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Interview with Homer and Ruth Blubaugh

Homer Blubaugh

Ruth Blubaugh

Alice McCunn

Jen DiLisi

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Interview with Fr. Homer Blubaugh & Ruth Blubaugh (Mother)
November 3, 1998
Alice McCunn and Jen DiLisi
Irish-American

(Starts a minute or two into interview-pause was on)

HB: ...You know, same church they went to. Long time ago. So Mom never thought she'd make it to Ireland in her whole lifetime. SO we know where they went now. And these cousins have come over to visit here in this....here in Danville too.

JD: Mmm-hmm.

AM: Where did you visit on your trip?

RB: Oh, I don't know....let me see....

HB: Well, it was Limerick County, which was the same one herancestors came from Ireland.

RB: Well, we drove around. The one thing that was, really touched me, was when the ships had started over with our grandparents and gone down. They never got here. Of course, they never got here. But they had all those artifacts and oh, it was so sad. To think they never saw them again, you know? They put the, what they found of the remains on the ship. Realistic. I mean, it happened. It was so, historic.

HB: Well, they called some of the ships that brought the Irish over during the famine "Floating coffins" They may have, the ships may have come and may not have arrived.

JD: Hmm.

HB: And they packed so many people on them and maybe it was an expensive fare or something, bnut it was...they didn't have the nice passenger ships for those people. <Pause> But you have questions you want to ask us.

AM: We should tell you a little about our project and what we're doing first. It's a project on Rural Diversity, so we're looking at Knox County and we're looking at various ethnic groups in Knox County. So, we're interviewing Irish-Americans and what we want is just your perspective of what it was like living in this area as an Irish-American. We have groups interviewing Amish, Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans, Jewish-Americans. And eventually this will result in a series of articles in the Mt. Vernon News.

HB: Great. She was born here in 1917. So she's lived most of her life here.

RB: But it's been three generations since I've been here. I mean, do you want us that far away?

HB: Well, she might handle specific questions better than I will.

JD: So, who was it in your family who first came over here?

HB: Well, it was her, well, they came over twenty years before the famine. They preceded the famine.

JD: Oh, so...this is 1800's?

HB: Yeah, same year. 18--, 1826. This Thomas Colopy and his wife and oldest daughter they came in 1826, but they went to...near Albany, NY on the St. Lawrence Seaway.

JD: Mm-hmm.

HB: Then they came to a neighboring county in 1835. And they came to this county in the later 1800's.

RB: They were seeking agriculture. That's what they were seeking. Good land.

AM: And they found it here.

RB: They were happy they got here.

HB: Most Irish were farmers. At least had farming skills. SO most of the Irish we knew were of farming background, unless they went into a profession they'd arrive (inaudible).

JD: Mm-hmm. And how many came over?

HB: Oh this was, this family there was husband, wife and his daughter. Now, supposedly he brought over later on, I don't know famine or, he sponsored two sisters and a brother. Now we haven't proven that yet. We can't, we've gone through census records, interviewed people, gone through obituaries and church records, and we haven't found the rest of that family. It was probably a little clipping in a newspaper or almost 100 years ago that said that he sponsored some people who were his family, but we haven't found that yet. Most Irish came as single people. A couple was very rare.

JD: Mm-hmm.

HB: And....

JD: And would you say it was common for them to move to rural areas rather than.

HB: Yeah. They, uh, mainly the immigrants were involved in the canals. Any kind of manual

labor available. I think their dream was to have their own farm. And, wherever that might be., Very likely, they settled together as a colony. I think they stuck together with relation, religion, and probably nationality. They probably thought they understood each other. But the way her great-granddad came to this area....he walked from New York state, Albany to Ohio. To buy government land in Coshocton County in 1835.

JD: Oh my gosh.

HB: Plus, my dad heard that story from his grandfather so many times, they never forgot it. Can you imagine walking 600 miles to the middle of Knox County/Coshocton area? But he may have felt he didn't have many for transportation, it cost money to keep a horse, and Europeans walked like, there was a priest who walked from here to Mt. Vernon several times a week. They had this real fast walking gait. In fact they went up to Gambier because the road out of Howard wasn't there yet. And he walked that. People doubted he could ever do it. He just had a gait that was very, I'd say more than a fast walk. Before he ever owned a horse he walked it.

