

**Oral Memoirs**

**Of**

**Paul Mikler**

An Interview Conducted by

The

Museum of Seminole County History

*Museum of Seminole County History*

Copyright 2014

This material is protected by US copyright. Permission to print, reproduce or distribute copyrighted material is subject to the terms and conditions of fair use as prescribed in the US copyright law. Transmission or reproduction of protected items beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the copyright owners.

## **Interview Histories**

Transcriber: Laura Cepero

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Paul Mikler is unrestricted.

## **Abstract**

Oral history of Paul Mikler, a history teacher and coach from Oviedo, Florida. Mikler was born on July 8, 1916, and was raised in Slavia, an unincorporated community that was once part of Oviedo. He taught at Oviedo High School, where he was seminal in shaping the school's baseball program, from 1946 to 1970. Mikler passed away on April 12, 2000. Interview topics include Slovak immigrants in Oviedo, the importance of St. Luke's Lutheran Church, the celery industry, Judge R. W. Ware's praise of Oviedo, driving a Ford Model T automobile, Florida State Road 426, visiting Orlando, grocery and clothes shopping, the increase of drug use of youths over the years, and the future of the city, the state, and the country.

## Paul Mikler

Oral History Memoir 1

Oviedo, Florida

0:00:00

### Introduction

Mikler

Well, the—in the early 19—around the 1900, there was a great immigration to America from Europe [*clears throat*], and my parents came to—as most Slovak immigrants came—they came into New York Harbor and then went wherever they could.

0:00:17

### Slovak immigrants in Oviedo

Mikler

So they organized—the group organized what they called “the Slavia Colony Company.” And they sent a delegation to Florida—the company did—to find a location for a new settlement. A small group came to Florida and settled here.<sup>1</sup> And they settled here somewhere around 1911, and, um, most of those people were poor folks. They were used to farming, so they had farming on their mind[sic]. They knew how to farm better than most other things, so this is how the colony originated.

0:00:52

### Importance of St. Luke’s Lutheran Church

Mikler

Now, the building we’re sitting in right now didn’t look like this then, but the first [St. Luke’s Lutheran] Church was built about 1925. This is it. I—I keeps[sic] coming back to this. You can’t separate our community from the church, ‘cause the church—the Lord was important to all, and—and that was—not that we were saints. We’re sinners like everybody, but the Lord meant something to us, and still does to us today.

0:01:19

### Celery industry

Mikler

The—the first settlers had difficulty finding a crop—a cash crop—that would be a money crop, you see? Uh, they tried different things, but not knowing the weather, soil conditions, and so forth, they made a lot of mistakes. There were disasters, and so it was not until the—I’d say the middle- to late- [19]20s when celery was introduced and celery became the big cop.

0:01:46

### Judge R. W. Ware’s praise of Oviedo

Mikler

And just a case in point: this happened in the 40s. Judge [R. W.] Ware, the County Judge of Seminole County, spoke to the Oviedo PTA [Parent-Teacher

---

<sup>1</sup> Oviedo, Florida.

Association], and this is some of what he said: he said, “Folks, you know, if — if all Seminole County was like the Oviedo community” — now, we’re talking about Oviedo, Slavia, Chuluota, and Goldenrod, and Wagner, the long — the — he said, “I’d be out of a job.” Now, what’s the moral to that? People did the right thing and crime was insignificant.

0:02:22

### **Driving a Ford Model T**

**Mikler** Well, believe it or not, when I was a teenager, my cousin had — a few people had automobiles. I remember getting the first [Ford] Model T, and I was about the happiest person in the world, riding on the back of that Model T. That wasn’t riding a wagon. It was different, but then later, as we grew up as teenagers, I remember we’d go and get a car from the [inaudible], and go to town, and park on the street, and watch people walk by. We’d buy us about 10 cents worth of bananas, which is about 15 or 20 pounds, you might say [*laughs*].

0:02:52

### **Florida State Road 426 and visiting Orlando**

**Mikler** I remember when [Florida State Road] 426 was dirt, and going to Orlando, on a wagon, you got up early in the morning, and it would take all day to get to Orlando and back home before darkness, and that was some — some experience. There were no public restrooms. If you got thirsty, you had to carry your own water. It was just a different world. In fact, I remember between Winter Park and Orlando, there were very few homes. Lake Ivanhoe was a wooded lake. It was just woods there. [inaudible] water in[?] the horse on Lake Ivanhoe.

0:03:28

### **Grocery and clothes shopping**

**Mikler** And some of you may not believe this, but you could go today in [inaudible] grocery store — the big one, you know? And they — the housewife — whoever was shipping — would take the list to the counter, and the storekeeper would take the order. If you wanted five pounds of sugar, he’d go the shelves, get five pounds of sugar, bring it back. “What else? Five cans of beans?” He’d bring that, and so that was sort of different from today, and then when Papa took us once a year to the Slemons [Department Store], the big store on Church Street, right on — off of Orange Avenue. Uh, Papa would tell Mr. [William Melville] Slemons, “Here’s the family. Dress ‘em up.” So we got our new shirts, pants, suit, cap, shoes, and all that, and that was quite an experience. The whole family went shopping. You see that today? I don’t think so.

**Unidentified** [*laughs*].

**Mikler** [*laughs*].

0:04:22

### **Increase in drug use**

**Mikler** I think the worst influence we ever had in the history of the world is drugs — the cocaine, and this sort of stuff. This — I feel for kids, I feel for parents, ‘cause I

know some of the finest people I know have had cases of that, and — and it's hard — it's hard — it's a hard problem to face, but we must face it squarely, and most people in America — early America — immigrants and otherwise — had to do it [inaudible] — do it themselves. The government was not involved in these things. He said they took Bible and prayer out of school, and they gave prostitution, cocaine, and alcohol, and pornography. That's how he started his sermon. Now, he was on the money, wasn't he?

0:05:12

#### **How students have changed over time**

**Mikler** Well, one thing I — as a coach, I couldn't stand — I don't think I'd allow a player who put a helmet on with hair longer than girl's hair, but that...

**Unidentified** [*laughs*].

**Mikler** I couldn't stand [*laughs*]. I couldn't — I couldn't stand it. I'm afraid we're coming to an age, where it's almost me first. Case in point: when I was teaching, uh, I could ask boys to help move the piano or to help the school do a job, and I'd have volunteers coming. No one asked for any money. It was all voluntarily and they did it with a smile. The later years, it wasn't so. They said, "Coach, whatcha payin'?" You know, that's — that's what we're into today.

0:05:55

#### **Future of the city, the state, and the country**

**Mikler** It's hard to say what's coming, but I can see a great change between, uh, family and community and state and nation. So the family unit — I'm afraid — and our modern civilization, uh — it's a different — it's a more difficult world to live in. The future, I hope will be good, but it just depends on how we are willing to discipline ourselves and — and accept absolutes. It's easy to do wrong, it's hard to do right, and we gotta make the choices. We have that choice.

*End of Interview*