

REMINISCENCES

OF

CLARENCE STEFFY

Steffy, Clarence D.

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Interview by
Richard L. Elliott
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Stark and Portage Counties. And I was born in a house on the north side of the road which put me in Randolph Township, Portage County. But of course our mailing address

This is Information Seventy a weekly public affairs presentation of WFAH radio. Information Seventy with topics ranging from discussion of community improvement programs

and community problems to a look at the programs of area groups and organizations, a discussion of interesting topics with area people. And now today's Information Seventy.

ELLIOTT: Then you moved into the Canton area as a boy. ELLIOTT: This is Dick Elliott for Information Seventy and our guest today is Clarence Steffy editor of the Alliance

Review. And Clarence has celebrated fifty years in the newspaper business May 29, 1975 and that's a long time to be in anything, any kind of a business. Of course Clarence

you're known by many people of the community and active in so many areas; in government, in your church, in the library, and just all facets of community service. We thought we'd get you in here today to chat a little bit about that fifty years in the newspaper business. Of course being in that business so long disseminating news and information about the community of Alliance you know a lot about the history of the city and we might even get into that area, too.

First of all let's find out a little bit about yourself.

Where did you grow up?

STEFFY: I was born Dick, up near Congress Lake. As a matter of fact about two and a half miles west of New Baltimore: that road happens to be the road that divides

Stark and Portage Counties. And I was born in a house on the north side of the road which put me in Randolph Township, Portage County. But of course our mailing address was Hartville, so Hartville would be my birthplace.

ELLIOTT: Then you moved into the Canton area as a boy.

STEFFY: Yes, the family moved when I was only six years old. I started to school in a one room building. The Brumbaugh School which happened to bear the name of my mother's family. Then we went to Canton and subsequently spent a little time in Akron and Ravenna. But most of my early days were spent in Canton.

ELLIOTT: When did you decide that journalism and newspaper reporting would be your avocation?

STEFFY: Well the inspiration came from an eighth grade teacher named Alice Green at Gibbs School in Canton. The Canton Daily News Which was the other newspaper in Canton at that time was running at that particular time in my life a contest in essay writing. And Miss Green inspired me to get into it and I won some prizes. And from there on she kept patting me on the shoulder and directing me that way. Then I went to Lehman High School which was then a junior high school for my freshman year and won some more awards and just gradually I began to think of journalism. And I also had a start in the printing industry which is allied with newspapering and the combination of the two plus the fact that when I was a senior at Canton McKinley I was editor

of the monthly magazine. Things just seemed to naturally flow in that direction. So I wound up a newspaper man.

ELLIOTT: What was your first job in the newspaper, where was it at, in Canton?

STEFFY: At the Canton Daily News. It was May 27, 1925 to be specific that I ventured to the Canton Daily News to meet with Herb Minor who was the managing editor and a man I didn't know. I told him that I wanted to learn the business. He said, "well just today the business manager told me that I could put on a young fellow this summer in the editorial department." And I got the job and started on May 29, 1925. And never since have I earned my livelihood in any other way.

ELLIOTT: Of course the Alliance Review would be classified as a small newspaper. I don't know that the Canton Daily News would be a small, probably a medium size newspaper right? Do you have any reasons for staying with the small newspaper? Or did you ever have thoughts of working with the New York Times or something like that?

STEFFY: Strangly enough Dick, I never had thoughts of working for the New York Times or the metropolitan papers. As a matter of fact I had a couple of opportunities to move to larger papers and I often repeat this story. I had one specific offer and I went to Mr. Siddall who was general manager of the Review at the time and told him about it. And he was a very understanding person. And he said to me,

"well you have to make up your mind whether you want to be a big frog in a small puddle or a little frog in a big puddle." And my mind was made up. I stayed with the Review. And I'm very grateful for that decision.

ELLIOTT: What would be your philosophy as far as the newspaper business is concerned?

STEFFY: Do you mean the size of papers?

ELLIOTT: Oh just general philosophy of the newspaper's place in society.