RB: He had to!

HB: When they went to school, until they were maybe high school, they walked every place. To school, you always took a car to church, right? Did you walk to church?

RB: Horse and buggy when I was little.

HB: So what year did you first have a car?

RB: I can't say what year Dad got the car.

HB: Well, when Mom and Dad were married 1939, they used horses to farm till 1944-1945. Though they had a car for transportation. Now, did you know who the Irish cousins were around here? Did you kind of know who was Irish around here?

RB: Just knew the Colopy's were all Irish, and that's all I remember at that time.

HB: So you kind of knew Irish as your cousins, but not other Irish people?

RB: No.

HB: I don't think they....

JD: So there wasn't like a community of Irish people living together? All the....

HB: Not here. Not even an Irish club, I don't think.

RB: Dad's folks came from Zanesville. Of course the Finan's were there and they were Irish. The Colopy's.

HB: Well, they kind of knew where there were other communities of relation. Like in the area of Zanesville or Coshocton. And they tended to be very clannish about visiting, attending funerals if they could, having reunions almost every year. SO, those things that were family gatherings to catch up on the news, I would say weddings and funerals when possible, or things high on their priorities would keep in touch with their roots.

JD: Was it important to marry another Irish person? Or at least a Catholic? Was it important to marry another person of Irish descent in your family?

RB: Well, they tried to stay within religions. I can't remember any now...

HB: The main thing was not marrying too close. That would have been a problem, marrying your second cousin. So I think they would have married religion first. Maybe a distant cousin. There was always aunts and grandparents to tell you "You can't date him, you can't date her, they're too close." We had that problem around here. There are many cousins in this area who are married to their second cousin. Which isn't too close, but it's plenty close. And so, there's third and fourth cousins. My one sister's married to a third and a half, fourth cousin. So, people like Mom can always tell you how you related within a few generations. So, if they know they're a third or fourth cousin....well, one of my nephews wanted to date a cousin. And we said "What do you want to date your cousin for?" And he didn't know, he wasn't aware she was a cousin.

JD: Oh.

HB: So that's not a danger or problem, but there's a lot of people to date, eligible people, put it that way.

RB: Some people aren't interested in that. They have more of a one track mind than you want to be. They don't care who's who, they just do what they want to do.

HB: Well, when her, she graduated from high school here in the 30's. In that time people didn't tend to travel a lot for work or outside the immediate area. Later on, people would be employed in Mt. Vernon, people went to schools, colleges. You kind of had a wider circulation. And an area like this often spawned people to places where there was employment, like during the Depression years. If all the people who grew up here in the last hundred years lived here, Knox County's population would probably be triple or quadruple. So, these small communities had large families, sent, or knew where other cousins were living, job opportunities in Akron or Columbus or out of state. And so many of them who grew up here would have preferred to stay here, but there wasn't farms available. They may have met a spouse. They may have been in the service. So many of them moved away and stayed away because that was a greater opportunity.

RB: A lot of them around my father's age went to Akron. Of course, that was rubber city. That was new. In fact, later, after I graduated, I went up there to work too. And there was so many people from around Danville here. They had the Knox County Club.

AM: Really?

RB: Picnic, and I still as far as I know is still going on cause I had lots of aunts and uncles up there.

HB: But that club wasn't just relation. It was anyone. It was their network to keep in touch with what was going on down here.

JD: Right.

HB: It was kind of, I guess you'd call it keeping connected. To where you were from, there was a lot of common news, and we were talking this morning with Martha Finan, who's a cousin, that they used to charter a train from Columbus once a year and this church would have a festival out in the country. And they, people there, paid for this train. Spent their money because they wanted to feel connected and that was part of it. So whether it was dances or reunions or a church festival, those are things people felt a strong affinity to come back and stay connected. Even though the livelihood and they would probably remain where they were. They were established and quite often found a better life, more convenient life, than kind of a frugal life if they'd stayed in this area. And the other thing is, this area, available farms and jobs are very limited. So you, the opportunities took you away. And once in a great while one of them would come back to retire, once in a while they may buy land or something because they like the area. And when our cousin was here last year from Limerick County, he told Mom, he's travelled: he was in the military in Ireland, he's travelled a lot. He said this central area of Ohio was most like Ireland that he's ever been in all his life. So, if these people found the seasons, the not flat land/not totally hilly land. If they found the contour and the variety much like that, that would have made a thing for these people to feel at home.

