

TROST, WALTER INTERVIEW
AUGUST 23, 1979
SARA IMHOLTE-BECKSTRAND INTERVIEWER

Q: This is Sara Imholte-Beckstrand and it's August 23, 1979. I'm going to interview Walter Trost about the home front during World War II. First I'd like to ask you just a little bit about the war. Before Pearl Harbor, did you think that the United States should get involved in World War II?

No, I didn't.

Q: Did you know of any committees like the America First Committee?

No.

Q: Why didn't you think America should get involved in World War II?

Well, there was no warning at all. There wasn't too much said about it. I didn't think it would be a surprise like it was.

Q: So what did you think after Pearl Harbor?

After Pearl Harbor? Well, I'm glad they won, MacArthur, he was safe. He pulled away from there. Left his men to do the fighting. Kept himself in the clear. Then he came back again. Until they gave them the bomb and that ended it. There was one thing I didn't like about the whole thing; that is the women, they got working in it...building over in California and building boats and the women were welding...that's been going on now ever since. They never quit working and went back to take care of their families. That's what I didn't like about it.

Q: So you think if it hadn't been for World War II women probably wouldn't be working?

Not the way they are now I don't think. They'd probably be home tending their families and not being off in some machine shop standing beside another man working and pretty soon the family is broke up.

Q: So you think then World War II was real bad for families?

Yes, it was. I really do think so. It was all right before. Everything was fine. You'd hear of a divorce now and then but nothing like now. Nothing like now.

Q: What other things beside the women working did World War II do to the families?

Well, that was one of the worst things. I don't know (that) there has been anything else that hurt the families,

Q: Did you notice that a lot of young kids started working during World War II? Did that happen very much here around Donnelly?

Oh yes. Yes, there was, until they put a ...they've got an age limit on it now. But there was a lot of young kids.

Q: Do you think that hurt the family too? The fact that young kids were working?

Oh, I don't think it did. Only that it might of kept them out of school, some of them.

Q: Did you and your friends talk a lot about the war when it was going on?

Oh yes. Yes, I had a son in the war. He was in the navy. My son, Harold, was in the navy. He was in some pretty bad, close battles. I know we'd write to him pert near every day and he wrote alot, he answered alot. They were going up some river in Phillipines and he was up at the Crows Nest. He was, what do you call that... like tele...telgraphy...

Q: Oh yes, I know what you mean...like radio communications...

Yes. They were going up some river in the Phillipines. He said they called for help, they're crowding (the) hell out of us here. He said we need help. They're crowding (the) hell out of here.

Q: During World War II you worked in a meat shop, is that right, here in Donnelly?

Yes, I was in the butcher business. I was a butcher at a meat market.

Q: Meat was rationed, wasn't it, during the war?

Oh yes, they had rationing. Yes, I know my competitor, he called me one time and he says, I heard you were giving stuff without slips over there. And I told him, you run your business and I'll run mine. So that was the end of that.

Q: Was meat pretty hard to get a hold of?

No. No. We had plenty of meat. It wasn't high priced either. It wasn't so high priced. And groceries, they were cheap, 10¢ for a loaf of bread. And weiners, well, baloney was 25¢ a pound and it's \$2.00 now, that same kind. I made my own baloney and bought alot of it too. Off the truck I'd buy a hundred pounds. I'd get it for 20¢ and sell it for a little more and make a little profit on it.

Q: Do you think the war had hurt or helped your business?

Well, it din't hurt my business I don't think, No.

Q: How about most of the other places in town? Do you think it was a good thing for them? Or do you think with rationing and things like that it was pretty hard to keep a business going?

No, it wasn't. It's about the same as the welfare now. Ask for it and you get it. That's about the worst thing we've got right now, is welfare. Those people on welfare...we got one fellow right here, right close here, and he's been...everything he's got (goes) right up in the liquor store.

Q: Were there any welfare programs during World War II?

I didn't hear of any.

Q: So everybody just got ration stamps?

Food stamps. But that welfare...I think some of our welfare leaders should be in jail. The way their dishing it out. There's no sense to giving them welfare.. that man that spends every cent he's got in the liquor store, that should be looked into too. Then if he can't quite come out on it, he goes and tries to borrow a couple dollars. To tide him over. That aint right.

Q: Do you think that the war helped or hurt farmers during World War II?

Well, got a little better price..price was always up a little. I had one neighbor out on the farm, he used to say there should be a war to beat the prices up. Oh, that was the wrong thing to say I thought.

Q: Well, it seems like the war helped the farmers...

Yes, it's helped them a little.

Q: Did your lifestyle change alot during the war? Did you drive alot less or eat alot less of certain foods?

Oh no, I ate about the same. I'm an old dutchman and I like common foods. But since the war, things are put up different. You go to a store and where you used to pick out one, like a pair of gloves, got a pair of gloves for the winter... now there's three of them in a package, you buy three of them, see. All that stuff, put in about three in a package. You ahve to take them all. Pushing it. And it's the same way with meat, they put so much in a package. What I used to sell...oh a quarters worth of beefstake..get a little slice of beefstake for a quarter. And now it's put up to the package, it's so much. It ain't a quarter either. \$2.00. So there's alot of changes that way, alot of them. So they buy more. Pushing the product.