STEFFY: Well the newspaper had a specific place in society since the founding of this country. And the provision in the Bill of Rights for the freedom of the press means what it says. And the American people have benefited as a result as might be compared with a situation in many countries around the world. But of course the place of the newspaper in any community, this size or any other size, has changed over the years. These things happen with progress. And there have been so many marks of progress in the production of the newspaper that the newspapers have gone right along with the general improvement and conditions and situations. Of course I believe in newspapers perhaps more now than I did when I started because I think I have a better understanding of their place. I do have very specific opinions as to the place of so called small papers and so called large papers. I do not think that the large papers are able to serve the community like a small paper can be-

cause we live close to our people and we have a specific interest in our people. It is more personalized as I'm sure you realize just as in your medium. And so I've always loved newspapers and believe me I still do.

ELLIOTT: As you look back over the years you mentioned earlier, before we started our program that there wasn't a specific big story but is there a certain era of your work at the Alliance Review that you remember?

STEFFY: I think there is one era that I shall always remember and that is the Depression era. I was covering the City Hall at that time and I was doing probably all the stories that ran in the Review with reference to the Depression. And while that was not a period in life to relish it nevertheless was a specific era in the history of this community and the whole nation. And I think I shall always prize the fact that it was my privilege, somebody had to do it, and it turned out to be my privilege in Alliance to record the events and happenings of the Depression era. Which in Alliance was marked by such things as the issuance of script, money you know, and austerity programs. The police and fire departments were stripped to the very bone. And all departments were operating on a very slim budget in those days. Certainly nothing compared to the budgets that we have today. It was a very trying era. And yet as I look back upon it the people of Alliance tackled it in a courageous way. They handled it in a very intelligent way. We had civic and community leadership that

was very effective. In all my experience with various mayors and administrators of the city government I shall always cherish the memory of Guy Allott, who came into the mayoralty in 1933, and served two terms when the Depression was at its height. And it was in that period that script was issued. And I suppose that it was in that period that the relief lines were the longest. I think that he did a masterful job and I would rate Mayor Allott as one of the best that we ever had; even though he was blind.

ELLIOTT: He as I recall, ran a hardware store did he not?

STEFFY: He did. The Allott Hardware, in which his brother-in-law Blaine Bowman assisted him. Blaine eventually took over the hardware and established his own business.

ELLIOTT: We mentioned newspaper. Back in that day there wasn't any radio and any TV to speak of. Was there much impact on the newspaper business when radio came about and then followed close behind by TV?

STEFFY: Oh, certainly there was some impact. And very frankly we in the newspaper business with a printed word were scared particularly from a revenue standpoint. We in the news department had our fears up too. But we have found that we are able to live together, that the radio, TV and newspapers especially newspapers in the community this size live in an entirely different life atmosphere than do any of the electronics. We both have a purpose and we both serve a purpose. I think you know that our feelings are pretty good today.

ELLIOTT: We have no problems at all. Let's talk a little bit about the newspaper business when you first started here at the Alliance Review. It was located in the same building.

STEFFY: But in the old building.

ELLIOTT: Yeah, the old building next door to the new one.

STEFFY: That's right.

ELLIOTT: What can you tell us about that?

STEFFY: Well in 1930 when I joined the Review, the Review building was really not an old one because it had been built at the turn of the century. So you see it couldn't have been more than thirty years old. And we were modern in all necessary respects. By the time I came to the Review we had the teletypes for the transmitting of the associated news and of course the linotype was long by that time an essential part of the industry. We had a circulation department that was alert and on its toes and even as it is today. And we had a very effective advertising department and a good editorial department even then.

ELLIOTT: Who was the editor of the Review when you came?

STEFFY: That's right. Now pictures always were used of course but in my earliest days in the newspaper business Paul Reed really ran the department as the city editor.

ELLIOTT: Did you start as a city hall reporter?

STEFFY: I started as city hall reporter which was the number one reportorial job and the most important one I

dare say in that particular period. I should say the most essential. But I moved on from there. In 1942, I took over the editorial department when Paul Reed went to the service.

ELLIOTT: Things have changed a little bit in the newspaper business from the time you started to now especially with the production end of things.

STEFFY: Oh tremendously. Of course now we are what is known as an offset newspaper.

ELLIOTT: No linotypes?

