that dairy through World War II, and of course, the price didn't go up very much. Really, I think at the end of World War II when we were selling milk in 1950, we were only getting \$3 a hundred for it after we quit the route. It didn't go up that much. Today's prices are, I think, \$11 a hundred. That's a pretty sizable difference. I don't think they were making that much more money though. Through my

high school days from 1929, 1930, 1931, and 1932, the times weren't very good and money wasn't very plentiful even though my father had a good job during the late 1920's up until 1930, when the plant that he worked at shut down. It never did go back into operation.

M: What was that plant?

B: It was what they called the Empire Steel Company. It was the Falcon Plant in Niles. They had two plants in Niles and one in Mansfield and one somewhere else. I don't remember where it was.

M: What did they make?

B: These were steel mills. They rolled steel, flat sheets mostly. My father's job was to turn the roll that they used to form the iron. His job was terminated in the early part of the 1930's I remember. Fortunately, we had four horses on the farm, and he took one of the teams of horses and a slip scraper. I think they hold half a cubic yard or something of the sort. He worked at that all summer long at something like \$2 an hour for his time and the use of the horses, which wasn't very much money. But, of course, it wasn't as bad as it would be today if you were getting \$2 an hour with the horses.

M: There wasn't any overtime or anything like that?

B: No, there wasn't overtime, just straight time.

M: Did he work long hours then?

B: No, they just worked a normal eight hour day. There were about three local farmers who were helping this man build a pond or lake. The man that they were building it for was a large stockholder in the steel mill in which my father had been working. Shortly after that, he went to Mansfield to the plant they had down there and he stayed there then until 1956 or 1958 when he retired. He bought a farm while he was down there. I remember those people down there had a few chickens and a couple of cows and most of their income was just a few farm products. They had a gas well on the farm which gave them their heat, and light, and also a few dollars in cash. It was surprising--their taxes at that time were like \$45 a year and this year they're \$600.

M: That's quite a difference.

B: It sure is. Anyway, what we had done then, during the Depression, was deliver milk and cream. We butchered cows, sold meat, butchered pigs and sold pork. We had some chickens and we sold some eggs and butchered chickens. It was kind of

all-around produce. We sold a little bit of vegetables and sweet corn and things of that sort. We really didn't feel the effects of the Depression that much. My wife probably felt it more than we did because after she was out of high school she worked in a small restaurant, gas station, and sort of general store down at Cedars Corners where the Amoco station is now. They paid her \$2 a week.

While I was a student at Ohio State University I did my own cooking because I lived in a sheep barn where they had some rooms fixed up for students. Some lived in the stadium. There were about ten of us who lived in the various farm buildings around the university. I remember buying a pound loaf of bread for a nickel. We could get a dozen of eggs for 10¢. The prices were cheap and the farmers really didn't make out on it very well. I can remember in the late 1920's when we sold wheat for \$3 a bushel. During 1932 there was a man who had a terrific yield of wheat for that time. He had 55 bushels to the acre which was a very large yield, and he sold it for 35¢ a bushel. That was the reason, I imagine, that the price of bread was pretty much influenced by the price of wheat. I think there are 40 pounds of flour in a bushel of wheat and if you only pay a penny a pound for the flour, or less--it really would be less--it wouldn't cost too much to make a loaf of bread.

At that time they raised fat hogs and there was lots of lard around. Lard was very cheap. I remember buying an old pig off of the neighbor for 3¢ a pound, butchering it, and selling the lard, sausage, and hams and everything.

M: What did they use the lard for?

B: That was shortening, mostly shortening. You didn't have Crisco and that sort of thing at that time. I did pretty well on that old sow. She weighed 500 pounds and I paid \$15 for her and took in \$75. I had a lot of work though. Since we were on the farm after my wife and I were married in 1935, we worked a partnership with another fellow and we used to take \$20 a month to live on from receipts. That was sufficient to buy the groceries we had to buy. We didn't have to buy paper, rent, or buy the milk. We had a garden and things of that sort which we produced on the farm so it really wasn't too hard. Out of the \$20 a month we saved enough to pay for our first child who was born in 1936. The total cost was \$90 including the doctor and ten days in the hospital.

M: Isn't that fantastic?

B: Yes, fantastic. It sure seems like it today doesn't it? That wouldn't take one day would it?

M: No, I don't think so. Just the bed alone costs about that.

B: Yes. And at that time they didn't charge for the baby. Now they charge for the baby.

M: Many women didn't go to the hospital at that time to have their babies; they had them at home.

