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OSBORNE: This morning I have with me Ralph Hunt who has been in the grocery business in Alliance for many years and his father before him and this is what we want to talk about.

Some of his impressions growing up in it;

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## REMINISCENCES

OF

RALPH HUNT

*Hunt, Ralph E.*

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OSBORNE: All right

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Interview by  
N. Yost Osborne  
January 6, 1976

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OSBORNE: Right.

HUNT: And he was in an independent store there and like

all independent. We didn't have any chain of the grocery business.

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stores in the area, at the time.

OSBORNE: This morning I have with me Ralph Hunt who has been in the grocery business in Alliance for many years and his father before him and this is what we want to talk about. He started as a young man. He bought a little business down there and actually Dad said he was too young to be in business because he only lasted three years. He was too generous with credit and that led to his downfall. Okay, when did you get started in the grocery business Ralph?

HUNT: Well, I guess I've been in the grocery business the biggest part of my life if you want to consider the time that I helped my father. And that was probably from the time that I was in first grade. I have a picture of him in

this truck at home. So that was something new in the grocery business to have a delivery truck. OSBORNE: All right, so as far as your life in Alliance is concerned it's been tied up in the grocery business. When did your father start, you mentioned he had a grocery business.

HUNT: Well, he originally had a store down at the corner of Patterson and Webb. Which at that time, 1911, was one of the better sections of town. The trucks just weren't built to go through those snows that they had at that time. OSBORNE: Right.

OSBORNE: Now, did your father grow up in Alliance or did he come here from someplace else? HUNT: And he was in an independent store there and like all independent stores in those days they were the king pins of the grocery business. Because we didn't have any chain

Bergholz, Ohio.

stores in the area, at the time.

OSBORNE: Now, how did he get started? Did he just start as a young man, or....

HUNT: He started as a young man. He bought a little business down there and actually Dad said he was too young to be in business because he only lasted three years. He was too generous with credit and that led to his downfall.

In 1911 the grocery business was pretty simple in a lot of ways. They did make deliveries. And he told me he made his first delivery in a horse and wagon. But then he had the first Model T delivery truck in the city of Alliance. He bought this old Model T; I have a picture of him in this truck at home. So that was something new in the grocery business to have a delivery truck.

OSBORNE: Now, this was in Alliance?

OSBORNE: And particularly I imagine with the muddy streets at that time.

HUNT: Oh yeah, that's right. In fact he said when they had heavy snows that truck wouldn't cut it. They still had to go in horse and wagon, you know. The trucks just weren't built to go through those snows that they had at that time.

HUNT: It was kind of a neighborhood type store where you OSBORNE: Now, did your father grow up in Alliance or did he come here from someplace else?

HUNT: No, he came here. Actually he spent his youth in Bergholz, Ohio.

OSBORNE: Oh, down in the hills. they were able to buy in

HUNT: His father worked for the railroad and of course at that time Alliance was quite a railroad town and so Grandpa Hunt came up here and Dad came up here, too, and they made their home down on Webb Street. And of course it was natural for Dad to open a grocery store in that area because he knew all of the people down that way.

OSBORNE: Sure.

HUNT: But then he was in that store for about three years he told me, from 1911 to 1914 and the things that I told you led to his downfall then, so he got out of the grocery business. But about 1925 he got back into business for the A & P Tea Company. In one of their small stores.

OSBORNE: Now, this was in Alliance?

HUNT: In Alliance on Arch Street. Now what a lot of people don't know about the A & P; at one time they had nine stores in the city of Alliance.

OSBORNE: Nine stores.

HUNT: It was kind of a neighborhood type store where you have a little store on the corner. At that time they made quite an impact on the grocery business because up until then the independents more or less had their own way in the grocery business. And they charged high prices; made a good mark up on food. Of course the corporate chain came



in and they changed this because they were able to buy in quantities and they had their own labels: they canned their own vegetables and fruits and they bought in quantities as far as fresh meats and fresh vegetables. Of course they began to cut prices. And this really hurt the independent neighborhood type grocery.

OSBORNE: Now, did these stores, the A & P Stores at that time, were they cash, did they sell for cash....

HUNT: Oh no, they were strictly cash.

OSBORNE: No credit.

HUNT: Never did give credit. Never did give delivery.

It was strictly a cash and carry operation. But as I say there were nine A & P's in town at one time. And there were three on Main Street.

OSBORNE: That's just hard to believe.

HUNT: There was one up by the present Mount Union Bank there, a branch on Main Street; at 117. And then there was one down at the corner of Arch and Main where the shoe store is, right diagonal from Midland Buckeye. And there was one down at the lower end of Main Street about where the Superior Wallpaper and Paint store is now. And there were two on Arch Street. One about where the Rastetter Market is now and one up where Jays stands on the corner of Grant and Arch. There was one over on Haines Ave. on the corner of



Haines and Oxford. There was another one on Haines down the corner of Market and Haines. Oh they were just, they were all over town. Over on Liberty at Summit and Liberty. Just a lot of small stores.

OSBORNE: Neighborhood type grocery.

HUNT: Right, right. Now they opened the first supermarket right where the present Mount Union Bank building is now; there was a supermarket. The bank building was on a corner, a small room and then the A & P was right next to it. That was their first self serve one in the city. That wasn't the first self serve market in the city because the old Perskeys Store in Mount Union was the first self serve market but then the A & P opened their self serve store there. I worked there in the summer time when I came home from college.

OSBORNE: Oh, I see.

