

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Mines in Mineral Ridge

Personal Experience

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FRANK JOSEPH

Interviewed

by

Judy Rasmussen

on

August 19, 1978

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: FRANK JOSEPH
INTERVIEWER: Judy Rasmussen
SUBJECT: Mines in Mineral Ridge
DATE: August 19, 1978

R: This is an interview with Mr. Frank Joseph for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Judy Rasmussen, at 69 East Main Street, Mineral Ridge, Ohio, on August 19, 1978, at 11:00 a.m.

Mr. Joseph, could you give me a little on your family background?

J: Well, my father was born in Wales, and my mother was born here in the United States. In other words, I'm what you call a mongrel.

R: How did they meet?

J: Well, they both lived here at the time.

R: Your father came over?

J: Yes, well, my grandfather did. I don't know exactly when they met, but my dad was born in 1872, and my mother in 1869. Both have passed away now.

R: What did your father do for a living?

J: He mined coal for a time.

R: Do you remember any of that?

J: No, he was mining coal before I was born. He was one of the last ones to come out of these mines here in town. He was only about 17, 18, 19 years old at the time. He was operating a water pump to pump the water out of the mine, which in those days was only a hand pump. He said that the water was coming so fast in the mine, that the pump wouldn't pump it all out. He told them to get out of there. If they didn't, they would probably have drowned in there.

R: What year was this?

J: This is probably back about 1889 or 1890.

R: Where was the mine located?

J: Here in town. I think it was either off Liberty Street, or off of the County Line Road. I'm not sure which one it was. In fact, I don't even recall if he ever told us which mine it was. There was a Parker mine, and they were relation to us. It could have been that mine that he was in. That would be on the next street over on County Line Road. Right at the end of this street here there is a shaft, another shaft. It is called the Austin Shaft. It has been filled up with tin cans now, and there is practically nothing there but old rusty cans.

The next mine over is the Parker mine. It has been bull dozed over now with a bull dozer. The last time I was over there with Mrs. Harris, I couldn't find it at all. But another fellow told her that he would take her over and show her where the mine was, because he lived right there where it was. This has been covered over now, and you can't find it.

R: Have you ever been inside any of these mines?

J: I've been in the Parker Mine, yes.

R: What did it look like when you went in? Was it a shaft mine?

J: It was just a slope. I went all the way back in. I was only a kid.

R: What did it feel like when you were in there?

J: Nothing. They used to have a track in there, a small based track, a narrow based track with the coal cars on it. They used to have a pony in there. They kept the pony right down in the mine. The pony was dying down in there, and he

couldn't help him come out. Then he came out into the sunlight, and he couldn't see anything.

R: How long was the Parker mine in use?

J: Oh, the Parker mine was in existence, maybe for 15 or 20 years. I reckon it was maybe a quarter of a mile back in from the entrance way.

R: Were there entries going out the side?

J: Yes, there were entries off of each side. Right down the road here on the other side of the street here, Liberty Street here . . . if you go down there, there is another shaft down there, an air shaft. There is an incline there. It's filled up with water, and it's awful dangerous; I can tell you that for kids around there. Nothing has ever been done about it. It is still down there yet. It has got about a 35 or 40 degree angle on it. If anybody would start to slide down in there, why, they would never get out of it.

R: How were the outsides kept up? I mean, what are the supports?

J: No supports are on it.

R: What keeps it up right?

J: Part of it is paved in now. The front of it is paved in. If you went down in there, after you would get down in, oh, maybe 15 feet, why, then it is shored.

R: How is it shored?

J: There are no timbers in there. Probably down below in the mine part itself where it goes into the mine itself, it is probably shored up in there. That part of it, why, they get by because they figure the air would go in anyhow.

R: And the Parker mine, how are they? How is it shored?

J: It was shored up; it was the timber. The timber probably isn't there now; that was years and years ago.

R: Is there water in the Parker mine?

J: I don't know anything about the Parker mine, because it was covered over with the bull dozer, but there is water in this one. There are quite a few other air openings there. Now the next street down to the left of there has also got air shafts coming out. Then down on the other end of town is the Jim Carl Mine. I don't think they operate it anymore,

but I haven't been back in there for years.

R: I would like to talk more about your father again. Do you have any other stories that he used to tell you?

J: No, that was the only one I ever heard him tell. I could tell you something about this town, though. This town used to have 80-some saloons in it at one time.

R: For the miners?

J: For the miners.

R: Keep them busy.

J: This dang Parker operated a mine down here where Fitch's is now. After this town went dry, why, he opened up a grocery store there. Then after the grocery store was this beer garden they got down there now.

R: With the Parker mine, why don't we talk about that one more than the others? Is there any red dogs in the shale?

J: A what?

R: It's associated with shale.

J: No, I never heard that.

R: You were inside the Parker mine?

J: Oh, yes.

R: How high were the ceilings?

J: I would say the ceilings were probably about eight feet, seven or eight feet.

R: How wide were they?