RB: They'd feel more at home.

AM: Hmm.

HB: We walked out the house one morning and saw a deer at the edge of our lane, and he just loved being here. And so it really was an enjoyable thing. We would never had known that if we hadn't been over to see them. And then they came back. So, I don't know that connectedness ever gets lost.

RB: I should have brought that card. I just received a card from him last week. The stamp was like, it looked like a patty.

HB: Well, he went on a cruise in the Mediterranean with his wife.

JD: Oh.

HB: He's retired military from Ireland. When you get in a profession in Ireland you can afford to travel a bit and live well compared to other people. So he's one of those frugal people, his kids all learned. He sent all of his kids to summer school to not only study Gaelic, but to read it and speak it. They are graduates in terms of literary. At least in Ireland, all the big business is

conducted in Gaelic. Some American, otherwise, groups might go there and not know Gaelic, and their attorneys.....they still conduct a lot of business. And they'd like to see Gaelic revived. We have a reunion in our family every September, which is going on for 130 years or so. So we like to have some of our cousins who can dance the Irish jig to come so we can....this September, these cousins came to visit us. This cousin's daughter is 8 years old and she did the, she put her vest on and her shoes and did this little two or three Irish. She did all the right moves and this little girl was, just, they put their hands down to the side and do that fast stepping. So that was something that was kind of fun to do. And so those are the things the older ones of the family. She has one living aunt, and Anna is how old? 94....

RB: 97.

HB: 97. She's probably been here every year. She lives by herself, doesn't drive anymore, and is very alert.

RB: She had 8 children. And her oldest daughter died some time ago. She's....

HB: She's outlived all the younger ones but one. He's still quite young. So, longevity is something some of the Irish have. I can't say all of them, and she raised her children. Her husband died young and she supported herself and her kids. She has a large family and now, when your grandmother Fanny died, she has 144 descendants. This was in 1956. And so, one of the you might say....many of them, I'm one of 10. And so, in my parents' generation, having a large family 6-8-10 kids was typical. And that's one of the areas of why many left the Danville area. Went outside the whole Knox County was opportunity and maybe somebody else. And other cousins kind of knew that these younger cousins work age, and would enjoy working in a factory, would like to have a job, and they, whatever their final decision was to go to Akron or Columbus, there was an opportunity that they'd never have here. You kind of knew the Knox County market would be saturated. And, not everybody could afford to go into farming then. I mean, many factory jobs and that was the opportunity. Now, when they went to other places I don't know how small their Irish settlements would remain. In Columbus there's several other Irish groups. Daughters of Aaron, The Highburnians (sp?) And they have a big St. Patrick's Day parade in Columbus. But most of the Knox County people were not aware of that. I've been down there a number of times. So, bigger cities have formal organizations. I don't know that there's any such organizations in Knox County. Maybe among the rest of your class they may find things like that. But they've (the Irish) been quietly a part of the community 150 years or more, but I don't know they really have any formal, there may have been a long time ago, I don't know that there was. I haven't come across any. Sometimes those in many large cities there are ethnic groups that operate lodges, clubs, fraternities. I was at a wedding and this group came down from Cleveland and they brought a bagpiper and this whole crew. They even brought a band. And these people did the Irish jig and all that stuff. The groom's family was Irish, her family was maybe somewhat Irish, and he kept saying to those people: "You know you can dance Granny" They must have been dancing for two hours. But it was nice to see that larger communities do actively make this their own location, dance, lodge, whatever you call, I guess you have to be certified Irish to be part of something like that.

JD: I didn't realize that.

HB: I know there was in Cleveland, I don't know where it was, it may have been a certain part of it, this Lowery family, they were a part of that cause his grandad came from Ireland very recently. So, they had people from Ireland at the wedding. They came over a few days.

JD: Besides from St. Patrick's Day, did you celebrate your heritage in any other way even when growing up?

HB: Did you do any specific Irish celebrations [speaking to RB], there weren't like you know, well I think they just looked upon St. Patrick's Day as being another, well they knew it was Irish but they didn't do, did schools do anything different on St. Patrick's Day [speaking to RB]?

RB: No.

HB: I don't even think education wise there was any major focus on Irish heritage. We just became so blended in you might call it that. I wouldn't say we lost our roots, but it just didn't seem to be a high priority.

JD: How important was the Catholic Church to your family?

HB: Well you see the church has been established here since the 1820s and the first building was 1831. So to these people in this Danville area, the church was probably more important than anything else. For them, this is where the children were baptized within a few days of birth, this was the only place you got married, and you would marry, and if you married someone not Catholic then you still got connected with the church being married, if that person was Catholic of course you would be in the church. I think their religion was probably more of a cohesive thing in the community than necessarily being Irish. But I think just somehow, with every succeeding decade, the Irish origins, I wouldn't say they were unimportant but they didn't get celebrated or... Sometimes there would be people acting toward you of Irish descent that would raise that awareness. There could be others who were not Irish that didn't necessarily promote it or do that. So ah, there's more of a return lately to names like Caitlin and all kinds of Irish names, Shawn, that were used more frequently years ago. I think even the naming of kids you know became minimized or overlooked or ah ah and ah this cousin whose daughter worked for the union, her she made sure all of her kids had Irish names. And that was fine with her husband. They have four or five now and there are some of the younger generation who came over to Ireland. She's a nurse in Cleveland who went to Ireland a few times, we went there one time. We spent six days and rented a car, and rained only one day, it was really nice. And ah, so I think the interest is there in Ireland more of them would like to go there they realize, I think most of them realize there's an Irish background, but ah somehow actualizing that in a visit is something they would like to do. There's an increased interest more recently. This thing is now is like more involved and ah and what the people find out about four or five generations ago somebody came from Ireland, and you could tell them name, place, and date then that's a whole lot of help. And a lot of their kids are younger school aged, and then you could tell them this is where we came from. And at least what I try to promote is becoming more aware of their roots, ah, you know

there's more time to that lately, or they're put some more resources in their hands.

RB: There's a lot of ones in our family with red hair and that it associated with the Colopy red hair. We lived in Akron, there were several friends of ours and their hair was coal black. They were Irish. Dark eyes. Red hair and Colopy's had the light blue eyes.

HB: So out of her ten kids, only one of us had red hair. My brother.

RB: But look at the rest of them. I had cousins that had red hair.

HB: Your sister Delann (??) Had red hair.

RB: Yeah Delann, it was sandy. Mine was sandy.

HB: Was your hair a little bit redish at one time?

RB: Yes, but it was a bright, dark red.

HB: So she has ten children, thirty-one grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. And one due in about a month and a half.

JD: How old are you?

HB: She was born April 1, 1917. She's eighty-one. So she has all of her family ,except one her brother. So out of seven, they're all still alive. And she's the oldest of seven and her one sister when she was fifty-five had a massive heartattack, and she's just a year younger than mom and she's recoverd from that. She had bypass surgery sixteen years ago and she's going strong.

AM: So is your family, your childre, are they together now or are they all pretty mich living in the same area?

RB: Yes. One daughter lives in Virginia and the rest all live in Ohio.

HB: We're going down to see her on Friday. So, of us ten kids, nine are in Ohio or and one is out of state with the American.

RB: She's a stuardess. She was ful time and when her second child was born, she became part time or just goes when they need her but she still gets all the benefits.

HB: She has the youngest family. All her kids are still in school.

RB: She's almost as busy as I am.

HB: Well, mom was my sister's age, ten of us were born in ten years. There was a big farm to keep going and we had thirty some cows to milk morning and night and she was aware of every

detail of farm life as dad was. And now she looks at her daughters who are that age and she can't figure out how they do it. How they keep fourteen hours in the car.

RB: I guess its just a different life. I was old fashioned. I churned my own butter, canned several hundred courts of fruit or vegetables a year.

HB: ...over a period of time. I don't know if that is bad or good, I just think it is just part of being Americanized or somehting like that.

JD: Do you find that St. Patrick's Day has a bad connotation behind it?

HB: When I was in Columbus, I've been part of the St. Patrick's Day parade for a number of years and its just a nice fun way for all the wanna-be Irish plus the Irish connection and the name Blubaugh is hardly Irish, but her family is very Irish but through all these marriages, I don't know what percentage Irish mom is or most people here are. But, other than awareness of almost everybody else is Irish or a mixture, but there are hardly any pure Irish as such. I imagine that's pretty much the same in Mt. Vernon.

RB: The friends we had in Akron, the name was McAvee, they ended up when I came over, they stopped in the coal fields of Pittsburgh of PA, and they lived there and grew up there and this gentleman who was good friends of my father, and he would tell us stories. They had larhe families. Then they came to Akron when the rubber factories started. Everyone went to Akron for work.

HB: I think the Irish people tend to take opportunity to work. Whatever maual skill you could find, whether it was coal, or who knows, the steel industry, or digging ditches for canals. Thet seemed to be labor intensive just to have the job. I mean they, some may have had more professional skills and some didn't. You take what's available and not be too choosy about it. They all had sizeable families to support and I think when they found a place to settle or get land, that was always their dream. And so, you may be a transient, an apartment dweller, but eventually they wanted to have a place to call their home, is what I can tell.

JD: Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

AM: When we talked to Martha yesterday, we got the sense that there weren't many familes, it was just a couple of main families and the identity was maintained through religion and there really wasn't much observation just becasue you know because you went to church and that's where everyone...

HB: And everybody knew everybody. She knows everybody.

RB: There's a lot of Kelly families up in Akron and a Kelly family in Mt. Vernon, I think one or two. Kelly was a common name in Summit County up in Akron. Your name gives you away. And all the Mc's, don't they come from Ireland?

HB: Well not all. Well your talking about McKenzie and they're Scottish. Amny times, but not always. When the Europeans came to this country. They were told to never correct the people at immigration, if they misspell your name. There's a lot of confusion, a lot of records could not be found, cause they Americansized it or they took the Mc off. I would say many of the Irish are literate. They value education and the fact that many Irish took low paying jobs as laborers doesn't mean they didn't have a basic education.

JD: I think Martha said the name was changed, it used to have two l's.

HB: Yeah, it was C-O-L-L-O-P-Y.

RB: And that's the way they spelled it in Ireland two l's. It was always a story that my grandmother was in an hurry one day and dropped one l. When I was a little girl and I went to Akron, people called me Calupy, and my aunt was a college graduate and she said you know don't dare laugh at Ruth. It was our fault. If they had kept the two l's in they would say Colopy.

HB: People just let those taditions slowly die out. I think the oldest generations back then were very keen about it and hoped that that would, I don't think it was any plan to lose Irish heritage, but it just kind of happen more by default than by any active decision to do that. People have antiques and things from Ireland, but they value those things in generations and generations. Like she has some old quilts. From your mother... Her one great grandad was in the Civil War and believe it or not, a lot of the Irish were missionary soldiers. We are real proud of our Irish background, but you have to know a little something about it to be proud of it.

AM: I am part Irish, but I don't know much because I am so many generations you know removed that...

AM: Can you think of the names of any people that might have information for us or that would like to talk with us?

HB: They live in town. She drives a school bus and he works for the city. They may be very happy to have you call them up. They live right over here a couple of blocks away.

HB: Franklin County has a big St. Patrick's Day parade and they have their own Irish newsletter. It tells more or less about their events and literature. Columbus has some effort. They have been better in the last 25 yrs. Than they used to do. They have their own lodge and an Irish place. So, I guess there's a slow revival of Irish connections. But, other than busy-ness and raising families and all that it kind of got lost.

RB: Did Martha tell you about her father? Martha's fahter had a wonderful mind on him. He could remember... I could listen to him all day, but he passed away. Martha's father is a first cousin of mine.

HB: He was Irish and his mother was Irish, so he had double Irish in him. He was one of seven sons. His six brothers all became... They had a heart condition in that family, many of the men died before they were fifty. Jim and they one brother lived until their later sixties.

AM: If we can think of anything else, can we give you a call?

HB. Yeah, fine. She's usually home most of the time.