

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Erie Railroad Project

Railroad Experiences

O. H. 717

RAYMOND BRODE

Interviewed

by

Jerry Mullen

on

November 19, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Erie Railroad Project

INTERVIEWEE: RAYMOND BRODE

INTERVIEWER: Jerry Mullen

SUBJECT: dispatcher, employment conditions, officials

DATE: November 19, 1975

M: This is an interview with Mr. Raymond Brode for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the History of Railroading on the Erie Railroad by Jerry Mullen, at Mr. Brode's home on Ravenwood Avenue, on November 19, 1975, at 4:00 p.m.

Tell me a little bit about your family and your parents.

B: Well, my father was a farmer. I lived on a farm for the first thirty years of my life. The railroad cut our farm in two, and I guess that's how I got interested in railroading. I started out working on a section in 1928 for about three months. Then I went operating.

M: First of all, where was your dad's farm?

B: In Ravenna, Ohio about three miles east of Ravenna. As I said, I worked three months on the section, then went operating. In 1941 I started dispatching until I was retired in 1972.

M: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

B: I had six brothers and one sister.

M: Are any of them on the railroad?

B: No. No other railroaders but me.

M: Were your parents originally from Ohio?

B: Oh yes, from Ravenna.

M: Did you work on their farm while you were growing up?

B: I worked on the farm, yes, when I was growing up.

M: Tell me something about your education.

B: Well, I went until one year in high school.

M: Where did you go to grade school?

B: Ravenna Township Centralized School.

M: Was it a one-room schoolhouse?

B: No. I went the second year they built a centralized school.

M: Then from there did you go into the service?

B: No. I went to work, and in 1938, I got married. I worked on the railroad too, of course.

M: How did you get interested in railroading?

B: The railroad ran through our farm. There was a tower nearby, and I used to go visit with the guys. They wanted to talk me into hiring out then as an operator.

M: Did you work anyplace else before you started on the railroad?

B: I worked for the Western Union for a while. That was about all. I guess I went from the Western Union to the railroad.

M: What did you do on the Western Union?

B: Peddled messages.

M: I see. What year was it that you started on the railroad?

B: 1928. I was on the section for three months. Then I went operating. I started in April of 1928, and I was an operator in July of 1928.

M: What's a section?

B: Track work.

M: Why did you transfer from the section to the operating department?

B: It looked like an easier job.

M: Would you describe the operator's task in his day?

B: Well, mostly then it was interlocking. We used to copy a lot of train orders over on the single track between SN and

Pymatuning and Shenango and BK.

M: How would an operator's day start when he arrived at work?

B: He would check up on all the trains and find out what was going on.

M: Did you perform any normal or repeated tasks during the day?

B: Oh yes, lots of them.

M: Would you describe an interlocking?

B: Well, an interlocking is throwing switches that are pipe-connected to the levers in the tower. You pull these big levers, and they throw the switches, crossovers and switches into the siding.

M: How long did you stay on that particular job?

B: I worked as an operator until 1941. That was about thirteen years. Then in 1941, I went to work as a dispatcher.

M: Did you have to learn various jobs as an operator?

B: Oh yes. There were a lot of jobs in those days. We had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven jobs between Kent and Meadville.

M: What were they? What were some of them?

B: We had one east at Ravenna, at FM Tower, and Braceville where the New York Central Railroad crossed, and SN where the first and second district crossed. Pam K was next, that was the train order office. That was north of Warren. All trains got orders there. Johnson's was next. That was likewise a train order office. Pymatuning, an interlocking plant and train order office, is where the first and second divisions come together again. Then at Shenango the Bessemer Railroad crossed us. Atlantic was a train order office. Stoney Point was a train order office. BK was interlocking and train order.

M: You had to learn all these different jobs?

B: I learned them all.

M: Where were you living at the time?

B: I was living at the farm over in Ravenna.

M: How did you make your way back and forth?

B: Riding trains and by car. I had a model T Ford.

M: There probably weren't very many highways?

B: Well, there were highways, but they were nothing like they are today.