B: Yes, many of them did.

M: Oh, so you were very fortunate then to be able to go.

B: My mother had only one out of four in the hospital.

The one thing I noticed during the Depression was that people were not so busy and they had more time to be more neighborly. Neighbors were helping each other more than today. Nobody has time to help anybody. Even in a community, there are a lot of people who don't want to do anything in the community unless there's some pay involved in it. I think we've gone a long way down the road and it's not a good sign at all.

M: Do you remember how you might have spent some of these neighborly visits? What did you do on a typical summer evening?

B: We played ball quite a bit because I was younger then. I noticed that after World War II we rarely ever got together in the neighborhood and played ball. These are older people who would be playing ball too. We could get enough people together and play ball. We could visit. We did a lot more visiting locally than we do now. Today people rarely visit back and forth among the neighborhood unless you get snowed in or something.

M: Sometimes you don't even know your own neighbor.

B: I don't know all the people on my own street even, and it's not a very long one. I think there were some good things. I think many people take the attitude that I went through the Depression and I don't want my children to have to live like that. I don't think that hurt anybody. I think most people were better off as a result of having to make due. I don't think the hardship was that great. Although I realize that some places in town, some places where food was harder to get and that sort of thing, where they had the soup kitchens and that, maybe there was a lot more hardship than there was in the country because the country people should be able to get along without anything. I know we burned wood in our stove. We didn't buy any coal. We did have electricity. During the Depression we had electricity.

I remember my grandmother, she would pay a minimum bill of

\$1.50 and she was entitled to use 35 or 40 kilowatts. She would use--I remember checking a couple of bills--only five or six. You couldn't convince her. She had an electric iron which she didn't use because it took too much electricity and yet, there were 30 kilowatts she was paying for that she didn't get. She was using the flat iron that was setting on top of the wood stove that she used to cook with or heat with. We had both kinds.

The amount of cash required was minimal as compared to what the people in town needed. I know some of our relatives living in town had a hard time paying a lot of their gas bills, and light bill, and they usually bought coal too. Coal was rather cheap. There was a lot of coal delivered for \$3 and \$4 a ton. Today you can't even touch it for anything like that. Surprisingly enough, even though we had the milk route and we were selling retail to people, we didn't have that much trouble collecting money to continue the business with. Once in a while, you would have people who wouldn't pay. One of the hardest people we had to collect off of was the policeman of the city of Youngstown. We never did collect off of him.

M: Did you put anybody on credit at the time? I know now everybody's on credit.

B: I was on credit all the time. During 1937, when they had the steel strike down there, many of the people whose husbands worked in the mills were very upset because here they've been going through this situation--they worked two or three years and then they would go on strike. This time was a long time and many people got way behind, but most of them all paid up eventually. I don't remember that we ever lost a whole good lot of money. It was slow coming and we tried to get a few people to work it out. They had young fellows who were high school age and even some older and they would come out to work and they just didn't know how well enough to make it worthwhile for us to put up with them.

M: How about getting back to when you were in high school. Did any of your classmates experience any type of hardship or were they aware of the Depression really, as such?

B: I think my wife was pretty much aware of it. She wasn't able to buy very many pictures. She only bought six. Some of the children were a little hard pressed, but you would be surprised at the number of them who had cars too. That's surprising too. As I think back I know there were only eighteen in the class, and I think half of them had an automobile. The boys were out working. One boy came back to school after a couple of years out of school. He had a car and he was working while he was going to school. His father disagreed and his father kicked him out, so he quit school and went to work. Then he came back.

M: Were there many dropouts because of the Depression?

B: I don't know if it was because of the Depression, but at the time, you had to go to school of course, until you were sixteen. But there were many kids who were in my class originally who never graduated from high school. Actually, there were only twelve out of the original class of some thirty who graduated. Most of the rest of them dropped out of school at some time or another. I don't know if the money was the reason for it. We had to buy our books for schools and today you don't.

M: Where was Liberty School located at the time?

B: It was where Ramada Inn is now. They had two small portable buildings there. In 1923 they opened a high school at the present location and took all the children to one, centralized location. Prior to that, they had one down on the corner of Trumbull Road and Belmont where the People's Bank is. There was a school located there too. I think that was the only one besides the one at the center of Churchill that was being used. One time they had about nine.

The Depression didn't affect me like a lot of people.

M: But you and your family knew that there was such a thing and that some people did have hard times. You mentioned going to college down to the Ohio State University. What did you take up there?

B: I started in dairy husbandry for that year down there. I went down in August and they paid me \$20 a month to work five hours a day. They furnished the room in the sheep barn that I was telling you about. That was part of the deal.

M: What did the sheep barn look like?

B: It was just a two-story building and it was a storage area originally, I suspect. Then when the Depression came along, they just converted it to a house for students in order to help them out. They remodeled the sheep barn. It had steam heat in it, just with ordinary pipes. There were three of us in one room, and there was another room that was divided into two, sort of one place. I think there were five boys over there. I got scarlet fever while I was there and it quarantined the whole bunch for two weeks. I didn't really feel short-changed or anything. I always had what I wanted. I remember riding a bicycle to campus all the time. In December and January it was really cold riding across the river, all the way to school.

M: You're associated with the Liberty Township community now as well as with their school. Can you tell us anything about

the schools at that time or the teachers?

B: I can recall that there were some teachers who we had at school who didn't get paid, one of them for two years. Apparently, they had income of some other sort where the money didn't mean that much to them. They eventually received all their pay, but I can't imagine how they would go that long. I know that several times at the minute book at the school it tells where they wrote checks and didn't have money to cover them and would have to hold them up. They faulted on their bonds a couple of times because the tax collections were not good. Taxes weren't high considering today's dollars. I don't remember what our taxes were at home anymore. But that farm down in Richland County was \$45 a year at that time.

M: How much acreage?

B: We had 130 acres. I don't think our taxes were much higher than that. I know the one farm I had, I think when we first bought it, we only paid something like \$150 a year tax on it. Now it's ten times that. Taxes have really gone up more than anything else. We didn't pay much tax in those days either. That was about the time sales tax went into effect.

M: What did the people think about the taxes at first?

B: It was like every tax that they go on today; they were opposed to it. They didn't like it.

M: Getting back to the schools, do you remember what the base pay might have been for a schoolteacher during that time?

B: I remember seeing a check that was in my book at one time by one of the teachers who had been there longer than most of them. She's now retired from our school. It was \$85, so she collected \$85 a month for nine months. It would be like \$700 or \$800 a year. Surprisingly enough, a few years ago a lady from Albany, New York, wrote and asked me to look up her teaching record during World War I. Her payment during World War I was equal to the payment we made to teachers prior to World War II. The change in the teachers pay raise, now it might have gone up during the 1920's, but it came back down again during the 1930's so that the pay raise was really not that much different. I think there were many people who weren't teaching at that time and didn't earn more than \$1,000 or \$1,200 at the most. Even in the later 1940's, after World War II, I know the superintendent only received like \$3,600 a year.

M: Was that comparable to other wages, say for someone who was in another profession or something similar to that?

B: I remember one of my friends in school who said that his father was earning, it seemed to me, \$4 a day, which would be 50¢ an hour. They had four or five children in the family and of course if he worked steady it wasn't too bad, but if he didn't work steady it was pretty tough. Over at the township records, there were times when the superintendent of the road department, for instance, was only getting 59¢ an hour. They gave him a raise one time of a nickel an hour, which was considered a pretty sizable raise. Our guys, they wanted at least as much as the guy who was earning, at that time, hourly increase not just the nickel. The wages have gone up, but nobody paid income taxes as we pay income taxes. All the money you got, you could keep, at least most of it.

M: What about costs? Do you remember what things might have cost at that time?

B: I remember buying 10¢ worth of gasoline one time and got about three quarters of a gallon. Gasoline was as low as 14¢ a gallon. I guess there wasn't much tax on it in those days either. The tax didn't come until later. During the Depression gasoline was delivered at, like I said, 14¢ a gallon. We didn't have to pay much; of course, we didn't drive far either. I don't know how many miles a year my father would drive. He drove not during the Depression, but he would drive thirty miles a day, round-trip to work because he lived out there on a farm in Mansfield. Of course, they lived in town and then later on they bought the farm. It was thirty acres. He drove to work out there.

We did hire some help on the farm and we rarely paid less than a dollar a day and board for a hired man, or maybe for a while we paid \$20 a month. But I know there were people who paid not more than \$10 a month for pay and then there were some of the foreign people that worked for them for nothing. Maybe they got their clothes or something out of it. We did hire for \$20 a month.

M: Was this a single man or a married man?

B: This was a single man. We didn't have room for a married man. Most of them were older. It wasn't the young fellows who worked on the farm, but mostly older men who couldn't find other kinds of work.

M: Where did they sleep?