STEFFY: No linotypes. Linotypes have gone to the junkyard. We're modern in every respect.

ELLIOTT: It makes a big difference in the appearance of the newspaper.

STEFFY: It really does.

ELLIOTT: And I know everybody is really pleased with the new look of the Alliance Review in the last two or three years especially with the pictures. It really makes a difference.

STEFFY: That's right. Now pictures always were used of course but in my earliest days in the newspaper business either here or in Canton or in Mount Vernon the pictures were as of nothing compared to today. And we didn't run as many local pictures. We depended upon the mats which came in. And it was from those mats that the plates were made

and the pictures reproduced in the newspaper. But today local pictures are predominate.

ELLIOTT: Newspaper plays a pretty important part too in recording history. Unlike the electronic media; once we say it it's usually gone. Sometimes there are a few things we wish weren't on tape recorders out there and were gone.

But newspaper is there forever and recorded.

STEFFY: That's right. And I have with me a quotation from Walter Cronkite in that respect and I would like to read it.

ELLIOTT: We'll accept that since he's in our business. It must be all right what ever it is he said.

STEFFY: He was asked the question, "what do you think is the future of the printed word?" And he replied, "it's got to be good. Television and audio visual communications generally have tremendous impact and they haven't even begun to scratch the surface of the use of them for education. But it is in evanescent form. It's here at the moment that you receive it and then it's gone. You've got to have the printed page to study and to go back and review. To absorb more deeply than you possibly can do audio visually." So I think that answers the question. It ties in with your comments too about the recorded history. We do figure that we record history and with the editorial work that I'm doing now I shall rely upon our films. You see all of the Reviews are on film today. But we wish sometimes that we

could turn back to one of those old papers in it's real form. Yet we have the record of Alliance going back to newspapers a hundred years ago.

ELLIOTT: Now these are available to the public at the Rodman Library are they not?

STEFFY: That's right.

ELLIOTT: So if you want a newspaper from 1893 you can go back and via microfilm....

STEFFY: That's right. They get a copy of our films. But from the standpoint of research and that sort of thing it's more advantageous to use the microfilm at the Library than at the Review. Although that can be done too.

ELLIOTT: So it's available either location.

STEFFY: That's right.

ELLIOTT: And I know the machine at the library, of course I've used it a couple of times just to do some research, to go back about ten years and do some research and if you see an article in there that you want a copy of you can use the photostatic process that's right there in the film and take a picture of the microfilm. And you can take the copy home with you to stay.

STEFFY: Correct.

ELLIOTT: Now that's really a great feature. Let's talk a little bit about Alliance and how it's changed since you've arrived in 1930's. This was a big railroad town was it not?

STEFFY: That's right. Well first in that respect I would like to make this comment; and that is that the attitude in Alliance has changed considerably over the last fifty years. When I came here as a student at Mount Union College and then started covering Alliance I found very prevalent what I would call a mass inferiority complex. People were inclined to run down their community. Some people still do. But not like they used to. It seemed to be an epidemic in those days. And I think there were a couple of reasons for it; one was that early in the 1920's the Pennsylvania Roundhouse was moved from Alliance to Canton and many people felt that the Roundhouse had been forced out by interests in the community; which of course was not true. The railroad had made plans many years prior to the moving time to concentrate on Canton and that's understandable because of the industry. What an irony it is that today the Roundhouse doesn't amount to much as far as Canton is concerned or as far as the railroad is concerned. That's not to say that it is not needed because it is but it certainly isn't the going concern that it was in that time.

STEFFY: That's right. So people were depressed about that. There was also a tendency in the community to criticize Mount Union College. The story was Memorial Hall which was new then had been promised to the community as a meeting place. I wasn't here then so I can't say one way or the other as to what actually happened. But I'm sure it was a misconception or misinterpretation. Nevertheless the people were saddled with this kind of an attitude. So generally

the attitude was rather on the pessimistic side. However I'm gratified that following the Depression and the prosperity that we have had over the country and in Alliance in particular; starting with the 1940's and on through; the attitude has changed. And we have so many new facilities here. We have so many things that I would like to brag about so far as Alliance is concerned. And of course number one I suppose would be the new High School which is probably unmatched any place in Ohio and there are few to match it in the nation. And another facility which is dear to my heart is the Library. It was my privilege to serve for two years as President of the Ohio Library Trustees Association. And I saw a lot of libraries over Ohio and I can assure you that there isn't any community this size in Ohio and few in the nation that have a library with greater service, facilities for service, than we have in Alliance. It's a thing to be treasured. And of course we have this modern YMCA now. And so many other things that would take a lot of time to mention. But we have these things which I hope have changed the attitude of the people of Alliance. I love Alliance and I'm not a native. I used to say....

ELLIOTT: Well I think you are after fifty years.

STEFFY: I used to say that Alliance's worst enemies were it's natives; people who haven't had an opportunity to see what other communities have. And the kind of thing that we encountered in Alliance those days is typical of a home community. You go to any town and you'll find that the

natives are more apt to run down the home town than are the newcomers.

ELLIOTT: And of course Mount Union College is a fantastic resource.

STEFFY: I don't think that the people of Alliance really appreciate what that has meant to the community culturally or otherwise. I realize that we have so many colleges and universities now that draw people from Alliance as well as Mount Union College. But there was a day when Canton and Massillon and Stark County would have given anything to get Mount Union College. Of course they now have their own institutions. Canton does in particular.

ELLIOTT: Let's talk a little bit about this railroading. Of course railroading isn't the big business that it was. As you mentioned the Roundhouse really wouldn't be very significant in this day and age but back in it's day it was significant. Did the railroad have a big part to play do you think in the development in Alliance?

ELLIOTT: My dad was a railroader, right. And of course STEFFY: Without any question. That's where we get the name of the city Alliance; it's the crossing of the railroads north and south and east and west. And of course this was a railroad center. It was recognized as such.

STEFFY: Well I think it was in the earlier state but by And Alliance benefited from that, there isn't any question. I think it would have been wonderful to kept the roundhouse but I believe that move was inevitable at the time.

ELLIOTT: A lot of famous people stopped there didn't they? ELLIOTT: It would be nice to even have the old Sourbeck House today.

STEFFY: That's right. And from a personal standpoint I wish we still had flourshing railroads because I always liked railroads.

ELLIOTT: I can remember as a kid when diesels first became popular why we used to go and sit at the crossing. We had the train schedule, and we knew at 9:12 on Saturday night the train was coming through probably pulled by a diesel and we went up to see the diesel engine go by. That doesn't happen today.

STEFFY: Of course my memories go back to the earlies, not the earliest, but the railroad trains and the early part of this century. And it was a privilege to ride the train as a boy from Hartville to Canton.

ELLIOTT: We used to go over to Canton shopping and ride the train I recall. Today you wouldn't think of that at all.

STEFFY: Well your dad was a railroader.

ELLIOTT: My dad was a railroader, right. And of course the old Sourbeck House which I can remember that too, very vaguely but that was a pretty popular spot along the tracks between New York and Chicago to have dinner wasn't it?

STEFFY: Well I think it was in the earlier state but by the time I came to Alliance in 1926 it was known as the Chase House. The Sourbeck was gone.

ELLIOTT: A lot of famous people stopped there didn't they?

STEFFY: So I understand according to history and according to the newspaper and I believe it.

ELLIOTT: What other area of Alliance would you like to talk about? You've been active as Clerk of City Council. Has government, city government changed a lot over the last few years?

STEFFY: City government has changed just like every other phase of life. Yes, as I look back upon my so called career I treasure most of my association with City Council. I covered City Council meetings for those many years and it has been my privilege to serve, this is my thirtieth year as Clerk of Council.

ELLIOTT: How did all that start?

STEFFY: A task that I took on thinking that it would be just temporary. You mean my Clerkship?

ELLIOTT: Uh huh.

STEFFY: It's a rather interesting story. Albert Faracchio who was a Democrat wanted me to become Clerk of Council because he said, "you're here anyway," and he thought I could do the job. And eventually in 1946 I accepted the roll thinking it would be just a temporary thing. But here it is thirty years. Next to my newspapering, of course, has been I suppose dearest to my heart so far as the city activities are concerned. Although I never discount the Library either. But City Council has been a very fascinating thing to me. I've always liked government. The seed for that planted by my maternal grandfather who's name was Samuel Brumbaugh.

He was always a local politician up around Hartville and Randolph and so I got my interest there very naturally. So I've watched City Councils over the years. Of course legislation is similar in many respects; there are always financial problems and that sort of thing. But there is much more legislation handled today than was the case 20, 30, 40 years ago. Much more. And of course the variety of legislation is different. Whoever heard of Urban Renewal in those days, for example. And it's very fascinating. I'd like to mention since we're talking about City Council that I have a deep respect for all of the men and women, we've had a couple you know, who have served in council. Without exception they've been dedicated people. They've tried to do in my opinion what was best for the city of Alliance. And in my career there have been only four regularly elected City Council President; T. Elmer Trott who was a professor at Mount Union was President when I started. He was followed briefly by Harry Morrison who had been a Councilman and who was appointed after Mr. Trott's death to serve an unexpired term. Then he was followed by Dr. Morgan who was President of Council for twenty-seven and a half years; he served his last six months as Mayor. Then he was followed by Dick Ogline and now by Dr. Kelleher. And they've all been very astute men. Men who were conscientious and dedicated to their position. And we've had some very excellent Councilmen. If I were permitted I would like to say this. City Council meetings are open. People have the privilege of attending any council meeting. I'm often asked can anybody

attend? Yes indeed, that's provided for by state law. I wish more people attended council meetings in this city and elsewhere. People have a tendency to sit back and wait till council does something and pounce upon the legislators for having inacted something. A very typical thing is the TOPICS Program. About which there is a lot of complaint. And yet if people were to refer back to the columns of the Review and to the record here at the radio station they would find out that they were told that the TOPICS Program was coming up for discussion and consideration. They had their opportunity, they didn't take advantage of inquiring about it. And now they're sometimes complaining. Yet no doubt in the long run they'll find out as a whole TOPICS Program will probably be a blessing for the community. There are instances of course that will be corrected. And I'm sure that the city council will find out that in due time the Mayor will exercise the privilege of asking for a survey after one year which is part of the contract. And that was agreed upon four years ago, under the previous administration.

ELLIOTT: So it just didn't happen last year.

STEFFY: No it didn't happen over night.

ELLIOTT: It wasn't a quick thing, in fact most of these things by the time the public finds out about them or realizes or it hits them between the eyes; you want to know where some people have been once and a while I wonder. We get calls and I'm sure you get them at the Review about this new such and such. And gee, we've been talking about it for two years.

STEFFY: Well that's the way we live. said, "well you've

ELLIOTT: Right. Can you remember any real fiery moments in City Council, any real hot explosives. that one.

STEFFY: Well, I haven't given any thought to that. But I suppose since he used the word fiery. The most fiery time would have been when Albert Faracchio was in Council and he will live in Council history because there was a term or two maybe more than one term when he was a lone Democrat in Council and believe me he spoke for his party and he kept this thing alive. And he in my humble opinion always represented his people quite well. He was their spokesman and he had a fiery attitude, too. But he kept neatly. Some people liked that, some didn't.

ELLIOTT: It was as I recall, I can recall some of those days and he did speak very loudly being the only one there. He made sure that the other side was heard.

STEFFY: He wrote his name in Alliance Council history.

ELLIOTT: He sure did. Clarence we thank you very much for being with us. Our time is up but we've really enjoyed the past thirty minutes of reminiscing a little bit about the Alliance Review and the newspaper business with you, and of course the city of Alliance which is dear to all our hearts I think.

STEFFY: It is to mine.

ELLIOTT: We thank you very much for being with us and we hope you have another twenty five or fifty years at the Alliance Review.

STEFFY: One of the men at the Review said, "well you've started on your second fifty what are you going to do for an encore?" I haven't an answer to that one.

ELLIOTT: We'll be watching the newspaper to find out.

STEFFY: Thank you.

ELLIOTT: Our guest today Clarence Steffy, editor of the Alliance Review, this is Dick Elliott for Information Seventy.

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