Q: Did gas rationing affect you at all during the war?

No, it didn't affect me at all.

Q: Did you live in town here so you could walk pretty much?

Yes.

Q: How did it seem to affect other people? To not make a difference or...?

Well...lots of the farmers...I don't think gas was rationed to the farmers. Then they got their gas out of the tank at home so they got out of it that way.

Q: I was reading that during World War II they used to have salvage drives, like collect old rubber and old metal...

Oh yes.

Q: Did they do that here in Donnelly?

Oh yes. Old batteries, they do that yet.

Q: Were you ever part of any of those drives at all?

No.

Q: Did they have many war time committees here like rationing boards...?

Yes, yes.

Q: Were you involved in any of those kinds of...

No, no.

Q: Did they seem to do an okay job of what they were doing?

Well, I don't remember too much about that. I guess some people come out better than others.

Q: Yes, some people always seem to.

Yes. It's that way with everything. All that rationing stuff.

Q: What did you do for fun here, during the war at night?

Oh, they had about the same as they have now. They'd have dances once in a while,

Q: There wasn't a movie theater here, was there?

No.

Q: So did you have to go into Morris if you wanted to see,...

...had to go to Morris.

Q: Did you go in to Morris much?

No, I didn't. I wasn't much for shows anyway. I watch television right now. I get the news and shut it off. I've got just a couple of programs that I don't miss.

Q: Did many people seem to go into Morris? For movies,...

Oh yes. They do yet.

Q: Were most of the movies during the war pretty war orientated? Like were they about the war?

That I don't know. I couldn't say.

Q: For your meat business, what kind of advertisements did you run during the war? (Do you) think that's changed alot from the war to now?

No, I don't think that it's changed much,

Q: The reason I ask is that my mom always says that during World War II there is that saying, make do, do without, wear it out.

No, I don't remember that. I know I advertised every Nash Finch. I had groceries in the shop. Nash Finch would send out posters that would hang up on the strings across. Advertising different stuff and groceries. It's all the advertising I did.

Q: Did you purchase many war bonds during the war? Was that a big thing around here?

No, I didn't.

Q: That wasn't a very big thing....

I didn't have the money. I didn't have the money.

Q: During the war was there any kind of what you'd call a black market for goods?

Oh yes, lots of them, lots of it.

Q: How would that operate? Let's say I wanted something and I didn't have ration coupons for it?

I had a brother-in-law, he was a butcher, and he got caught...

Q: He got caught?

Yes.

Q: What happened to him?

He had to pay a fine. He was selling meat that he wasn't suppose to. Only so much. But he was dishing it out.

Q: What else would be sold on the black market? What other things beside meat?

Oh, I just don't remember. Meat was one. Flour was on (in) the First World War but it wasn't on (during the second). I think it was just beef.

Q: So were very many businessmen in town ever involved with the black market type thing?

No. Not that I heard of anyway.

Q: Do you think during the war you had to sacrifice alot? Give up alot of things that you wanted?

I didn't, no.

Q: Do you think most people did?

No, I don't think they did. They didn't have to give up too much.

Q: During the war did it seem like alot of people left Donnelly?

Oh yes, yes. We had put up a sign with all the names on it. But I don't remember how many names were on it. I think it was about 28.

Q: After the war did it seem like most of these people came back? (Did) most of the people that left leave for good?

There was three for four out of this town that didn't come back.

Q: During the war did it seem like there was more problems with drunkenness, kids causing trouble, like vandalism and things like that?

No, I don't know. That just started here a few years ago. Seems like it's getting worse....it isn't any better. It just started here a few years ago.

Q: Were there any anti-war movements here in Donnelly at all?

No.

Q: Nothing like conscientious objectors during Vietnam or anything?

No.

Q: I read about in Morris during the war they had a liquor store controversy, whether to make it into a municipal. Did they have any big local controversies here in Donnelly, any big problems during the war?

No. They had the liquor store owned by Hank Saverts. But then it went from him to municipal.

Q: When it went municipal, was there a big vote on that? I know in Morris it was an issue.

I don't remember that.

Q: What did you think of Roosevelt as a President?

Roosevelt? Well, he was alright. Roosevelt was real good.

Q: (Do you) think he did a pretty good job?

Yes.

Q: In looking back at the war now, what general feelings do you have about the war?

Looking back at it now, I wish they'd have (taken) Russia over. Completely, and held them right there, and had them yet. Right under their feet. That's the worst class of people in the world I think, is Russia. That's where they made a mistake. We saved their darn skins for them and now they try to run us. And they're doing a darn good job of it. And (we) had the bomb, Course they gave it to Russia right away. Now Russia, they've got guns all over planted right here at us. All they ahve to(do) is say the word. I tell you, we're just in a bad shape here. Now they've got some kind of...they can throw some kind of beam that can cut down a whole army. I wonder if they're going to give that to Russia too. They're liable to be foolish enough to. If they'd shut up about such things, keep it a secret. Now I bet Russia is working on it. They let it out right away, what they've got.

Q: Well, I guess that's it for today, Thank you,

End of Interview,