B: We provided a place for them to sleep in the house. Usually, it was considered with board. I think we had one or two men most of the time. Of course, that meant a lot of extra work for my wife. I don't know whether we would go back to that sort of arrangement again or not, but that was a very common

arrangement at that time. There were men looking for work. Of course, most of the time the ones we got were alcoholics. Sometimes they would go off and they would be gone for a week or two at a time.

M: When they came back would you give them their job back?

B: Yes, we did. I remember one Swedish fellow who worked for me for about six months. He didn't take any of his money and he had me buy him some clothes and whatever tobacco he needed. Finally, he said to me one day that he would like to go to town one Saturday morning with me and then he would stay overnight and Sunday morning he would come home with me. I said, "All right, that's all right with me." So we did that. He went to town and got to drinking and he got a girl; he had a lot of money on him by that time. In the morning he woke up and the girl was gone and the money was gone. So he hocked his clothes and a week later I met him coming back out. He was there for a whole week. He had gone down in Hoover City, down by the incinerator in Youngstown and he spent the week with the can gangers. He really had a binge, is what we call it. He apologized. It took him three months to get all of his debts paid off after he had gone back.

M: That was an expensive binge.

B: That was an expensive binge. That's the way a lot of those people were back then. There were a lot of people who lived down in that Hoover City. It was just a bunch of scrap iron put together.

M: Do you remember going down and seeing that place?

B: Yes. I remember seeing the little shacks down back of the incinerator. They went there because of the heat. It was warm. You didn't even have to provide any heat.

M: Where would these men get their food?

B: Scrounge it.

M: They didn't work, did they?

B: They would scrounge it. They might have got some from the garbage trucks that came in there. It's surprising how many people scrounged garbage from the restaurants and that sort of thing around town at that time. I don't know how people lived like that, but I guess they survived. A human person is sometimes not so human and is able to survive under conditions which we normally would think offhand you would just die. You couldn't possibly live like that.

M: Most cities, I think, had a Hoover City?

B: Yes. They called it a Hoover City.

M: Do you remember why they called it that?

B: President Hoover was supposedly responsible for the Depression, but I think history will prove him to be one of the better presidents. I think he had the foresight to make it go, but he had a congress, a democratic congress against him. They refused to put into effect any of his policies. In fact, most of his policies were the ones that Mr. Roosevelt used afterwards. Eventually, history will show that Mr. Hoover was a more knowledgeable man than he was dubbed with at that time. He had done a lot of work. He was very successful, of course, in engineering a lot of money. He never took any money for being president, although I don't know if that was the idea. He could have probably taken the money and done something else with it.

M: When Roosevelt then became elected, what was the opinion of the people regarding him and his policies, because he introduced quite a few?

B: Most of the things that he introduced were things that Mr. Hoover had prescribed to start with. Later on, of course, they weren't. The big problem was the money problem and over history you'll notice that money goes up and down or the economy goes up and down. It primarily goes up and down because productivity and money don't go together. If you get a lot of money and no productivity, then eventually the money becomes almost worthless. I remember a man and a friend of ours who had bought some U.S. Steel stock--he worked there--for \$360 a share. Then, I think it eventually dropped to \$6, but he still had the stock. And if he lived long enough, it would probably come back up and he would have recuperated it all. This was the big problem, the fact that many banks had overloaned their money. They put loans on shaky deals. Even just recently we had the same thing if you looked at some of the real estate trust. They borrowed a lot of money and then the demand, when the economy slowed down, went away and then everything sort of collapsed.

There was a lot of money lost. I remember the banks closing. My uncle was banking in the Trumbull Bank in Girard and he had deposited his paycheck in there and the next day my aunt went to write a check on the bank to pay the milkman and the milkman said the check wasn't any good; the bank closed. Well, eventually, the bank paid out a little bit of money on the money that the people had in there, but it might have been 25¢ or 50¢ on a dollar. There were a number of banks that closed. Some were absorbed by other banks. This was a common occurrence. This bank had loaned a lot of money in an area

called Pleasant Valley. There's a lake up there now. People had bought lots and borrowed the money from the bank to pay for them and things were really moving along. Today, those lots still haven't got a very high value compared to what they had at that time. We had lots right here where the school was built that were sold for \$1600 and more. Until recently they weren't worth over \$100 a piece. Actually, the inflation was really high at that time and then the Depression sort of slowed it down.

M: These banks that closed, did the people ever get their money back?

B: Some of them never got their money back, and at that time the people who owned stock in the banks were responsible, or liable for whatever the amount of value of stock they had in the bank. They were liable for that amount. Some of them lost a lot of money on it because they lost other property as a result of the bank failure. Of course, it's not that way anymore. If the bank goes broke, you lose your stock, but you don't have to put money into it to help somebody else who had savings in there. That's the way it was at that time. I know a lot of people refused to buy bank stock for that reason because they didn't want to get caught in that kind of bind.

M: Many people too didn't trust the banks after that when they did reopen.

B: Many insurance companies went broke too, and many people refused to buy insurance after that. Of course, the laws became more stringent for the operating of a bank and then that insurance came along and the insurance companies did the same thing. The laws got more strict and they had to invest their money in certain securities rather than in more a speculative kind. When everything's going bloom, everybody wants to hop on. When it goes bust, everybody wants to get out and that makes it that much worse.

M: That's right. Most people panic.

B: The guys jumped out of windows because of the loss of their money.

M: Did you ever remember hearing about anybody doing that in Youngstown?

B: I know a few people who did it, but I'm not so sure it was a result of the stock market. But that might have been just enough push to make them jump out of a window. I know one person that did it.

I think that there are a lot of built-in safeguards in our

economy today. We wouldn't have the kind of Depression we had then. However, I think we could build up to such a Depression because as we continue to push this inflation along, some day it's going to bust and then maybe we'll go through a depression. Who knows? I would rather believe that if we did get into that sort of situation again today, we would probably turn to socialism or maybe even communism where the state would take over. Eventually you would find you would lose all your freedoms and we would become another Russian community.

M: Would you think the people of today, I'm talking about our young people, would survive a Depression such as what we had in 1929?

B: If it were like the one in 1929 it would be debatable. There would be a lot of people who really wouldn't have the know-how. You have to remember that we knew how to do some things that today people don't. You go to the store and you buy almost everything you use. We didn't do that in those days. You canned. You raised gardens. Almost everybody had a garden. I remember during some of the deliveries of milk on the west side of town . . . almost all of those farm people out there were of some foreign country. Many of them were of first generation even. They just came over. They had gardens on little plots of land that might be only 20' or 40' square. They would raise almost enough vegetables in that plot to can and keep them through the whole year. We don't know how to do that anymore. We've lost the touch on how to do that. We buy it all out of the grocery store.

I remember cabbage selling for 2¢ and 3¢ a pound in the stores. I don't know what it is today. Cabbage is usually a reasonably priced product, but what the farmer gets and what the storekeeper gets are two different things because there's a lot of labor. It is expensive labor when you think about truck drivers getting \$7. They're probably going to be getting as high as \$10 an hour by the time the project goes through.

M: You said you grew some vegetables and produce to sell. Did you take these into Youngstown at all?

B: We delivered it door to door. We didn't sell any on the market; we sold it all door to door.

M: What type of wagon did you have?

B: It was horse drawn. They dipped it out of the can into your own jug. That was before the Depression. That was about World War I time rather than World War II.

When I first started school, we went to school with horse-drawn vehicles. About 1923 or 1924 they got the first motorized

vehicles, and during the Depression, of course, they had buses. There were a lot of things that we didn't have in school. The books were old. If I remember right, when I was in school I don't think we ever had books that would even come up. This is 1932 when I graduated and we didn't have any books that covered World War I even. You can see the books were way out-of-date because we didn't have the money to buy them. They didn't want to change the books because even though we, the kids, had to buy the books, it was hard enough for the parents to come up with enough money to buy a book, even though maybe the most expensive book would be a couple of dollars.

M: What would the school do, for instance, with someone who couldn't really afford to buy book?

B: They had some agencies which helped kids buy books. During the Depression they had a group over at the town hall that got money from someplace, the state or the county or someplace. They would give out money for people who worked. Everyone then had to work for any relief. We used to call them relief orders, and you had to work for them. They would work them on the road. Of course, at that time most of the road work was all done by hand. I can remember a lot of people who would work cleaning out ditches and that sort of thing. I don't think they paid them more than 50¢ an hour, and they would only let them work three days a week.

M: Would this have been part of the WPA Program?

B: This was prior to the WPA Program. The WPA Program was, of course, the federal government program. After they got those started, they put in Sodom Road. They used an old steam shovel that was really run by steam. They hammered the stones into small pieces like they did when they built the original road down on where old Route 40 was. It was sledge-hammered.

There were a lot of people who worked on WPA and PWA. It's like today. Every program they change the name and they changed everything all around. I don't believe that's just the way to go. I think they're making it very expensive to do what little they do do. I know there were a lot of people; they would allow them to work six days a week and they would allow people to work three days. Then they would put another crew on for three days. That way they gave everybody a chance. They found out, too, that in building a road it wasn't the labor that was expensive but it was the material. They would haul slag. Just hauling the slag--I remember people who did trucking at that time--the price they received for trucking . . . I don't know how they operated trucks.

I don't think that really very many people worked very steady

until World War II started. A few of them went back to work in 1939 when our country started to provide some materials to the allies in World War II. I don't think we really had good times until World War II started. Of course, everybody felt that after World War II was over we would have another Depression, and that didn't turn out. We had ups and downs, but never a depression like the 1930's.

Another thing that was a problem in the 1930's is we had the Dust Bowl. It was a large portion of the United States that didn't have enough water to grow crops. They just had these big dust storms. A large number of those farmers were really hard up and many of them left the ground at that time, Oklahoma and some of those areas. Those people were really hard up. They didn't have anything to eat. Not only no money, but they didn't have anything if they would have had money. They probably couldn't have bought anything.

M: They couldn't grow the crops at all on the land?

B: I remember when I went down to Columbus a number of times where they brought many, many thousands of potatoes, heads of beef cattle, and built fences in some areas. They turned the cattle in there and fed them because there was nothing for them to eat out where they were.

M: Where did these cattle come from then?

B: From out in the plains and the west, not so far; most of them came from Illinois. I remember going out in 1933 and 1944. We went out when I was down at Ohio State. I went home with a fellow who was graduating, and he went home to pick his mother up. We left in the night and got to his house in early morning. I remember milking his father's cow for him. His father had planted some oats and the oats didn't germinate; the ground was so dry they just couldn't germinate. That was the kind of problem his father had. He just didn't have a crop there because there was no moisture. The Depression was intensified for many people as a result of the Dust Bowl or the dry period that we went through during the 1930's.

M: The area in which you lived in, out west, they might have had it a little harder than we did here in the east.

B: I don't think Ohio really suffered too much from the drought conditions that we had at that time, except in Western Ohio. Eastern Ohio, our area, never suffered from not enough rain. We get more than enough. We tried to make hay here in the summertime because it rained so often.

M: Most of the steelworkers in the Youngstown area didn't get their unemployment, so when the mills did shut down they

- were the ones who were hurting.
- B: They were hurting. One lady said they liked to see the smoke because then they knew somebody was going to work. Today they don't want to see any smoke.
- M: The pollution?
- B: Yes, the pollution bit. During the Depression there was a lot more smoke in Youngstown than there is today because of the houses that still burned coal. I remember our milk bottles that were on the front porch overnight would have an inch of soot in the bottom, a little triangular pile like that. The householder would come out and sweep the floor of the porch, periodically, in order to keep from tracking the soot back in the house. It was in large chunks. Most of the furnaces weren't very efficient in those days burning coal. Large chunks of soot were floating all over the place. Environmentalists know what pollution is.
- M: You mentioned milk bottles. As a dairy farmer then, how did you get hold of these bottles? What did you do with them for sanitation purposes then?
- B: We bought the bottles and then we washed them with solutions that were prescribed to wash them with. There was a brush on a motor that you would stick the bottle on and wash it out and put it in the sterilizing solution.
- M: Was this more automated or did you do a lot of work by hand?
- B: Ours wasn't automated at all; we did it all by hand. We didn't have any automation in the washing.
- M: How did you do that?
- B: We put the bottles in a large tub, took them one by one, and put them over the brush and brushed them out. You learned to do it so that the brush got into all the corners. Then you put it into another solution, a sterile chlorine solution. After they rinsed them they stuck upside down on a crate. Then you take it in and fill it with a filler. We used a one-hole thing for a while. It was just a little hand filler. It would hold enough to fill a case of bottles, which is twelve three-gallon. You push it over to that and then you push the caps on by hand. Then they got a little bit more sophisticated than that and had one that had a tank on it that would hold about twenty gallons. We never really got automated. It was just a small operation. At one time there were about 250 dairies in Youngstown. I think there's only about one that's bottling milk anymore.
- M: Was there any competition between these 250 dairies?

- B: Limited. Most of them were limited to specific areas of town. They didn't travel too much all over town. If you were only selling 200 bottles of milk like we were, you wouldn't want to drive 100 miles to do it. It wouldn't even be worthwhile today. At that time I suppose we went 25 to 30 miles a day. I bought a truck for \$450, a brand new one.
- M: What kind of truck was that?
- B: It was a Chevy panel truck. The prices were different. I bought a new car in 1939 for \$709. It was a Ford, so-called deluxe model. Today you pay for the same car, probably, \$5000, but you're not getting much more car. The engine runs better but the body doesn't hold together very well.
- M: No, they don't.
- B: The higher the income the bigger the rate. Like I told you to start with, I wasn't the one who was really affected too much by it. Even though in high school sometimes if I didn't have classes, I went home and worked on the farm. I still got pretty good grades. There weren't very many in the school and classes weren't large.
- M: As a young boy what kind of things did you do? When did you get out? You mentioned playing baseball.
- B: We could go to the show when I was dating. We could go to a show for 50¢ and that would get us in the show and buy us a couple of hamburgers.
- M: That would be the two of you?
- B: Two of us. It could maybe even buy us a couple gallons of gas. It wasn't unusual for people to buy a couple gallons of gas even though it only cost 35¢.
- M: You would drive down into Youngstown for this?
- B: Down in Youngstown to go to the show. I remember one time I forgot my pocketbook and my girlfriend didn't have any money. Even though it only cost 10¢ or 15¢ to get into the show, we had to go home because she didn't have anything. My first date was the worst thing.
- M: What happened?
- B: This girl's parents weren't very easy to convince that I should be able to date their daughter. I was just sixteen years old. I suppose we were juniors in high school at that time. My brother had a girl that lived near where my girl lived on

Warner Road. We drove over to Niles. We had just been driving around. The darn battery cable broke on the car when we were in Niles and we didn't know what was wrong with the car. A fellow who lived near where the car broke down found out what was wrong with it, and he was trying to take it down the cellar and fix it. We weren't too far from friends of my father who had a gas station and we called my dad and my dad came out. Eventually, they got the battery cable fixed, but the car wouldn't start. Here when the battery cable broke it froze the points on the car. My dad was a fair mechanic. They got that started and it was about two o'clock when I got that girl home. It took me six months to get a date again. Even though my mother went over the next day and explained what had happened, it was hard for me. I dated her for a couple of years after that. Eventually, we separated and went our private ways.

- M: Do you have anything, in summary, Mr. Banner, that you would like to say about the Depression, your attitude about having gone through it or experienced it even though you weren't hard hit by it? Did that change your way of living, say, in the future? Were you more frugal with your money?
- B: I look at that dollar that we earned the same way that I looked at the ones that we earned during the Depression. You just don't get used to all these dollars. I don't think it's the right way to go. I think our government is lenient. They don't have the courage to say no either. There are many things the government is doing for us that they shouldn't be doing for us, that we should be doing for ourselves. The government doesn't do anything for you except take something from you in order to do it. In the meantime, you've lost a pretty large share of it. I know that in the kind of work I do that to have the government do it for you, like build a road or something of the sort, it would cost about five or six times more than if the people just got together and did it themselves. I know of an example, Lactetia Drive. They could have had it done for \$100 for each lot on the street, but they couldn't get all the people to agree, and when they finally did it and had it assessed against their tax it cost them \$600 a lot.

This is the sort of thing that we just don't understand, that the people we put in government many times aren't the most effective or efficient operators or the most knowledgeable either. They probably have the toughest hide because they get a lot of criticisms, which is not always warranted. Many times people won't even consider the reasons for whatever is done. Some are limited by law and some, of course, are limited by finances, and some are limited because of the kinds of people we have working for us. I try very strongly to teach the fact that people should not try to depend on the government for things. Those people, in most cases, I don't think I would hire them to operate my business if I had a business. I don't

believe they are capable of operating a business.

M: Do you remember, for instance, during the Depression if the people grumbled about the government?

B: The union men were the people who grumbled most because they thought the government ought to do something for them. President Roosevelt took advantage of that and that is why he was re-elected for so many times. Even though I think that if he had gone two terms he probably would have been considered a great president. People are in office for a period of time and the longer the period of time, the farther they go toward the socialistic concept of doing things for people in order to get reelected, rather than doing things to see that it's done properly.

This is what happened when we allow people to stay in congress, or wherever for thirty years or however many years some of them have been in there. I think they lost contact with reality. They don't realize what it requires for an average person to do when he is working on his own. All they know is that they've got so many dollars and they like to spend them where it's going to buy them the most votes, rather than for whatever possible good they can do. I feel very strongly that the president shouldn't have but one six-year term. The first thing he does when he's elected is run for the second term. That's uppermost in his mind the whole time. Of course, I realize that the congressmen are doing the same thing. They continue running for office trying to do the things that will make them the votes.