M: Say if you spent a couple of days over in Meadville, would you stay there or go over each day?

B: No, stay over there. Stoney Point, Atlantic, Shenango, Pymatuning, we would sleep in the tower and go to the store to get something to eat.

M: Did they have any facilities for you other than the tower itself?

B: No. There were no facilities. The floor was the bed. You would go to the store somewhere to get some cold cuts for sandwiches.

M: How many hours a day did you work?

B: We worked eight hours then, eight hours a day and seven days a week.

M: This was in the 1930's?

B: That was in 1928 when I was hired out.

M: How many people were on the operator's roster at the time?

B: If I remember right, when I was hired out, I was number 180.

M: So there were 180 men that worked either full-time or part-time?

B: Most of them were full-time then.

M: When the Depression hit, how did it affect your job and your position?

B: I was furloughed from March of 1932 to 1937, five years.

M: Did you do anything else during that time?

B: Yes, I worked on WPA [Works Progress Administration] and worked for farmers and anything that you could get to do.

M: What kind of work did you do on the WPA?

B: Pick and shovel.

M: For any particular company?

B: No. It was just a government program. We fixed up roads and dug ditches and such things as that.

M: How old were you then?

B: I was about twenty-three or twenty-four.

M: Did you do this work in Ohio?

B: Yes, in Ravenna.

M: Do you remember any of the people that you worked with at that time, any of the operators?

B: Oh yes. I remember a lot of them.

M: Can you recall them?

B: Yes. I can recall a lot of them. At Ravenna there was an old agent there by the name of spencer. He was way up in his 70's. Freedom, there were two old fellows Charlie Brown and Heart Bringham. Braceville, there was Judge Chapman. BO was Charlie Grettsinger. These were all old fellows when I was working. I remember them distinctly. That's most of them.

M: Why do they stand out?

B: Well, they were just old-timers when I started. They were really old.

M: Did they teach you how to become an operator?

B: That's right.

M: What ways did they do that?

B: You would go in there, and they would explain everything to you. They would show you how to do all this. You would stay for two or three days and learn the job. At that time, of course, these men were really old. We didn't have any pension system then. So they worked as long as they could stick it out.

M: Would you describe what kind of train orders you would write during a day?

B: There was what we called a nineteen order. It was a running order that told the trains what they were to do. There was a thirty-one order that was a restricted order. Sometimes that would hold a train, and sometimes it would make them meet somewhere with another train. They were called restricting.

M: What do you mean by making them meet?

B: If two trains were going to meet at a siding, they each had to have a copy of that order. That's what we called restricted because one train couldn't go by the meeting point until the other one got there.

M: What other chores did you have to do around the tower?

B: Sweep the floor, wash the windows, clean the lanterns, shovel snow when it snowed.

M: Do you remember what the trains were like themselves?

B: They were all steam engines at that time. To ground seventy-five cars made a full train depending, of course, on the engines because some engines were bigger than others.

M: Did you have a permanent job? Did you eventually get a permanent job as an operator?

B: I didn't get a permanent job as an operator until 1938. I was agent at Orangeville.

M: That's after you were recalled?

B: Yes. I was recalled in 1937, and in 1938 I got a regular job.

M: What's involved in an agent's job?

B: Handling freight and express, collecting the money from the customers and mailing it into the treasurer's office, keeping the station clean and the windows washed and so forth.

M: Orangeville was in Pennsylvania, right?

B: Yes, just over the line.

M: What kind of customers did you have in that area?

B: We had coal. The two main ones we had over there were a coal dealer because we got in quite a bit of coal and a big gladiola farm that shipped out lots of gladiola bulbs all over the country. Those were the main things.

M: Was there a yard there?

B: No. Just a spur track for the coal yard.

M: So that was a minor agency?

B: That was very minor. Of course, we had a big water tank there where the engines used to stop and take water.

M: From there where did you go?

B: I went dispatching from there.

M: How were you chosen, or were you picked, or what manner?

B: You were chosen and asked to come in and learn to be a dispatcher.