HUNT: And it was an unique experience then in those days; I worked as a <sup>cashier</sup> chasier because there wasn't anything in the store that was marked as far as price. The price was underneath the item on the shelf. So the customer knew what it was. But when they came up to the check out with it you had to remember the price. And that wasn't easy. I used to take a crayon whenever I had time and some of the hard to remember items I'd put a price on the top till I learned them. Then that was their first self serve market

and then they built a second one down on Main Street in the block where the present Kroger Store is now.

OSBORNE: Oh yes.

HUNT: Then years later they closed that one up and they moved up on Arch Street. You probably remember that, where the Goodwill Store is.

OSBORNE: Yes, right, yes.

HUNT: Yeah, before they went down to the Plaza. So that's a little bit of the history of the A & P's. I'm familiar with that because my dad worked for them for so many years. He ended up at the corner of Liberty and Summit. They had a small store there. And when they closed that store they gave their managers the option to buy. They eventually began closing all these little neighborhood stores.

OSBORNE: Oh yes.

HUNT: So they gave their managers the option to buy all the equipment for like \$100.00.

OSBORNE: By golly.

HUNT: You know they were pretty good to their old managers. They said now we're going to close the store if you want to buy the equipment to start in for yourself. I'll sell it to you for \$100.00. So the A & P closed on Saturday

night and I had two brothers, myself and my dad and a couple of other people, we had a truck load of groceries in there. On Sunday morning we got our shelves stocked and Dad opened up on Monday morning and never lost a day's business. And that's how he started as an independent again.

OSBORNE: Oh yes. Now this would be about what year?

HUNT: This was about 1940. And then he stayed in business there as an independent for about twenty years before he retired. So as I say, I grew up in the grocery business myself because when I was in the first grade Dad had the A & P over on Arch Street. I used to get pretty mad if he didn't save soap on the bottom shelf for me to put up. I'd come over from school. But he said he never wanted me to be a grocery man; he said there was easier ways to make a living. I went to college, ran out of money, came home and then after a stint in the service I did about the only thing I knew to do, which was in food business. My first store was up in Mount Union, right across from the present Shell Station there. There's a little building, it was a barber shop after I moved out.

OSBORNE: Oh yes.

HUNT: But I bought that little business from Mr. Dixon. I was there for five years before I moved out on State Street. But the thing that is happened in the grocery business, as I said there were many good independents in town you know



in the early 20's. A lot of stores; I think at one time there was six stores on Main Street, different independents. I know there were three in Mount Union. I was thinking Mr. Maple had a store up there, Floyd Senn who was later Mayor of the City of Alliance had one. Ted Haupt had one: it was called Quality Market and Mr. Dixon had the store that I bought. But then the chains came in and the involvement of the supermarkets and they just slowly drove the small independents out of business. But then we had a resurgence of independents because they joined associations. We have started cooperatives. I belong to a cooperative now, and there are 175 of us own our own warehouses. We hire the help that run it and if there is any profit made at the end of the year, of course it is returned to us. But we're able to buy groceries just as cheap as the chains. In fact out through the West there are a lot of chains buying from cooperatives such as we have been able to buy.

OSBORNE: Now, your cooperatives were what, what's the name?

HUNT: Associated Grocers.

OSBORNE: Associated.

HUNT: Yeah. We're down at Urichsville, Ohio. And business has just grown on leaps and bounds. We're serving from Urichsville, Ohio, we're going as far east as Pittsburgh, we're going south into W. Virginia, Charleston. We're going



west out of Ashland, Ohio; all from this one warehouse in Urichsville. Well it's the only salvation for the little man really.

OSBORNE: Yes.

HUNT: So there's been a big change. The independents are now coming back. There's a lot of good independent supermarkets and some of the chains are really hurting because they're caught up in the spiral of really high wages and of course with the corporate structure and all that. And all the corporation heads their overhead is just really really hurting them. A & P particularly has closed many, many stores and they are having a heck of a time making a profit. And you know the grocery business operates on about 1½ to 2% net at the end of the year if you do that you feel pretty good about it.

OSBORNE: Yes.

HUNT: So the independents have come back; there is no doubt about that. Of course right in Alliance now we have one independent that's doing more business than any of the chains you know.

OSBORNE: Yes.

HUNT: And we have others that are just right up there, too. There's been the change. You've had the chains come in

and hurt the independents then the independents got wise and got together and now they're coming back again.

OSBORNE: But of course there's another feature in addition to that. And that is the personality and the knowhow of the individual who's running the business. And this is so true, it doesn't matter much what, whether it's a hot dog stand or whether it's a haberdashery or what but this makes a big difference. And you can have an independent who starts out and it just doesn't go. You've done a flourishing business; at least to my way of thinking you do a very fine business. And it's personality of the individual and a certain know-how that goes with it: and this makes a success.

HUNT: Well I think this is true. And I think this is one thing that has hurt the chains too. They have had a very impersonal and cold attitude and I think you will find this in most chain stores. But where you have an individual where this is his livelihood, he's not just drawing a pay check, he has to keep that business going, well he's got to go all out. He's going to have his people going all out to create a friendly atmosphere and try to give that extra service that you don't get in the chain store.

OSBORNE: Well, I appreciate that. I stop in your business often and if I don't see you it's your wife or at like it's almost public service. You have a lot of these

least one of the clerks that I know. And you appreciate this. Everything is a number and it is so impersonal in so many other places today and you appreciate this bit of warmth. It makes a difference.

HUNT: That's right. Well and another thing too, you know, you go into a chain store and for some reason people hesitate to ask for special favors where they will come into an independent and they'll say, "look Ralph I'm having a special party and I need a special cut of meat this week end." And you know they know that we are going to do our best to take care of them: that's the big difference. Of course I'm probably one of the few stores left that deliver in the city of Alliance. I think maybe there is one other one now. And also give credit: you know we have a lot of monthly accounts which to me is good business because of - we try to be very selective when we give credit, too. But once you've got a customer buying on credit and get that pattern established, you feel that you get a big part of their business. And carrying the accounts from month to month is not that much of a burden if you know you're going to get your money, you know, at the end of the month...

OSBORNE: Yes.

HUNT: It's a good steady business. Delivery business does cost a lot of money. But on the other hand sometimes you feel like it's almost public service. You have a lot of these



old people that can't get out. And once they get older sometimes they get to be a little bit of a problem. On the other hand you feel like you're doing something for them.

OSBORNE: Right, so what you're saying is, part of your business at least is done by telephone.

HUNT: A lot of it.

OSBORNE: People don't even come to the store.

HUNT: A lot of it is done by phone. Like on week-ends, maybe like on Fridays and Saturdays we'll put out, oh fifty or sixty orders each day you know just on deliveries. And it is a good steady business. It keeps my help busy all of the time: if they are not out front waiting on trade they're back there working orders. So I really get a lot of milage out of them. They don't stand around.

OSBORNE: What would you say, the orders by telephone. Do you think this has remained steady, has this increased, say thirty years ago?

HUNT: Well, let's see. Let me think a little bit about that. I would say probably we're doing a little bit more business by telephone than we were like twenty years ago. But the big change I've noticed in my business the last few years, we have an awful lot of strange faces in that store that we never saw before. Where as a few years ago, like



ten years ago it was more or less all pretty much the regular clientele. We don't have that any more. We have people coming up from Sebring and Beloit and even Minerva and Louisville, and I think mainly because most of the supermarkets have packaged meat any more. In fact I didn't really realize this until I went down and saw one of my friends down at one of the chain stores a few months ago. But everything they get anymore comes in pre cut. Where you used to get a side of beef and process it right there in the store. This is all done at the warehouse now and in comes their steaks are cut and even their ground beef is ground and put into packages and all they do is open it up and regrind it one time you know. And it is just a complete change in grocery business. Even their hams are cut. You know you think a butcher can cut a ham but even their hams are cut. And their ham slices. Everything is pre cut in the chains anyway. The reason for this of course is to cut down on their overhead. They can have one guy doing this at warehouse level, cutting the same thing day after day after day, and now a big supermarket now only has to have a couple of butchers because all they have to do is get it out and put it in the case and package it. So that's been a big change in my business. I have had so many people that we never saw before coming and buying meat. The meat business has been good.

OSBORNE: I suppose.

HUNT: Just tremendous.

OSBORNE: Now when you started out did you do meat: it was a combination grocery and meat?

HUNT: Right.

OSBORNE: Of course in early years this was a distinction; there were just grocery stores and just meat markets.

HUNT: That's right.

OSBORNE: But now you've had a combination.

HUNT: Right. Well of course you had to, it just seemed like people wanted the one stop shopping. They didn't like to go one place for groceries and one place for meat.

And the meat market as a meat market just gradually disappeared. And I can remember when there was two real good meat markets on Main St. Just selling meat alone. When

they can go to one place and get everything you know that's what the people want today. You know we were talking about profit in the grocery business. That's been another big

change in the business. The involvement with the supermarket with all the different departments. The tendency

has been the present grocery stores or the present markets today to give the dry groceries away; you make a very nominal profit on those and make your profit in your special departments like the big supermarkets have. The deli departments they have.

OSBORNE: Yes. If you can just have a couple outstanding

HUNT: And of course what people pay for that stuff is amazing but where you have the wife that is working at the second job they want something quick. And many times you know a lot of the younger people don't really know how to cook any more. So they make their money in their deli departments; they make it in their meat departments. They make it particularly in their produce departments and they have the drug racks; even they process film you know. So they can give the groceries away as long as they can pick up that extra. After all they have that big overhead they have to make it somewhere you know.

OSBORNE: Now, you do just a bit with the delicatessen. Not the main spot there. I can remember when I first started working for Dad. I was in high school really. HUNT: No, I don't have the room really, you know. Everything had to be weighed in those days you know. Sugar

OSBORNE: But you do with the bakery. We in and you weighed it up. We even weighed up bulk butter and you weighed up HUNT: Yeah, right. large and you weighed up beans. There were very few things

OSBORNE: You have a very fine bakery department. Now you added that when? days a week weighing things up. And things were so simple: you had like six or eight kinds of cereal HUNT: Well I put that in about ten years ago. Just built compared with fifty, no there must be a hundred different on a little addition so I could put that bakery in. kinds now. If you wanted to carry them all you know. And

OSBORNE: Yes. be one or two brands of coffee. There weren't any cake mixes in those days as we know them now. Of course



HUNT: You know if you can just have a couple outstanding things and they do; like they make an outstanding pie.

OSBORNE: Oh they do.

HUNT: Well we have them coming in just for those. But once you get them coming in the store you'll sell them something else.

OSBORNE: Sure.

HUNT: We've done a real good job in that little bakery thing too.

OSBORNE: Yes, that is. That is a very fine feature.

HUNT: It's helped a lot. You know another thing you were talking about-changes in business. I can remember when I first started working for Dad. I was in high school really. Everything had to be weighed in those days you know. Sugar came in you weighed it up; coffee came in and you weighed it up. We even weighed up bulk butter and you weighed up lard and you weighed up beans. There were very few things that came in packages. You had bulk tea. You just spent like a couple of days a week weighing things up. And things were so simple: you had like six or eight kinds of cereal compared with fifty, no there must be a hundred different kinds now. If you wanted to carry them all you know. And you'd have maybe one or two brands of coffee. There weren't any cake mixes in those days as we know them now. Of course



frozen food didn't really come on the market till the thirties. That started with a few vegetables. You know what the frozen food business is today. I mean you can get everything, a complete meal if you want it. Not the greatest but it is there.

OSBORNE: It's convenient. hat Ralph?

HUNT: So the items, every year, the items just keep increasing, increasing and increasing. You know that's always a problem to try and find space for them. But one thing I know the warehouses have done anymore; they do everything by computer. And if they don't sell so many cases of an item in a month, they just discontinue carrying it. And sometimes people will come in and they'll say, "Gee, where's this old favorite of mine?" "Well, I'm sorry but you're one of the few people that bought it so they're not selling it anymore." And they find this hard to believe.

OSBORNE: Now, was the name Billocrest Market when you first  
OSBORNE: I'm sure.

HUNT: It has to be that way, you know, with so many new items you just can't keep putting more and more in the warehouse or the store.

OSBORNE: I mean from the time you started. You called it  
OSBORNE: You pay for an inventory.

HUNT: Oh definitely. You've got to keep it moving.

OSBORNE: That's right. feature I wanted to discuss with

HUNT: Well that's been another big change. The number of items in the business. It's just unbelievable, you know, what they have come out with in the last few years.

OSBORNE: Well now you said you had a little store in Mount Union and then you moved out on State Street. About what time, what year was that Ralph?

HUNT: Oh I actually started in business for myself in 1948 and I stayed there five years in that old building in Mount Union. And it was an old building but we did business in that old building. And then I went out in 1953; I went out to Hillcrest, and bought that market from an old gentleman by the name of Joe Fratoni. And we put an addition on it right away when we bought it. And that was in 1953 so, gosh, I've been out there this will have been 23 years. It don't seem possible.

OSBORNE: Now, was the name Hillcrest Market when you first went out there?

HUNT: No, I just named it that. I called it Hillcrest Market.

OSBORNE: I mean from the time you started. You called it Hillcrest Market?

HUNT: Oh yes, yes, right, right.

OSBORNE: Now one other feature I wanted to discuss with

you or talk about, you know years ago a farmer used to think he had to have a large family in order to get everything done on the farm: at least this was a help. Mechanization now helps you. You don't have to have quite the number of hired men. I don't know how familiar you are but I come from farther south in farm country. I can remember when a prosperous farmer had two or three hired men and if he had a large family so much the better. Now members of your family have helped: it's been a family enterprise in a way too hasn't it?

HUNT: Right. That's right. I think that's been real good for my kids in many ways. That's one thing I've said has been a plus being in business. They've all helped from the time they were in high school. It's been good experience for them meeting the public and another thing it's been good for them income-wise. They have always had some money. And when they got ready to go to college they could help a little bit with their education. Of course, they all went to college. Plus the fact, I think it developed them so many ways, their personality, and being able to get out and meet the public. And of course it's helped me because I knew I had somebody there that was interested; it was their livelihood as well as mine.

OSBORNE: Sure.

HUNT: And even now, even after the kids are married, why



they zip out there and if we're busy why they dig right in.

OSBORNE: Why I know, I've seen that. No surprise, there's Nancy behind the counter helping out.

HUNT: That's right. In fact she came out before New Year's and, of course, we were overwhelmed with customers. She dug right in and I said, "You'll learn not to come out before a holiday." But she enjoys it. They still like the business. So that part's been real good.

OSBORNE: Well now as you look ahead. Do you think there's going to be a third generation Hunt continue on this?

HUNT: Not really. I never, of course I'm like my dad. I never really encouraged them to take part in the business as far as a career. Right now I have a young fellow in with me on a ten year program that's going to take the business over in ten years. And the rest of my family is pretty well set as far as their careers. So really I think the Hunts are going to get out of the grocery business finally.

OSBORNE: Finally decided to take your fathers advice on that.

HUNT: Yeah. Finally. Well I'll tell you, it's really a dog eat dog job. Of course I go to work at 7:00 in the morning and quit at 6:00 at night. I do take a day off a week, which is like today. It's not only the work you put

in at the store, you put in a lot of hours at home too. We do our own book work and all of our own payroll. And of course I could hire it done.

OSBORNE: Then you add to the overhead on that.

HUNT: That's right. I had training in accounting in college so I mean it's not hard for me to do, it's just time consuming.

OSBORNE: It's time consuming.

HUNT: And if you go out in the evening you know you come home at midnight, if you're out why then you have your money to balance up before you go to bed. It's always there you know. It's very time consuming but on the other hand it's been a very enjoyable experience. I've had a lot of young people, in fact I usually hire Mount Union College people on many cases to work for me.

OSBORNE: Right.

HUNT: I watched those kids grow up. We have a couple of lawyers that worked for me and one girl is going to be a doctor. You know it's been real interesting to watch them too.

OSBORNE: Several times you've, when I've talked with you you've mentioned some of the amusing anecdotes. I remember one it was around Christmas time when a woman early in the

morning aroused you out of bed: forgot to get her turkey and all. Do you want to reminisce a bit about some of those aspects of the business Ralph.

HUNT: You know I've just thought about some of the humorous things but I really can't think of too many things.

That was probably, it was humorous but it wasn't humorous to the lady.

OSBORNE: Yes, that's right.

HUNT: At that particular time I was more shocked than anything else.

OSBORNE: Do you want to recount that, so we can have it for the record.

HUNT: Well you know when you're a father and you have a family why at Christmas Eve you stay up like at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning putting toys together and getting things together you know. We got to bed about 4:00 and at 5:30 the phone rang and this was a gal, well she's remotely related to me; never been in my store. 5:30 she said, "Ralph, I wonder if you'd go out and get me some heavy duty aluminum foil, my husband will meet you out there. I'm ready to cook my turkey and I don't have any foil." And after an hour and a half of sleep I couldn't believe what I was hearing. You know, like I said, "Sure I'll go out." And by the time I got out there I was awake enough. I wasn't in too



good a humor about it. It was funny in a sense. You know when she called. Oh we have had some things that have been amusing different times in the store. Some of the people, it's amusing, but still it makes you mad you know...

OSBORNE: It's a customer reaction.

HUNT: They'll bring back an article to the store and they'll say I bought this here and it's not any good. You look at the stamp on it and it's from some other market. You run into this every once in a while. And then you get some of these old people that get so confused about; they'll call up and they'll say, "Well I haven't gotten my order today." And I'll say, "Well just a minute and we'll check through here." And we'll check and they never called one in. They just think, well, I called that order in but they never did. We run into things like that. Some of the old people are amusing, it's pathetic in a sense, but some of the things they do. And then they'll have their favorite people. They won't give their order to anyone but this certain person. They'll call up and they will ask for one of the girls and if they are busy, "Oh, I'll wait." And of course if they are not working that day, "Well, I'll call tomorrow." They want that personal touch you know. But I'll tell you over the years we've had some wonderful people dealing with us. And on occasion one will give you a little problem you don't really think that much about it

because there's been so many nice people. It's been rewarding that way too. We've made a lot of friends over the years in business.

OSBORNE: I'm sure. What about return of merchandise. Any incidents you can remember about that, that would be, I suppose, aggravating at the time but humorous as you look back on it?

HUNT: Well I don't think there's a Thanksgiving goes by - this is the first year at Thanksgiving and the first year at Christmas that I haven't had a call from somebody and they say, "Ralph, what am I going to do, my turkey is spoiled?" So I usually say, "Well, why don't you bring it out to the store and we'll check it over." And the way they package turkeys today, they cryovac them in a cryovac package, and sometimes some of the blood is in that package. And it will develop a little bit of an odor you know. And they will open that up and it just hits them and they'll say, "Oh my turkey is spoiled." So what we do we take it out, we wash it off and then we'll say, "Now you check it out." But it is disturbing. Christmas morning or Thanksgiving and you get that call and then you go out there and of course there is nothing the matter you know. I've had people you know say, "Well I don't feel firght about it." I'll say, "Well gee, I don't know what else to do, I don't have another one to give you, unless you want me to give you a frozen

one and you can thaw it out and have your dinner later in the day." But this has happened but sometimes they won't accept it. That's been kind of an aggravating thing at times. People are funny and, of course, I always say to them, "Look if you don't feel right about it, it's your holiday dinner, don't use it." But these things happen but this year was a perfect year, it didn't happen.

OSBORNE: Fine. That's fine. Of course we don't have shortages now as we had earlier times. You went through the coupon, the ration bit and then I imagine when you started up right after the war there, there were times when you couldn't get certain items, what they call stoop merchandise this sort of thing. Did you have any experience with that, that you can recall when it was difficult?

HUNT: Well of course I was in the service myself but before I went - I didn't go till 1944 - so the war actually started in late 41 you know. So 42 and 43 those shortages started to develop. But I can remember, Dad would get in a shipment of soap - that was one of the critical items you know - and he would just put it in the back room; he wouldn't put it on the shelf. And anything that was short you just put in the back room and if your customers came in, you know you took care of them.

OSBORNE: Yes.

HUNT: But you know if you wanted it, you went and got it.



HUNT: And of course he always had the strangers running around all over town....

OSBORNE: Oh yes.

HUNT: For this stuff you know. Of course they weren't going to get it in a regular independent store. Heck, if there was 25 cases in the back they wouldn't get it. But this was a problem and meat really got to be a problem. I think you can remember how meat was. We had this one little packaging house outside of town here that was breaking all of the laws as far as rationing goes and what they were allowed to kill and they were just - and they were doing a land office business. It was really about the only place you could get any meat. And I know my dad would go out there about 4:00 in the morning and stand in line and they, you know, you would just take anything they would give you, and you pay any price they ask. Because you had to have a little meat for your customers. And they really kept this town going as far as meat goes. And by his own admission; the gentleman that ran that place, I don't know if I should call him gentleman or not because he was a law-breaker; but he made a quarter of a million dollars in that little packing house one year selling black market meat.

OSBORNE: Boy.

HUNT: But you know if you wanted it, you went and got it.

OSBORNE: Yes.

HUNT: And I suppose you were maybe as guilty as they were by buying it but on the other hand here is your customers coming in, so you feel like well, I'll try to take care of them. And that was one of the most critical things; that meat situation. And right at the time the war started Dad was buying from a wholesaler from over in Canton, Ohio. Couple of good Jewish fellows; Bloom and Kline.

OSBORNE: Oh yes.

HUNT: And they were nice Jewish people. And you know they were smart. And they said to Dad, "Look, put everything you can in the basement, in the way of canned vegetables and canned fruits. We'll send a couple of truck loads over. Don't worry about paying for it. When you get the money you'll pay for it, but you'll be glad you have it." So they filled up Dad's basement over at that little store at the corner of Liberty and Summit. And Dad had things long, long, long after a lot of these other stores.

OSBORNE: Yeah.

HUNT: And what happened too, you know like an item a can of beans that was a critical item for example; was baked beans. A can of beans that was sold for 10¢ went up as high as a quarter you know so you more than doubled your money on that kind of merchandise. Plus the fact that you had it

for the trade. There was a lot of money to be made in the grocery business at that time if you were smart enough to buy ahead and had a place to put it. And then of course the same thing developed a little bit later during the Korean War to a limited extent. Not as much as World War II but...

OSBORNE: Some shortages.

HUNT: Yeah. Because I was living up on Shunk at the time and I had the little store at Mount Union and I put, I like filled my basement up with canned goods. And there were some opportunities to make some money and still at the same time have merchandise which other people didn't have. You weren't taking advantage of your customer, you were just taking advantage of the market.

OSBORNE: Yes.

HUNT: And it was a good opportunity. But you know you talk about shortages and not being able to get things. Right now a lot of people don't realize it but the supply of certain kinds of meat are very difficult right now. We used to have a couple of good local packers here, we don't have them anymore. Fairmount Provision went out of business. So we depend on everything from Canton, usually like Superior or Sugardale which are the two big ones over there. Of course there are some other ones come in here but they mainly do the big part of the business in this area now. So you place



an order with them for example for maybe 50 pork loins. Sometimes you'll get 20, sometimes you'll get 30, sometimes you won't get any. And then you have to shuffle and try to see where you can find some you know: it's been real difficult the last year, it really has. Just for example I did get one pork loin yesterday. I didn't have any pork chops in my store all day. So then I'm on the telephone, when am I going to get them, are you going to send me any. It's just been like that for about the last year. It seems like continually they mark things out. And the supply of pork particularly has been very very tight. That's the reason the prices have been so high. And so we still run into some shortages. And the same way with the dry groceries, it's amazing that certain items will be out for a period of a month or so before, they can't seem to keep up with production in some areas. I don't know why it is, whether the demand is so great anymore or what the problem is. But the whole concept there of supply has changed too because where you had many, many, many companies in the dry grocery business; they keep getting swallowed up by the big ones. Proctor and Gamble has just taken over so many things. Borden Company is a big big name in the food business any more. If you check the labels on your cans any more you would be surprised how many items come from maybe three or four different sources.

OSBORNE: Just the large.

HUNT: Right. They keep swallowing up the small companies. And you know another thing they do, the grocers get a little upset about this. They'll put these new products on the market. It might be a product you don't really want to put in your store at all. But they plug that on television out for months ahead of time and they create demand before they even come in to sell you. They'll test market it in an area you know and by the time they come in to sell you that product you've had people in there asking for it. And you've got to put it in whether you want to or not. So that's the way this thing works any more. And then the giants in the business have just created that demand.

OSBORNE: One other aspect along that line a little differently. I notice the Small Business Administration's business men in that have been plaguing the Ford Administration to give a little favorite treatment or at least lighten the load for the small businessman - that the restrictions and government forms and all, that by the time you fill those out and take care of all of that you don't have time to do business. Now what is your reaction or how do you, or do you want to say?

HUNT: Well of course you know it gets more difficult every-year as far as forms. Originally we had our government withholding and our Social Security; federal old age benefit to fill out. And then of course they added state unemploy-

ment and then they added state income tax and now we have a federal unemployment form to fill out. And then of course now we have the city tax which we didn't have a few years ago. Where we used to fill out a couple of forms at the end of the year and now we've got a half a dozen to fill out. According to law now you're supposed to keep a record of any injuries in your store and what cause of it and treatment and so on. This is another thing that's supposed to be a part of your permanent records. And year by year by year, this is the truth they just keep adding on. And another thing that has really plagued the grocers and the food business has been inspection by Federal Department of Agriculture, State Department of Health. Which I'm not saying is not good but I think some of the things they are so picky about that are just little things that they just continually harass anybody in the food business any more. I know my competitor up there built a brand new big market and they went in there just picking the thing apart you know. And things like this. And you think a brand new store, everything should be in pretty good shape. And of course that's what closed up our one packer here in town; Fairmount Provision. The funny part about it was, his product had the lowest bacterial count in the state of Ohio. But they closed him up because it was an old building and they wanted to make repairs and things to the tune of half a million dollars which he could just simply not afford to do and he just gave up you know. And I think sometimes inspection is just a little



bit too rigid and maybe just a little too unreasonable. This is the one thing that bothers me more than anything. The government forms, sure, you get more of them all the time but you can fill them out. They don't really harass me that much. But some of these things in inspection are just almost unreasonable any more. And the thing about it is those people have the authority you know, when they come in your store whether they know as much about the business or not as they should by golly they can make it rough for you.

OSBORNE: Yeah, yeah. This is true. Well it's been I suppose as you look back a tremendous change when you started working for your father and where you are today if you look back over those years.

HUNT: I'll tell you there's going to be a lot bigger change in the future too. I think there will always be room for a good small independent. I feel that way: in fact if I didn't feel that way I wouldn't be training this young fellow I have now to take my store over because that wouldn't be fair to him. And I really feel that there will always be a place for a small good independent grocer. There is going to be a tremendous change in the business. You're going to see electronic cash registers where you just pass the item under what they call an electric scanner and everything will be recorded on the register. You won't have the key punching, you won't be punching the registers anymore. And the ordering is already being done that way. Product codes are placed

on the shelves and they go through with an electric scanner and this is recorded on a tape. This is put right in, the equipment transfers the message right to the warehouse and there'll be some tremendous changes. And particularly at warehouse level. There will be more things all the time that are going to be done at warehouse level. They'll come into the store and there will be less preparation as far as selling to the consumer. And, of course, this is the answer if you cut the overhead. So I think there'll be a lot of big changes in the business. In one sense I would hate to see the metric system come in and it's going to come you know. This is one thing that's always bugged me, if I can get out of it before that comes in. But it's coming, we know that. And it's going to make a difference in all of your recipes, you're going to have to change the whole concept, you know. How you sell things.

OSBORNE: I remember back, oh, when I was a boy a couple there, Pop and Mom Motter who ran a store and Pop always had a cigar in his mouth. And when you went in to buy cheese there was a big wheel on the table with a piece of cheese cloth over it. But he had a big knife and he didn't object to wiping it on his cordoroy trousers and cutting a slice like that you know. I suppose those days are gone forever.

HUNT: That's right this....

OSBORNE: I suppose the overhead would be too great to go

back to this type of merchandising. And you probably feel this too, it's just a reaction to being a number and having everything just so automated. You'd like to go back to a little more simplicity but whether you can ever do that in the grocery business again. you know. It would have to be a

novelty type operation.

HUNT: Well, let's put it this way; any market like that would be a novelty and it would be a type of place they would go in maybe for a couple or three items. But not to do their total shopping you know.

OSBORNE: Not a volume of business. you know. I don't think

OSBORNE: Not a volume of business. you know.

HUNT: Yeah. It would be the type of thing that would be a novel operation. I guess they had an old fashion meat market like that up around, I think it's in the Hudson area somebody told me about. But I haven't been up to see it, but the butchers are just like the old fashioned butchers, they have their regular meat cases. I guess it's kind of an old type operation but the prices they tell me are just unbelievable. They started really about the time the supermarket started where they put in these additional items to try to make it more of a one stop shopping operation. And of course also to make more profit. The more items you get in there.

OSBORNE: Oh yeah, they would have to be yes. when you have

HUNT: They wouldn't necessarily have to be but I think these department stores, housewares, softgoods, hosiery, towels people maybe are taking advantage of the novelty of the thing. that type of thing you know. Anything to make a dollar. And making a higher mark up. I've got to go up sometime. That's the idea. You know if the overhead's there you gotta

One of my customers said, "Oh, they had one of the most beautiful rib roasts up there, Ralph." And they said, "We check-gotta pick it up somewhere else."



ed the price on it and it was three dollars and something a pound." I think we were selling rib roast for about \$1.89 at the time. They said, "It was beautiful." But you know the funny part was some of those people are just buying that stuff like it was regular you know. It would have to be a novelty type operation.

OSBORNE: You'd pay for nostalgia at that price.

HUNT: Oh yeah. I can see where it would be kind of fun to have that kind of an operation you know. But I don't think it would ever be a volume type thing you know.

OSBORNE: Well now in addition to groceries you have other lines. I can buy mouthwash and shaving lotion and gloves, and other items like this. When did this start coming in? The non-grocery type product.

HUNT: They started really about the time the supermarket started where they put in these additional items to try to make it more of a one stop shopping operation. And of course also to make more profit. The more items you get in there. Like I say, you give the dry groceries away then you have to make the profit somewhere. And then that's where the drug department started: housewares, softgoods, hosiery, towels that type of thing you know. Anything to make a dollar. That's the idea. You know if the overhead's there you gotta make it somewhere. If you don't make it on one thing you gotta pick it up somewhere else.

OSBORNE: What's your temptation at this point: I'm sure you've thought of it. To buy to the left or right of you and put on an additional wing, and then you can put in more areas like this.

HUNT: Well I'll tell you. At my age the temptation is gone.

I should have made the move twenty years ago. When I went out there: I'm a very cautious person. I've never gone in over my head. I always just did what I felt I could handle.

I should have built a bigger market when I went out there probably. On the other hand when you get into a bigger type operation, then you have to deal with labor union.

HUNT: Because now we have four lanes and they're filled up.

OSBORNE: Yes. Is and out of the parking lot.

HUNT: And you have headaches too you know. Maybe you don't work as hard, you do more supervision, you hire people to do more of the work. That part's good. I have the land here, I do have that property next to me there. I bought it because I thought maybe someday I would do something with it. When I started the business I had practically no capital. And everything I made and raising a family you know of five and trying to educate them. So I never had a lot of money to, for expansion, and I never felt like I wanted to go too far out on a limb. This has been a good rewarding business you know. But as I say if I would have made the move twenty years ago that was when to do it but now I got about ten years to go and what the heck. If this young fellow that's

HUNT: Right. Well most business is our big business. And there's not too many places where you can go in anymore

in there wants to do it someday that's up to him. In fact we've talked about it and I've given him some ideas. And he may do it. I think he can do it. I think it's a tremendous location there.

OSBORNE: Oh that is.

HUNT: State Street anymore is just unbelievable, the traffic. You wonder how in the world you got along with two lanes of traffic through there you know.

OSBORNE: Right.

HUNT: Because now we have four lanes and they're filled up. It's hard to get in and out of the parking lot.

OSBORNE: It is.

HUNT: So the grocery's have just been something else. And the opportunity is there if somebody wants to explore it.

OSBORNE: What do you feel, talking about that end of town. Do you feel your trade is a carriage trade, does it come pretty much from this area? You mentioned people coming from other places for meat maybe because it wasn't packaged.

HUNT: Right. Well meat business is our big business.

OSBORNE: Yes.

HUNT: Yost as you know, that's really our big business. And there's not too many places where you can go in anymore



and get that meat cut right as you want it.

OSBORNE: Right.

HUNT: And that's the reason we're attracting people from all over now anymore. It's not like it used to be, where we had a more or less a localized group of people dealing with us. We just have them coming from all over the city of Alliance and so many people from Sebring and Beloit.

And the way we know, most people pay by check anymore. And you'd just be amazed how many people come there, and it's

just meat alone, I know that. Well I probably shouldn't say this but I have a gal that buy all her meat from me and she said, "Do you know my father-in-law is with a chain store here in Alliance, here. We used to go down there and buy some meat because we felt that we had to." But she

said, "Since they've been bringing this meat in from warehouses, you know already cut, we just can't stand it." So

this is the one salvation I think the small independent has right now. They can have a specialized, a specially good meat department. I think there will always be room for them.

OSBORNE: How did you get your knowledge of meat?

HUNT: I just learned it by doing it. Of course I knew alot about the grocery business and when I bought this store from Mr. Dixon up in Mount Union I went in there and he had a very

OSBORNE: Yes. No, this is...

good meat business and I had very little exposure to the meat business before I went up there. And believe me I had to ask a lot of questions. He stayed with me for about a week. And then I used to buy a lot of meat from Liber's when they were in business out there. I bought all my beef from them. I would call up John and say, "Look John, I got a question." And believe me those first few years when I was learning it I learned it myself. But that's a good way to learn it because you never forget it you know.

OSBORNE: That's right.

HUNT: That's the way I learned it. I didn't go to school or anything. They didn't have any schools for meat cutting. I never saw a graduate from one of those yet that could go right into a meat market and start to do the job because they could only teach you so much.

OSBORNE: Right.

HUNT: But you know it's, there's been a big change there because you used to do all your cutting by hand with a hand saw. And of course now we have a power saw and everything and production in that anymore too. But we still have people that come in and they want those special cuts you know. And they don't have to press a buzzer and wait fifteen or twenty minutes to get it.

OSBORNE: Yes. No, this is....

HUNT: That's part of salvation. really like the business.

You know if you're doing means an awful lot.  
OSBORNE: That's right.

OSBORNE: There's a difference too.

HUNT: We know it.

HUNT: I've been here for two and a half years and I  
OSBORNE: And I think I mentioned at the start there, I  
think it's the personality of the owners and of the help  
that you have. I think this makes a big difference too. And  
this is always accomodating and a smile and you're cooperative  
and this makes a big difference Ralph.

OSBORNE: That's why speaking personally we're glad you  
HUNT: I'm sure of that. That's what we try to tell our  
people. In fact I keep telling them that all the time. And  
I have always had good people working for me.

tell me that it's been rewarding that way too.  
OSBORNE: I think so.

OSBORNE: Yeah. Well I appreciate very much talking with  
HUNT: Yeah, we try, it's kind of a thing where it builds  
you know, you get two or three people that are nice and pleas-  
ant why it just rubs on to everybody else.

HUNT: Okay, fine.  
OSBORNE: Yes.

HUNT: It's an additive. We have a lot of wonderful cus-  
tomers. I wouldn't trade them for anybody in town. We  
don't have those people who come in and harass you. We  
have a nice type of people. Well I think if you treat people  
nice that's the kind of people you'll get.

OSBORNE: Right. And if you had to go back and live over  
again you'd apt for this again with all the headaches and all.



HUNT: Well I probably would. I really like the business. You know if you like what you're doing means an awful lot.

OSBORNE: This makes a difference too.

HUNT: I went to college for two and a half years and I really thought I was going to come out being an accountant someday. But I ran out of money, came home and I got in the only thing I knew, you know. So it's worked out well you know. I have no regrets about it at all.

OSBORNE: Well I know speaking personally we're glad you operate out there on State Street, Ralph.

HUNT: Well thank you very much. I have a lot of people tell me that. It's been rewarding that way too.

OSBORNE: Good. Well I appreciate very much talking with you and getting this down on tape and we'll check back with you on it then.

HUNT: Okay, fine.

|                                  |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| A & P TEA COMPANY.....           | Hunt 3           |
| ASSOCIATED GROCERS.....          | Hunt 8           |
| BARBERSHOP IN MOUNT UNION.....   | Hunt 7           |
| BERGHOLZ, OHIO.....              | Hunt 2           |
| BLOOM AND KLINE WHOLESALERS..... | Hunt 27          |
| DIXON, MR.....                   | Hunt 8, Hunt 38  |
| FAIRMOUNT PROVISION.....         | Hunt 28, Hunt 31 |
| FRATONI, JOE.....                | Hunt 18          |
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| HAUPT, TED.....                  | Hunt 8           |
| HILLCREST.....                   | Hunt 18          |
| HILLCREST MARKET.....            | Hunt 18          |
| HUNT, GRANDPA.....               | Hunt 3           |
| HUNT, NANCY.....                 | Hunt 20          |
| JAY'S.....                       | Hunt 4           |
| KROGER STORE.....                | Hunt 6           |
| LIBER'S.....                     | Hunt 39          |
| MAPLE, MR.....                   | Hunt 8           |
| MEAT MARKETS.....                | Hunt 14          |
| MIDLAND BUCKEYE.....             | Hunt 4           |
| MODEL T DELIVERY TRUCK.....      | Hunt 2           |
| MOTTER, MOM AND POP.....         | Hunt 33          |
| MOUNT UNION BANK.....            | Hunt 4           |
| PATTERSON AND WEBB GROCERY.....  | Hunt 1           |
| PERSKEY'S GROCERY.....           | Hunt 5           |
| QUALITY MARKET.....              | Hunt 8           |
| RASTETTER MARKER.....            | Hunt 4           |
| RATIONING COUPONS.....           | Hunt 25          |
| SENN, FLOYD.....                 | Hunt 8           |
| SHELL OIL STATION.....           | Hunt 7           |
| SUGARDALE FOODS.....             | Hunt 28          |
| SUPERIOR FOODS.....              | Hunt 28          |
| SUPERIOR WALLPAPER STORE.....    | Hunt 4           |