I think that people have not been taught economics very well. The economics we have been taught are not very fundamental, for instance the Keynesian Theory where you spend yourself rich. I think this theory was distorted, but still they felt they could use it to manage the money and manage the economy up and down, manage the taxes. Politicians can't do those kinds of things because they do it with an eye on whether it's going to get votes or whether it isn't, not whether it's the right thing to do or not. As long as that situation continues we will have the kind of inflation we have now. As you see, most of the people are running against Washington now, rather than . . . They finally wised up that maybe Washington isn't that great white saviour that can help us all.

I feel very strongly that our government has interfered way too much in our lives. Most of the government programs that they've put out in recent years put the ones that we had in the Depression to shame so far as helping people. They spend billions of dollars now where they used to spend millions. Still, we don't have very much going for us.

M: During that time too people helped themselves more than they do now. They didn't rely on the government to help them.

B: No. The bank wouldn't loan money to people because they required so much security and there was no security. I remember the first loan my wife and I got. The banks wouldn't loan us the money so we went to what they called the production credit association, which was set up by one of the government programs to provide money to loan the farmers. When the fellow made up my pension and financial statement I actually was \$5000 in the red. What I owned and what I owed was \$5000 apart in the wrong direction. Eventually, we got out of it. It was a difficult time from a money standpoint. Banks were very hard to borrow money from. Even though they had lots of money, they couldn't get the kind of security that they demanded to loan money. You had to have 40%, 50% down in order to buy a house.

I know at one time in McDonald, when they built the houses over there originally in 1918 . . . My uncle rented his house and it eventually got up during the latter part of the 1920's that there was \$60 or \$70 a month rent. When the Depression came along and he moved out and moved to Niles, they wouldn't sell the houses over there. After the Depression had gone along a while they decided to sell them and they bought a house and moved back. We bought a house for \$6000 and when he died during 1960 they sold it for \$30,000. The house was still the same house. The difference in the number of dollars didn't add anything to the value of the house. It was just an inflationary kind of thing.

When Roosevelt took us off the gold standard, of course, that released a lot of money. He raised the price of gold from \$17 an ounce to \$35 an ounce. It stayed there until just recently when they took the lid off and it went to \$200 an ounce. Those economic things . . . It seems to me that when we permit government to do the things that we permit them to do, we're just asking for more trouble. Eventually, we're going to get it. There's just no way we can operate like that. People in government are going to have to get a little stiffer backbone because the unions are organizing and they'll put the pressure on all the people who operate any kind of an agency, a government agency, whatever. They get them to increase their wages and the government employees have gotten wages far beyond the benefits of the other employees. Washington, particularly, has about two to one according to the recent figures that I read. Around here, I'm sure most people who work for private industry don't receive the same kind of benefits that the people who work for the government do.

M: Right.

- B: Teachers have done pretty well in the last ten years. I think when I first came to school they were probably at about \$2000, I think. that was about in 1946. The base salary was \$2000 which was after World War II. In the meantime, it has gone up considerably, but I don't think they're very much ahead than they were before. You've got more dollars, but Uncle Sam takes the first cut and it's getting bigger, in spite of the fact they keep telling you they're making tax cuts. The higher your income, of course, still higher you pay more percentage and dollar vote. I thought during the Depression if I would have ever made this much money that I would have been rich, but I don't feel any different than I did during the Depression when I was earning what I was. I think my wife feels a little different because she was farther down the pole than I was. She was from a broken family, so consequently she didn't have anybody there that was providing money.
- M: Any other last minute comments or summation?
- B: No, except that I think if we continue the way we are that we may get back into that same problem. A lot of inflation eventually will bring along some kind of deflation. I don't know how, but I can't think that we can go on like this forever. The next thing that's going to happen will be down the line toward socialism like England rather than the kind of depression we had. Unions gained a lot of strength during the Depression with sit-ins and sit-outs and whatever. I'm not sure that that was bad, but I think those kinds of things ended up too far and too fast maybe. I agree that the situation that brought them about, that was the answer to it. Once you get a little power like that, it goes completely berserk and a little power, they say, corrupts a little and absolute power corrupts absolutely, so this is what has happened. The more power people have, the more they tend to bear down to other people.
- M: Thank you very much, Mr. Banner.

END OF INTERVIEW