J: Well, when you went in there, why, it was only about--it was practically square, maybe seven by eight, I mean, eight by seven. It wasn't too big. But in other words, this fellow only mined the coaling; he didn't ship no coal out. He mined the coal for his own use and maybe for his neighbors.

R: His name was Parker?

J: Yes.

R: Who did he hire to help?

J: Anybody that wanted to work for him.

R: Usually local men?

J: Yes, local men.

R: What kind of shifts did they work, do you know?

J: That I don't know. I don't know; I think they only worked day turn. It wouldn't be necessary for them to go ahead and have three shifts working only for their own use or maybe for their neighbor's use.

R: When was the Parker mine in operation?

J: Oh, I would say around 1880, 1890.

R: I imagine they used a lot of Welsh men?

J: They did.

R: They were good miners.

J: I think right in back of my place here now was a railroad, a narrow gauge railroad. Well, it wasn't too narrow either. With a 60 foot right of way through here, and it ran out to the County Line Road and beyond, east of the County Line Road to the old, I think it was the Warner Mine. I had trouble over this railroad then. The Erie Railroad owned it, see. I had to go to Cleveland to the Republic building in Cleveland to settle this out, and my grandfather was the Justice of the Peace. He tried straightening it out. When I went up there, they said to me, "Are you any relation to John Gillman?" I said, "Yes. That was my grandfather." He said, "Well, he used to write us about straightening some of that railroad property stuff out up there." I said, "Well, I'm still having trouble over it." So they fixed it up for me.

R: What did they do?

J: Well, I had a surveyor come in here. It wasn't his fault. See, in the middle of the road out here in route 46, he thought it was a full 60 feet right of way all the way through, which it wasn't. It hit the center of the road here. It dropped down from 60 feet to 42 feet. That was a difference of 18 feet. Well, this surveyor was going to try to cut nine feet off of my lace on account of the difference, see, in the width of the road. That was why I had to go to Cleveland. When I went on up to Cleveland, I found out that the abandoned railroad then was only 42 feet. Well, they gave me back my own property; it was originally

mine in the first place.

R: Do you think that railroad was used to get the coal out of here?

J: They used that to haul. . . . Down from here, that would be southwest of here, is an old stage where they laid the coal that came out of here. Maybe Parker didn't because he was right on that railroad then. He might have shipped coal out; I'm not sure, but in fact he could have. This shale goes down right here, and they leave all the cars down there. Then they reload them from there onto the regular Erie Railroad. That was how the Erie Railroad was involved in it, see. I guess they put the switch in and put the mine in over here in the back of my house.

R: I wonder how much coal was going for in those days?

J: You could probably buy coal for a couple of dollars a ton.

R: I bet. How did your grandfather get paid?

J: My grandfather?

R: Oh, your father; I'm sorry.

J: Well, back in those days, you didn't make any money at all. Even when I started in to work, I only made 40 cents an hour on the first job I ever got. That was back in 1934. It was right after the Depression, and you couldn't find a job. The fellow across the street here was superintendent down at the Niles Steel Products in Niles, which eventually got to be Republic Steel. He gave me the job. I was down there, oh, seven, eight years before I finally left there and took another job.

R: The Parker mine, it is closed now?

J: Oh, it is closed.

R: It has been bull dozed over.

J: Yes, and none of these mines . . . these mines around here haven't been operated probably since 1891, 1892, 1894, on up until 1900 is when they. . . . I think the railroad back there was pulled up in 1899.

R: Why were the mines closed?

J: They filled up with water; you couldn't operate them anymore.

R: They didn't have a pump to get rid of the water?

J: No, they didn't have electric pumps back in those days. Probably if somebody wanted to be smart and let these pumps in here and pump this water out of here, they could still operate these mines.

R: You think they are still full of coal?

J: Oh, there is coal in there. There is no question about that. There is coal in there. Let me show you something right here. Just look out this window. See that steel pipe right there? Well, that goes into the mine. My house sets right on top of the mine.

R: How deep do you think it is?

J: Ninety-two feet. I know how deep it is.

R: It is 92 feet below the surface?

J: Right.

R: So you really are in no danger of ever caving in?

J: No, no, there is no danger. With all of these caves it is kind of shaky a little bit.

R: What is the steel pipe for?

J: That is so that it drains out.

R: Oh, it is. Well, what was it before?

J: That was what it was put in there for.

R: Oh.

J: That was put in there when my grandfather owned this house back in 1911. This casing was put in I would say, back before that time; I don't know exactly what date it was put in. A guy came in here by the name of Lincoln, I think it was. He drilled the casing, and in the hole, he put the casing in. It was 96 dollars for 92 feet. It was supposed to go in all the way to the top of the mine, the end of the mine.

R: When did your family first find out your house was sitting on top of a mine?

J: We always knew that.

R: Oh, you always knew. Could you ever use any of it for your own personal use because your property was over the mine?

J: That I can't say.

R: Do you know if there is any equipment left in the mines?

J: They didn't get anything out.

R: They didn't. It's left back down there.

J: Shovels and everything else. There was no power equipment in those days. You did everything by hand. All the shovels and everything else, they just dropped everything and went out. You could probably find shovels and picks and everything else down there now. It would probably be all rotted out now and rusty, but then again they might work maybe because they were covered with water. They would be protected.

R: Yes. You went in the Parker mine as a boy?

J: Yes.

R: How far back did it go? How far back did you go when you went in there?

J: I didn't go back in there. We just went in there and played a little bit; then we came back out. I was only about nine, 10, 11 years old at the time. I'm 67 now.

R: How about the pillars and supportters?

J: They were pretty good size timbers. They were probably any where from six to eight inches thick.

R: What were they made of? Do you know?

J: It was oak, oak and hard wood timber in the mine. I'm not positive if they had a complete roof across from one section to the other, or whether they just had the thing shored up there, or whether they had wood across it at the top.

R: Do you know anything about robbing the pillars when they left the mine? Sometimes they would knock down the supportters.

J: No, they didn't knock them down. They are still there.

R: Why did your father move to this town, to mine?

J: He took up the machinist trade. He wanted to be a

machinist. Then he went up and seeing that he had been in the mine business. . . . The plant that he worked in made coal shovels. In other words, there was like a loading platform for the mine. He used to go out on the job and kept them coal platforms up. I have got a book of his. . . . It is just like a notebook. The Cortland Cement Company put it out in the year 1910 or 1911. There is also some of the stuff in there that I told you about when the mine was abandoned and everything. That is one reason why I knew everything about it.

R: Did they really think that it would ever cave in?

J: No, I haven't given a thought about this on whether it was going to cave in or not.

R: But when the miners worked, they were afraid because it was pretty dangerous?

J: Oh, any mine is dangerous; even a shaft mine is dangerous or any other kind of mine, a copper mine, salt, or gold.

R: Have you been in any other mines besides coal?

J: No, no, I'm not crazy about mines.

R: Neither am I; they frighten me. Is the Parker Mine easy to spot? Would I be able to see it if I had never seen it before?

J: No. Oh, you would if it was still in existence, but it is not in existence.

R: What about the other ones that you were talking about in Mineral Ridge?

J: You could see them. One of them is at the end of this road right here in front of me about, I would say, 25 to 50 yards from the end of the road here.

R: Have you ever seen that one?

J: That is the one that I said was all filled up with tin cans. This was just an air shaft to let air into the mine.

R: Do you know where it started, or how big that mine was underground?

J: No, it is part of this one right here.

R: They are just like big tunnels coming together.

J: This one is straight up and down. This one down west of here is the one that I said was on an incline slope and had water in it. Why, it is on an angle, see, and it runs down in there, and it's part of the same mine here.

R: So all the mines that you have been talking about, the shafts and such all connect into the one big mine that runs underneath where it sets.

J: Then now down here by the Thompson Fire, that one road there. . . . You go down over the hill there; there is a stone culvert down there, stone ridge rather, and old creek running down there. Well, if you head north on the left hand side, not too far from the culvert, I would say maybe 100 or 150 feet from the road, there is another mine. This fellow, he was a Turk, by the name of Hassen. He did mine for his own use, and it went back in about . . . it didn't go in over 50 or 75 feet. He was trying to find, and he even asked me if I would go in and help him shore the thing up, put the timbers in to hold it up. Finally he gave up on it altogether. Then on the other side of the road on up to what we used to call the raving, there were three more openings in there now. I don't think they mined coal there; they were probably just air shafts. I can't remember too much about them. I can remember what the holes back in there, what that is about all.

R: Are those mines that you are talking about, Turk's mines, are they part of the mines here or are they separate mines?

J: No, these are Turk's mines. They were separate. He just got one small vein of coal. It wasn't part of the big mine at all or the mines that they used underneath here in Mineral Ridge. This whole town, practically, is setting on a platt of mines all over the place.

R: I wonder why Mineral Ridge more than any other [place], do you know?

J: Well, maybe the geological survey I looked at was the cause of it, you know. That is why this town is named Mineral Ridge on how the minerals. . . . And also, this is about the second highest spot in the state of Ohio.

R: Have you ever seen a picture of this mine?

J: Oh, yes.

R: Is that where it is at?

J: Yes, this one is the Turk's.

R: Did he have a shaft?

J: No, he had a slope. It only went back in 50 or 60 feet.

R: Any rooms off to the side?

J: No.

R: Any pillars?

J: No.

R: He just dug right in.

J: He dug right in, and that is why he wanted somebody in there to help him put timbers in to hold up the roof.

R: Yes, did he mine it himself?

J: He mined it, yes. First he only used coal.

R: What kind?

J: It was good coal.

R: What kind of equipment did they use?

J: Just picks and shovels. In fact, he worked on the railroad, repairing the tracks and stuff. He was trained with the picks and shovels.

R: How do you know so much? How do you know about the mines in this area?

J: When I was a kid, I used to get around pretty good.

R: And you lived here all your life?

J: I have lived here all my life. I was born here in Mineral Ridge. That was one of the saddest days in the community.

R: What is that?

J: Me being born.

R: I know you do have a need for living here. Okay. I guess that is about is. Thank you.

J: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW