

April 30, 2014

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . . while dusting

A recent acquisition to the museum's archives comes from Frank Snyder, now of Mass. His collection is that of his father, Abraham Frank Snyder – Abe (b. 10/27/1896 – d. 11/11/1994). Abe was born in a town called Pillow (a borough in Dauphin County, Pa.) and came to Sullivan County as District Forester for the Wyoming State Forest District in 1921. He married Mildred Harrington in 1925. Following their marriage he then joined the Harrington Creamery Co. becoming treasurer and manager of milk and ice cream operations for the next 36 years, retiring in 1961. His obituary defines a very busy man who was not only active in his community but also respected.

In 1980, Abe was interviewed by Jim McCamley as part of the Laurel Leaves project



done by high school students under the direction of Stevie Shoemaker and Sally Coleman. With thanks to Derek Davis for transferring all the cassettes to CD's, we now have all these oral interviews available for listening. Many were also turned into written transcription, which is how Jim's interview with Abe is done. In the dialogue, Abe tells of his family's background coming from Germany and his experiences growing up. But further reading takes you to a question from Jim: "Can you tell us about the creamery you used to work in?" Abe's answer, in part, is said with basic information, having lived through the creamery's history after his marriage of Mildred. Here are just some parts.

"Maurice J. Harrington was the local man here and in the early 1900's, he established a plant down here to receive milk and cream to make butter, Later it developed into a larger plant." Then about 1912 he started to make ice cream." This plant was later sold to various hands, closing around 1965. But Abe goes on: "About 1940, they put the 8 hour a day in. Prior to that, you could work as long as you wanted to, but you did have to pay time and a half over the 40 hours that they worked in a week. And the average rate then was about .35 cents to .40 cents an hour for the average worker. A foreman might get .75 cents to \$1 but that was true only after the war (WWII) and then, of course, wages began to climb from \$1 up to what it is today. Now, \$3.10 an hour is required for an ordinary worker. [Remember, this was written in 1980 and that he's talking about what we now call minimum wage.]

"We bought milk from about 1500 farmers." He goes on to explain the Federal government's price structure for the variety of milk uses. And he tells of an exchange with a farmer: I said "What did we pay you for milk last month?" And he said, "I don't know, but it wasn't enough." And Abe went on to say "You know, one of the things that I dreaded mostly when I came to the plant as manager was to hear the farmer complain – one was the price of milk and two was the test that we gave. Milk was bought on a butter-fate test. In other words, if you had milk testing 3.5% butter-fat and somebody else had milk testing 4.5% butter-fat, the man who had the high butter-fat got the higher price for his milk than the person with the lower butter-fat content. But after I was there awhile and a farmer came in and complained we talked to him and told him what the reasons were and he went out smiling so you felt that you had done your job right."

The amount of personal reflection in these oral interviews is both interesting and eye-opening. I mean, can you imagine making .35 cents and hour, really? Okay, all things are relevant, but still . . . We'll continue with Abe's interview next week.