M: Did you have to have any particular qualifications?

B: I suppose they knew you and figured you were levelheaded enough to be a dispatcher.

M: Who was the fellow who elected you?

B: Max Schwartz. He was chief dispatcher then.

M: What year was that?

B: That was 1941.

M: First of all, how long did the training process last?

B: I would say over a period of six months.

M: Would you describe what you had to do?

B: You had to go in and sit down beside the dispatcher and learn the business. You had to learn how he did it and also learn all the rules, timetables and so forth.

M: Did you have to do any riding on the trains?

B: Oh ride on them?

M: Yes.

B: You had to go ride on the railroad to learn it.

M: What were those limits?

B: Kent, Ohio to Meadville, Pennsylvania, about ninety miles.

M: Which part of the learning process was more difficult, riding the trains and familiarizing yourself with the territory or actually working?

B: I worked so much as an operator that I pretty well knew the railroad. It was no job to ride the trains and learn the road, but the main thing was keeping the trains moving all the time.

M: Then you eventually became a dispatcher?



B: In 1941 I worked extra. I worked steady all the time. At that time, I think we had a six day week, and then later on, we got five day weeks.

M: If you can sum it up, what did a dispatcher do from the time he got to work in the morning to the time he left?

B: He sat in the chair and answered the telephone and wrote down the times that the trains passed different points and issued train order.

M: What was his purpose?

B: To keep the trains moving on the division he had.

M: Do you recall any problems that you had as a dispatcher, typical, ordinary day problems?

B: You had plenty of problems.

M: Such as?

B: Engine breakdown, broken rail somewhere. Of course, a broken rail would put the signal through it. You would have to get the section men out to change the rail. Engines breaking down. Setting out crippled cars. There were lots of problems.

M: From the time you arrived early in the morning, what was the first thing you did when you got there?

B: When you got there in the morning, the man you relieved told you about all the trains that were out on the railroad and where they were and what they were going to do. He told you about any train orders that were outstanding. You got a cup of coffee, and you were ready to go.

M: Did you have hourly reports that you had to fill in or distribute to people on the tracks?

B: No, not that I recall.

M: What system of communication was used?

B: Telephone.

M: Did you work the telegraph?

B: No. I never learned the telegraph. It was all telephone.

M: By the time you started as an operator?

B: Yes.

- M: From 1941 on through the war, how did that differ from the decade of the 1930's?
- B: It was a lot different. We had so much business during the war. Lots of days I would sit down after my eight hours were up. I went back in the corner and started eating my lunch. The railroad was full of trains at that time, so many trains that you didn't know what to do with them.
- M: Why was there so much more?
- B: The war material and troop trains and so forth.
- M: Which trains were the more important trains?
- B: We had Ninety-eights. They were the most important. We had a lot of war materials. From the arsenal over at Windham, we used to get trainloads of bombs out of there. There were trains hauling trainloads of oil. Of course, we were always told that they were all important.
- M: Did you ever have any troubles such as derailments or wrecks while you were working?
- B: I had a head-on collision between two trains about the second night I worked up at Warren. We had a gauntlet for about four or five blocks through the city of Warren. Two trains met there one night, and one of them didn't get stopped for the signal. They met head-on.
- M: What happened?
- B: They wrecked a couple of engines and several cars.
- M: Was anyone hurt?
- B: No. There was one fireman on one of the engines that was shaken up a bit, but that was all.
- M: Was anyone fired over the incident or reprimanded?
- B: I don't remember about that. I know that the one engineer claimed that the rail was wet and couldn't get the train stopped, so it ran by the signal.
- M: What's a gauntlet?
- B: A gauntlet is where two tracks run practically together. One in running in almost the same line as the other one. In other words, two trains can't go through there at the same time.
- M: From a double track they merge into a single track?

B: Yes. They kind of merge into a single track for a ways, then they branch out again.

M: What's the purpose of doing that?

B: I suppose they wanted to save space since it goes right down the streets of Warren.

M: After the war years ended, did people see the change from steam engines to diesels coming?

B: Oh yes. They started getting diesels. I don't remember just what year it was now, but they gradually kept buying diesels and kept getting rid of the steam engines. Of course, the diesels were all bigger trains. People seemed to think they were cheaper.

M: Which one did you prefer?

B: I preferred the steam engines.

M: Why?

B: I don't know. The railroad wasn't the same after they got rid of the steam engines. They were really something. I didn't care for those diesels.

M: What was it about an old steam engine that you liked?

B: Oh, I don't know. The smoke and the puffing. It seemed more like a railroad with a steam engine.

M: They did the same job, didn't they?

B: Yes. They did the same job. Of course, the diesels hauled bigger trains, as I said, and they were practically as fast. The railroads figured they were going to be cheaper than the steam engines. So they all went to diesels and got rid of their steam engines.

M: When did that changeover begin?

B: I don't just remember the year. Probably in the 1940's sometime if I remember.

M: In the late 1940's?

B: I think it was the late 1940's.

M: When you got into the 1950's, how did the railroad change? Did you do the things the same, old way?

B: Well, practically the same, old way. Business dropped off

some, of course, after the war was over. We did quite a bit of business right along.

M: Do you remember any of the presidents on the railroad?  
A fellow named Woodruff, do you recall him?

B: Yes. I remember Woodruff as being president. Denning was a president.

M: If you can recall or if you ever knew, how did their philosophies differ in running the railroad then as compared to today?

B: I don't know how their philosophies differed, but the railroad seemed to run right along anyway no matter who was president.

M: Who was your boss as dispatcher?

B: Chief dispatcher.

M: What was his task besides being a boss?

B: He was in charge of the dispatchers and movement of all the trains and making up all of the trains and in charge of the operators.

M: Who was the first one you worked for?

B: The first one I worked for was Bill Williams. Then I worked for Max Schwartz. Then I worked for John McNeilas and Jim Kelly and John Short and Book Staver and Barrion and Creland. Creland was chief when I left.

M: Who was the first man you worked with? First of all, did you work in downtown Youngstown?

B: Yes. I worked in the office down there in Youngstown on the fifth floor. The old-timers there were Charlie Collopy, Gus Heckman, Harry Wetsal, Dessard Chadwick, Burt Jones, Frank Flarity. These were all old fellows.

M: Who was the best fellow you worked for? Who was the best chief that you worked for?

B: The best chief that I ever worked for was Jim Kelly.

M: Why?

B: He was a good man to work for, that's all.

M: How did he do things differently?

B: He treated the men fairly. If you didn't do what was right,

you got told about it, and then it was forgotten. He didn't keep bringing it up to you.

- M: What was the hardest thing about your job as a dispatcher? I don't mean particularly the job itself, but outside factors that might have weighed on it.
- B: The hardest job I guess was not to delay the manifest trains and keep the superintendent happy.
- M: Did you have a lot of traffic in the 1940's compared to the 1950's?
- B: Oh yes, lots more. I recall we kept a record one time of trains that passed Stoney Point; that was a single track. Sixty-nine trains went by Stoney Point in a twenty-four hour period, and that was a record. That was a lot of trains.
- M: Do you recall what year that was in? Which period was it in?
- B: I think that was in 1942, I believe.
- M: With the increase in volume, how did that affect your job?
- B: It just made a lot more work for you, that's all.
- M: I suppose things were kind of hectic?
- B: They sure were. As I said before, there were many days that you didn't even get a chance to eat your lunch. Some days you took it home with you, and some days you would sit down and eat it after you got done with your work.
- M: Did you work with another dispatcher at the time?
- B: Yes. There were two dispatchers. One handled the first district, and the other handled the second district. We sat right across from each other. Just a partition separated us.
- M: Which division did you work in?
- B: I worked both, but most of my time I worked on the second district.
- M: Which one would you consider the easier?
- B: The second district was easier for me because I worked more out on the road there, and I knew all the operators and a lot of the trainmen on that division.
- M: How many passenger runs did they run during the 1940's?

- B: I believe there were something like ten or eleven passenger trains in each direction between Youngstown and Cleveland in that time.
- M: How many coaches per train?
- B: They ran anywhere from three to seven or eight.
- M: Considering the fact that highways as we know them today were kind of nonexistent, did most people travel by trains?
- B: Yes. There were lots of trains. I recall one time on a Sunday, we had a train come from Pittsburgh to Cleveland which was always crowded. This one Sunday night there were twenty-one coaches on it and there were still people standing up on it going from Youngstown to Cleveland. You don't see that any more.
- M: Did you have passenger trains between any other cities?
- B: They ran from Cleveland to Youngstown and onto the P&LE Railroad to Pittsburgh. They ran between New York and Chicago, which came through here. That's it.
- M: Did they arrive at particular times during the day?
- B: Oh yes. They were all on a schedule. They were supposed to arrive on schedule. Sometimes they were late.
- M: Why would they be late? What would cause them to be late?
- B: Several reasons: Bad weather, equipment failure, delayed by other trains.
- M: If you delayed a train a lengthy amount of time, did you hear about it?
- B: Yes. You heard about it very plainly.
- M: Who would issue a warning?
- B: Chief dispatcher.
- M: Did you ever receive any reprimands?
- B: Oh yes, yes, yes. I had a lot of them. I had quite a few of them. I threw them all away now.
- M: Do you feel that they were all justified?
- B: No. None of them were justified.
- M: Why?

- B: It was a tough job. Sometimes you couldn't help it. But, of course, it was always easier for somebody to sit back and say, "You should have done it this way." Well, you know yourself the next day that you should have done it the other way. You don't have to have anybody tell you that.
- M: What was the best tool you had as a person as yourself as a dispatcher?
- B: The best dispatcher?
- M: No. The best tool or gift you had as a dispatcher? How did you employ it and what do you think it was as far as temperament?
- B: Good judgment, I guess. I never let it bother me too much. Of course, there were times when you couldn't help getting shook up. I always managed to keep a pretty level head. When I got home from work, I forgot about it until the next day when I got back to work.
- M: Did you work during the daytime all of the time?
- B: No. I worked all shifts, days, afternoons, and nights, until I got a regular job. I got a daylight job for the last thirteen years.
- M: How did things vary from shift to shift?
- B: As far as work was concerned, the third trick was always the best trick to work. There were no officials around to bother you, and nobody to look over your shoulder to see what you were doing. In the daytime, there were always officials around. There was always somebody watching you all of the time.
- M: You sat in a office in Youngstown. You performed your job there for thirty years or so, right?
- B: Yes. I retired in 1972. From 1941 to 1972, most of my time was in the office at Youngstown.
- M: If you were working as a dispatcher during the normal course of a day and a major accident or a breakdown occurred, what would you do from Youngstown to affectively repair or speed up the service?
- B: There wasn't much you could do. If it was bad and both tracks were blocked, then they would detour trains over another railroad to get them around that. Anything short of that, well, you just had to wait until they got the repairs made. Trains had to wait.

- M: If you had to pick out the most important job on the railroad as far as actually moving freight, would you consider yours the most important?
- B: I would say, yes. Yes, sir. A lot of people don't realize that. I would say it was, yes. You had charge of all the trains on your division and had to keep them going.
- M: In other words, were these engineers and conductors of the trains responsible to you for direction?
- B: Yes. They were in a way. If you wanted them delayed or stopped, you stopped them. And if you wanted them to go, you kept them going. Indirectly, they were under your control.
- M: Getting back to the chief dispatchers, why did they vary? Why did you consider some more compatible or easier to work with than others?
- B: That's just the difference in people. Some people make a good boss, and some don't.
- M: How would you be appointed to be a chief dispatcher?
- B: That was done by the superintendent. The superintendent had charge of appointing chief dispatcher, and he appointed whomever he wanted.
- M: What qualities did you have to have to be chief dispatcher?
- B: You had to know the railroad and know the job and all the duties before you could be appointed to it.
- M: Did you have to know much about the equipment to run a railroad?
- B: You had to have an understanding of the engines and how much tonnage they would haul. You had to know all the physical characteristics of the railroad.
- M: What do you mean by physical characteristics?
- B: All the ins and outs, the territory over which the railroad ran and where the different shippers were located, grades, uphill and downhill, what tonnage you could pull with the engines.
- M: Would you describe what an investigation is and the purpose of it?
- B: When you did something wrong, you were called in for what you might say a trial. You had to answer all the questions that were asked of you. After it was all over with, the officials all read it, and they decided if you were guilty



or not. If you were guilty, they recommended what punishment you would get which was usually time off; five, ten, thirty days without pay.

M: Did you know many men who got fired?

B: Yes. I know a couple that were fired when I was working. Andy Gibson from Niles and Vince Johnson from Hubbard were both fired. One was due to a head-on collision on a single track, and one was for not stopping a train that had a train aboard which had a hotbox. They derailed and tore out a bridge and dumped fifteen or twenty cars of ore.

M: I suppose your diesel engines improved in quality. How did railroading change as far as personnel on the railroad and as far as equipment going into the 1960's?

B: I don't know. There was too much change. First it was all diesel then and no steam engines. It ran along about the same as it always had.

M: Were there as many people working in the 1960's as there were in the 1940's?

B: No. There weren't as many. They eliminated quite a number of jobs. They cut down everything they could to save money.

M: Would you describe the different types of signal systems that engineers used to move their trains about?

B: Most of them were automatic signals. Green, of course, was go, and red was stop.

M: I believe there was a system called a CTC [Centralized Traffic Control] system?

B: Oh yes. The CTC system was put in there. One man controlled signals for distances up to twenty-five miles. He also controlled the switches by pushing a button.

M: That kind of eliminated a few jobs then, right?

B: That eliminated a lot of jobs. As I say, at that time we had operators at Leavittsburg, Shenango, and Buchanan, three towers then where we had about a dozen when I started.

M: Undoubtedly that was better for the railroad as far as cutting down on expenses for the payroll. Do you think it was more efficient?

B: Yes, it cut down on the payroll. No, I don't think so.

M: Why not?

- B: I don't think it did. The trains didn't get over the railroad as fast as they did before they had it.
- M: What ways were people able to do things that machines couldn't do?
- B: If something happened to the CTC machine and it wasn't working, then you had a lot of train delay. Of course, when the CTC was working properly, everything was fine. But when it went bad, then things stood still.
- M: I suppose there were a few women who worked on the railroad. Do you remember any of them?
- B: I remember them all. I never forgot one of them. When I went to work, we had two women working over north of Warren in Cortland and Stoney Point out in the towers. Then they gradually retired. In the later years, the only ones who were working mostly were in the office in Youngstown as monitors and so forth.
- M: Can you recall a couple of women who worked in the towers?
- B: Oh yes. The first job I worked, Josephine Cook was the operator, and she got married. I worked for her when she got married. There was another one named Minny Chapman. She worked up at Johnson's. Genevieve Black worked up at Stoney Point.
- M: Weren't these jobs kind of physically demanding?
- B: No. Not these because they were all train orders. Nothing to copying train orders. No interlocking levers.
- M: Who was the meanest operator you ever worked with as a dispatcher?
- B: Meanest operator?
- M: Grouchy disposition.
- B: Oh, I don't know. I don't remember any who were like that.
- M: Did railroading make you grouchy?
- B: No. I had as much fun in my later years as I did in the beginning. I always enjoyed it, and it was interesting. I liked the job.
- M: Do you think you would have preferred another job if you could have worked one?
- B: No, I don't think so. Talking about operators, there were

some superintendents who I worked for who I thought were pretty miserable.

M: Even if you had the talents to do something else, you were perfectly satisfied?

B: I was perfectly satisfied. I always liked the job.

M: How do you think the attitudes on the railroad changed from the steam era to the diesel era?

B: I don't know. When the unions got going, things changed then. I would say quite a bit. Everybody was fighting, of course, to better themselves. I would say that's about all the changes I can think of.

M: Do you think men preferred to work with steam rather than diesel?

B: No. The engine crew said that they liked the diesels because they could go to work with a white shirt on around the diesel. The old steam engines got them pretty black by the time they were through. With the diesels, it was just like driving an automobile.

M: The Erie has been through a few bankruptcies in its history. Do you personally know of any reasons why this occurred so often?

B: No, I don't really know. That was a little bit out of my line. Of course, I've had my ideas. I think somebody was stealing most of it.

M: How do you think things could have been done better?

B: I don't know. I haven't any solution for that.

M: If you had an opportunity to change anything, what would you change?

B: I don't know. I've seen a lot of officials that I thought didn't know how to run the railroad. One thing about the railroad, they would spend a dollar to save a nickel anytime, and that was one thing that didn't help them any.

M: In what ways?

B: Some of the things they did were really foolish. It cost them more than they made out of it.

M: Do you recall any examples of that?

B: Yes. I can recall one where they were putting a single

track between Leavittsburg and North Randall. That was a very stupid move. It cost them plenty when they did that with the overtime that they paid the crews and delayed the trains, which if you figured out in money would have amounted to a lot.

M: What was the purpose of changing that track?

B: I don't know. Some guy got the idea in his head that one track was enough up through there, so they just took one of them up. I suppose that they saved taxes on it. But the savings they made from the taxes didn't begin to make up for the loss in wages and delays to the trains.

M: Were there any incidents during your career that kind of stand out compared to others any particular day, any particular train crash, anything of any sort?

B: Well, no. The most important thing was on July 16, 1972 when the company doctor disqualified me.

M: Do you mean you were medically disqualified? What did they say was wrong with you that would do that to you?

B: I had a heart attack in 1961, and then I got disqualified in 1972.

M: Did you want to retire at the time?

B: Yes.

M: Why?

B: Working conditions: mostly.

M: What do you mean?

B: Some guys that I had to work with like the superintendent and the chief dispatcher.

M: You said that Jim Kelly was the best one who you worked for. What was he like?

B: He was the best. He was pretty gruff, but he treated you all right. If you were right, he stuck up for you; if you were wrong, he told you about it.

M: If the other chief dispatchers had an attitude like that, do you think that they would have compared to Kelly as a chief dispatcher? Is that the only reason you prefer him over the others?

B: No, I don't know. He knew the railroad, and he knew what to do. He wasn't afraid to go ahead and do it. He was just a

good railroader, that's all.

M: Who were some of the fellows once you got a permanent job that you worked with from day to day?

B: Andy Gibson, Tony Straw, Johnny Short, Ralph Sodderno, Carl Blake were the older ones. In later years, Bill Arnold, Ronny Stallsmith.

M: As time went on from the 1940's through the 1950's and to the 1960's, do you think the older men who worked on the railroad were more proficient on their jobs?

B: Well, that's kind of hard to say. They had a lot of experience. Maybe when they started, they weren't any better than the younger ones who are starting today.

M: Were you ever involved with training dispatchers?

B: Oh yes. I broke in several.

M: Was it something you did voluntarily or involuntarily?

B: It was voluntary. We were usually short of help anyway, and if you wanted to get laid off, you had to have somebody relieve you. So it was to your advantage to train somebody, so you could get a day off once in a while.

M: From the period of the steam engines, do you think the officials of the railroad, the men who were responsible for the day to day decisions, do you think the quality increased?

B: No. They weren't near the quality as they were when I started to work. When I started to work on the railroad, the officials were efficient. On the new railroad later on, they got a bunch of men who didn't know enough to come in out of the rain.

M: How did the older men who worked in the 1930's and the 1940's learn their jobs that made them better officials?

B: They had the experience then. Of course, they spent all their life at it, and they had a lot of experiences. These younger ones, of course, had the experience, but some of them thought that they knew more than the old men did.

M: Who were some of the superintendents that you worked for?

B: When I started work, Bill White was superintendent. Then we had a fellow by the name of Murphy and Baker, McMullan.

M: What were they responsible for? What were their positions

and duties?

B: They were the bosses of the whole division. They were over everybody on the whole division.

M: Did you come into day to day contact with them?

B: Yes. We were in contact with the superintendent most of the time. Of course, his office was right next door to ours most of the time.

M: A past president, a fellow by the name of Moonshire, wrote a letter recently on his retirement from the railroad in Marion, Ohio, and he kind of blamed the officials of the railroad for their bad management, and it has been stated quite a few times. I suppose that those in charge were kind of directly responsible for the outcomes of the railroad and its business. Do you think that there were things that the engineers and conductors and yardmen could have done to increase the efficiency of the railroad?

B: Oh yes, sure. I think so; lots of times.

M: In what ways?

B: Speed it up a little. They didn't always hurry.

M: Was there any competition between your railroad, the Erie, and other railroads?

B: Oh yes. There was competition between the railroads.

M: In the passenger and the freight business?

B: Passenger and freight business, yes.

M: Did you get to know any guys from other railroads?

B: No, very, very few. I might have known two or three. I met several at the dispatchers' convention in Chicago where they were all there, and that's about all.

M: You retired in 1972 you said. What was your retirement dinner like? Would you describe the events of the day?

B: I had a dinner that was attended by about ninety people. I got a nice present. It was a good time.

M: Do you keep in touch with any of the fellows you used to work with?

B: No, not much. I see some of them. I was down in Florida last winter, and I looked up two or three guys that I used

to work with who have moved down there; I visited them. I haven't been around the railroad much since I've left.

M: Compared to other industries and professions, do you think railroading is a more difficult or easier task?

B: I don't know about that. I never did anything but the railroad, so I don't know how it is in other industries.

M: Is there anything else you might like to add?

B: Well, I might say that when I was working in 1928 I got thirty-five cents an hour working in the track. When I went operating, I got about sixty cents an hour. When I started dispatching, I think the daily rate was thirteen dollars. And when I quit the daily rate was fifty-one dollars.

M: So you think the pay kept up with the times?

B: No. I think we should add more for the responsibility we had, but we couldn't convince the railroad of that.

M: There's a merger that should take effect within the next six or seven months, and the Erie will for all practical purposes fade out of existence and become part of another railroad. Do you think that was inevitable considering the Erie's history?

B: Well, I don't know. I don't understand why they couldn't make money because they always did. I think they had too many big officials who were drawing big salaries and expense accounts. I think that they could have gotten rid of a lot of them and saved a lot of money that way. But it seems that when they want to save money, why they knock off the poorest paid jobs that they have which were the section men.

M: Do you think there is anything of value on the Erie system that will kind of pass out of existence when the Erie is lost?

B: I don't know about that. I imagine there will be.

M: Do you think that it's important for the Erie to exist as a railroad?

B: I think so, yes. I think it's important because there is no other way of moving freight like the railroads. I think they're pretty important.

M: The Erie's described, or its emblem includes the phrase of friendly service route; do you think you know the reason for that?

B: No, I don't.

M: Do you think the men who worked for the Erie were a different breed of men than other railroaders?

B: No, I don't think so.

M: Well, now that you're retired, I suppose you spend more time with your family?

B: Yes, that's right, most of my time. I have four boys who are all married and have families. I visit around with them and help them do odd jobs. Last winter my wife and I went down to Florida and stayed there all winter. We have a travel trailer. We took that down and spent the winter in Florida.

M: How do you think your family liked or disliked your job while you were on the railroad?

B: I don't think it affected them through me. I have one boy who's a brakeman at Briar Hill. He's the only one who went railroading.

M: How did they take it when you were away from home for a few days at a time?

B: Do you mean now?

M: No, as an operator when you traveled during the 1930's.

B: Most of that time was before I had any children when I was single yet.

M: I think I've run out of questions. Have you run out of answers?

B: Well, that's all I can think of now.

M: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW