YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Erie Railroad Project

Railroad Experience

O. H. 402

JAMES O'CONNOR

Interviewed

by

Jerry Mullen

on

October 27, 1975

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES O'CONNOR

INTERVIEWER: Jerry Mullen

SUBJECT: Notable Travelers, World War II on the Railroad, Employer-Employee Relations, Union Position, Bunkhouses

DATE: October 27, 1975

M: This is an interview with Mr. James J. O'Connor of the Erie-Lackawanna Railroad, with Jerry Mullen of the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, concerning Railroading in Youngstown, on October 27, 1975, at Mr. O'Connor's home at 3:30 p.m.

Just to get started, can you tell me a little bit about your parents and your family?

O: Oh yes, I remember a lot about my parents. My dad was born in 1866, and he died in 1947. I remember him very well. My mother died when I was just a child. I was thirteen. She died in 1919 with the flu.

M: How many sisters and brothers did you have?

O: I had five sisters and five brothers. They're all dead now, but one brother who lives in San Mateo, California, and two sisters are still living. One lives in Warren.

M: Do you remember what your school days were like?

O: Very well, yes.

M: Can you describe them?

O: I went through the eighth grade at St. Columba's, and that was the end of my schooling.

M: You began your career on the railroad in 1929. Why did you decide to go to work on the railroad?

O: That's a difficult question to answer. I think maybe because my dad didn't want me to.

M: Was he on the railroad?

O: No. He was a city policeman here for years before he died.

M: Do you remember what your first training was like, what your first position on the railroad was?

O: There actually was no training. You were just hired and went out and did your job. There was no pulmonary work given to you at all or any training of any kind.

M: So you began work in 1926?

O: In September of 1926.

M: Then you worked through the Depression. Can you recall what that was like?

O: I didn't work through the Depression. I was furloughed most of the time. I would work during the summer time during the war seasons. Then in the long bout of November and December after the lakes closed, there would be a big furlough and we would be laid off. That went on until approximately 1934 and 1935 when I began to have steady work, and I began to work steady ever since then.

M: What was it like in the 1920's on the railroad?

O: It was a pleasure to go to work. You looked forward to it with maybe anxiety as to what was going to happen on the next trip. Something was different on every trip that you made. There were challenges. There were the old steam engines we used to have. There was sort of a love for them and for the work. I think I've led an interesting life. I think my whole of railroading was interesting.

M: How did your day begin?

O: We never had a day begin. Our day might begin at one o'clock in the morning or nine o'clock at night. It was never just an eight hour day. Many times you would go to Cleveland or Meadville or Canton and lay over there for twelve or fourteen or sixteen hours. Then you would be called to come back again.

In those days, I was an extra man on the extra list. You worked a variety. I was called for vacancies on extra jobs or extra crews might be called.

M: Were you first employed in Youngstown?

O: In Youngstown, yes. Dan Madden was the train master who employed me.

M: What was your first position?

O: Brakeman, road brakeman.

M: What were your responsibilities as far as your normal workday?

O: As a road brakeman there were many responsibilities. Of course, under the direct supervision of the conductor, whatever assignments he gave you to do is what you actually had to do. After you qualified as a road brakemen, you were also a passenger brakeman, passenger baggage man. Of course, after I was promoted, I was a passenger conductor and a freight conductor. Throughout the years of my life on the railroad, I worked all of those assignments. I've got a resume that I made for a case that went to the first division of the Adjustment Board. Maybe I'll give you that.

M: Does this describe your responsibilities of a brakeman?

O: No, this describes more or less my history. This paragraph that I was going to read to you was from a resume of a case that I made before the Public Law Board number 1069. There was a dispute between the brotherhood railroad trainmen. I should say the United Transportation Union and the Erie-Lackawanna Railroad. In that submission to the board . . . I'll read this and maybe it will give you a better idea of my history on the railroad. This goes on to say that my name is James J. O'Connor. I was born June 1, 1906, and employed by the Erie Railroad Company as road trainman on September 29, 1926. I was promoted to road conductor on May 8, 1937, passenger conductor on August 26, 1946. During the years 1932 through 1937, I acted as stationmaster for the Erie Railroad Company in relief capacity at both Youngstown, Ohio and Cleveland, Ohio. On two occasions I worked there regularly at Youngstown passenger station for approximately one year each. In 1937, I was elected Local Chairman for the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen to represent road conductors and trainmen on the Mahoning Division First District, resigning as release stationmaster. In 1959, I was elected General Chairman of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen representing conductors, trainmen, and yardmen on the Erie Railroad system. After serving two four-year terms, I returned to train service in 1967. In December 1967, I was conductor on trains 29 and 28 operating between Youngstown and Cleveland, Ohio, continuing on that assignment until my retirement June 30, 1971.

M: Can you tell me the difference between the old engines of 1920 and the cabooses and the other ones you used in the 1960's and 1970's?

O: In 1926 when I was hired, it was all steam engines. There were no diesels at all. The Briar Hill steel and the cindering plant at Hubbard and the sand plant at Mahoning and some of the industries around here had their own power which was nothing more than an automobile motor mounted on a framework on the tracks. It was driven by an automobile motor or something a little larger than that. It would have the power to pull two or three cars. They used to use it to manipulate the cars around for their own convenience. On the railroad there were no diesels at all. Of course, we had big power of hauling the ore between Cleveland and Youngstown in the summer time. We used to have three, steam engines, generally one on the head end and two on the rear end of a train coming out of the riverbed. The two on the rear end would push the train up to North Randall. Then they would cut away, and we would take the train with the one engine on the head end down to Youngstown. We used to handle a lot of coal from Youngstown to Cleveland. It used to come from the Western Maryland Railroad, and we would get it off of the P&LE [Pittsburgh & Lake Erie] at Youngstown and handle it into the lakes in Cleveland. On those trains, we used to have generally two steam engines on the head end as far as North Randall, and the helper engine would cut off and the one steam engine would take the train on down the hill to the docks where they loaded the coal.

M: What was the purpose of the coal?

O: The coal was shipped out onto the lakes to the various points all over the country, all over the world I might say.

M: What was the job of a fireman at the time?

O: A fireman had a pretty tough job in those days. Of course, the head brakeman used to give a big assistance, if he was any good at all, to the fireman. Most of the smaller engines were steam and hand-fired. They shoveled coal. It was nothing for them to shovel twenty ton of coal between Youngstown and Cleveland on duty.

M: One man?

O: One man. Of course, he generally had the help of the head brakeman. But then the stokers came into being. The bigger engines came in with the stokers on them. The stokers fired the boilers.

M: Do you mean mechanically?

O: Yes. That was through the conveyer that drove the coal from the tank of the engine up into the firebox. Then it was ground up and sprayed out into the firebox through steam or air pressure.

M: Then it was converted into steam within the engine itself.

O: It would go into the firebox. The fire would heat the water and convert the water to steam.

M: Were the engines as powerful then as they are today?

O: According to the size of them, I would think comparatively that the diesels are much more powerful than what the steam engines were. Of course, you take a steam engine that was pulling as much as these diesel units would pull in a day, and they were a marvelous piece of machinery.

M: Can you remember the names of any of the steam engines? Did they name them?

O: Oh yes. There were the Old Forty Hundreds, the Thirty Hundreds, the Thrity-one Hundreds, Twenty-nine Hundreds, which were the passenger locomotives. Other locomotives were the Twenty-five Hundred and the Twenty-seven Hundred. We used to have what we called the Old Mother Hubbard. That was where the cab of the engine was halfway between the back end of the boiler and the head end of the engine.

M: What was the purpose of that?

O: Actually no purpose. That was just really the way they were built. The fireman was on one side and the engineer was on the opposite side. Of course, the yard engines were a smaller type of engine than the road engine.

M: You worked a fourteen hour day. Is that right?

O: Sixteen hour.

M: Sixteen hour? Can you remember what an average run in miles would take you every day?

O: Well that would depend. We would have short trips that we would make from here to Shenango, Youngstown to Leavittsburg, Youngstown to Farrell and back, and longer trips over the division from Youngstown to Meadville and back, or Youngstown to Kent and back, or Youngstown to Cleveland and back. Many, many times, we would outlaw going to Kent. Forty-five miles, we would never make it in sixteen hours. We would outlaw going to Cleveland, sixty-six miles. We would outlaw going to Meadville, fifty-five miles. I would have to be dragged in. Of course, you were dragged in then by some

other crew, not an automobile or a taxicab, but you'd actually be dragged in by a railroad crew.

M: Why did it take so long to complete one run?

O: Various happenings, derailments, engines running out of water in which they would have to kill the fire in them and then block the trains behind them. In those days there was a lot of that. They would run out of water and have to kill the engine and knock the fire out of it. Then there was congestion. There were so many trains that they couldn't get them into the yard. I've seen many times where we would go as far as Ravenna, and from Ravenna to Kent; there would be just one train behind the other tied up waiting to get into the yard.

M: Can you remember what kind of freight you hauled, besides coal and ore?

O: The big thing in this division was the coal and the ore. Other than that, miscellaneous freight,most of it going to the steel mills in this area. Of course, on the main line there was different freight. On the mainline we hauled Pennsylvania's freight.

M: Do you remember what kind of traffic signals were used in the 1930's?

O: The automatic signal type.

M: Would you describe that?

O: Well, I don't know just how to describe it. Do you mean the operation of the signals?

M: Yes, sir.

O: Of course, you had the signal that at that time was either in the red position which meant stop and proceed, or there may be an order block attached to it to stop and tell the dispatcher. It may be an approach signal which would be a yellow indication to approach the next signal prepared to stop, or a clear signal which would be in a green aspect which would mean that the tracks ahead were clear. There were many types of signals. We used to have the old manual-type signals on the branch lines down on the New Castle branch between Farrell and New Castle and between Lisbon and Niles.

M: How did that operate?

O: By manual, the operator operated it. You would have an operator there and if the signal was in the red position, you would stop and go in to find out what the orders were and what was going on. Of course, in those days, and I think they still do, they run those branches by train order. Am I right?

M: Yes, they do. Were there more employees when you started working on the railroad than when you finished?

O: Oh, much more. Well, the trains were smaller. There were more crews. There was a bigger operation. On the old Erie I would say up until the merger with the DL&W,[Delaware, Lackawanna & Western] the trains had more and more crews involved. When they hired out, we used to have around twenty-three or twenty-four rounds crews or pull crews that worked out of Youngstown. I doubt today if they have any.

M: What's the difference between a rounds crew and a pull crew?

O: They're the same thing. They operate on a first-in first-out basis. If you have, say, five or eight or ten in a pull, they come in and might be eight times out. As the crews are used ahead of them, they're called on their turn. They may be called for Meadville. They might be called for Cleveland. They might be called for Kent or they might be called for Shenango or Mahoning turn, or Leavittsburg turn. I'm talking about years ago. That's not the way it's operated today.

M: You're speaking about the 1920's and 1930's. How important do you think the railroad was to Youngstown as far as industry and its financial wealth is concerned?

O: If there weren't the railroads, then there wouldn't be the steel mills. They had the outlets. The railroads were of major importance to every city they operated in. But particularly in this area, when I first started on the railroad, we used to get shipments of steel out of here for California, Alaska, foreign countries, all over the world. You never hear tell of any more. I think the railroads were the most important things that we ever had in this country, not only to the industry, but to the community.

M: Would you describe some of the railroad officials of the 1920's and 1930's, the train masters, the superintendents, whoever the officials were?

O: Oh, I could go back and have my own ideas of many of them.

M: Can you remember any in particular?

O: I can remember old Dan Madden, the man who hired me. He was an old engineer on the Erie Railroad. He then became train master, and was train master for years. He was the one who hired me, and he was the one who promoted me to stationmaster at the Youngstown depot. He was insistant for a long while that I take a train master's job, and of course, after I was elected local chairman to represent the men. many promotions to an official would have been out of the window. I wouldn't have accepted them. The officials, I suppose, were a group of people in those days that we would look up to to get us out of trouble. If we got in trouble, the first thing we went to was the road fireman or the train master or the superintendent if we knew him. Generally, you found a fellow that was receptive to what your troubles were and you wouldn't hear any more about it. It would be covered up, and the derailment or whatever was involved, that would be the end of it. But then as time went on, later in the 1940's, it seemed that the attitude of the officials toward the employees had changed. If there was a sideswipe, or a derailment, or a fellow late for work, he was called in for an investigation. There was a big issue made out of it. You were disciplined.

M: Can you tell why those attitudes changed on the part of the officials?

O: No, I suppose it was because the officials that were promoted didn't have the background such as Dan Madden, Tom Mairhur who was road foreman of engines for years. They mingled with them; they knew their families; they visited their homes. There was more of a direct relationship. In the late 1940's and middle 1940's, that seemed to be wearing away. The officials felt more or less that they were in an elite group and were above the employees. Association more or less seemed to break off.

M: When did you get your first promotion?

O: I was promoted to road conductor on May 8, 1937.

M: What were your responsibilities then?

O: Of course, you only worked as a conductor when you were the senior man of the crew. Your responsibility as a conductor was to oversee the operation of the train or give orders after they were relayed to you by the dispatcher or by the superintendent. You operated your train from whatever point on the railroad you were operating.

M: Do you think that when you were promoted that changed your attitude as far as the railroad is concerned?

O: No, I don't believe so. It was something you looked forward to. You knew it was coming. Of course in those days, you might say I got hired in 1926 and was promoted to freight conductor in 1937. Of late years a man would probably be promoted to a conductor in two or three years.

M: Why is there such a difference?

O: I think the attitude of management is one thing. They want to give the man the knowledge he was going to accept as a conductor which was over that of a brakeman, and when he became a conductor, he was more interested in his work. He performed probably better than he did just being a brakeman. I think it gave a man incentive to be a little more particular about his work.

M: How about if we leave the 1930's and go on into the 1940's? At the beginning of the First World War from the time of Pearl Harbor to after Pearl Harbor, how did railroading change?

O: That wasn't the First World War; that was the Second.

M: That was the Second.

O: Things on the division had changed considerably. The arsenal plant was being built over in Ravenna. I can remember that we used to have our rounds crews or pull crews go in there, train after train after train with slag, ashes for the building of that railroad in there. Then they were shipping a lot of that stuff out of there. The railroads got terribly busy, both the passenger and the hauling of troops. We used to have troop train after troop train. During the Second World War, the normal business probably multiplied eight or ten times.

M: Did you have to put in more hours a day?

O: Oh, yes. There were a lot of our younger fellows taken into the service. The older men that were left on the railroads were working sixteen hours out of every twenty-four for several years seven days a week. You didn't get any days off at all.

M: Besides the arsenal freight, what other kind of freight did you haul during the war?

O: An awful lot of government material, shipments here from the steel mills for government operations and the building of war materials. That was one of the big things that multiplied our freight business so much.

M: Do you remember where the troops started and began on the Erie Railroad?

O: Oh, yes. They used to have troop trains that would run from Hoboken to Chicago, and of course, the opposite direction too. They would run troop trains, well, on all of the railroads. We used to maybe pick up a train off of the Pennsylvania at Youngstown and take it to Cleveland. Maybe it would be enroute to some part northeast of here or out in the west, northwest of here. We used to pick up freight trains at Cleveland and bring them down to Youngstown. They would be going out to camp, this side of Shenango, Camp Reynolds. There used to be a lot of troop trains going in and out of Camp Reynolds there.

M: Was there a lot of secrecy?

O: Yes, there was a lot of secrecy. In fact, I remember one incident of a very good, close friend of mine who was taken into the service, Pete Sullivan, who is passed away a number of years ago. Another fellow that was a former Delaware-Lackawanna Western conductor later became Vice-President of the Brotherhood of Trainmen and just retired a couple of years ago. He was Bill Wile and was also commander on this troop train. When the troop train comes out of Chicago over the Erie and down to Kent and through the communications of the dispatchers from Chicago into Youngstown, why, the word was made that this troop train was going to be at Kent. When the men found out about it, there was a number of us who drove over to Kent to see Pete Sullivan and old Bill Wile. We knew them very well. Bill Wile was the commander of this train. As the train proceeded east after this group that was over in Kent visiting the train, this Bill Wile raised particular hell about who let out the secrets of the operation of that train over the Erie. There was quite a bit of an investigation done about it from the government as to how it was leaked out and how the men in Youngstown found out that the train was going to be at Kent and the approximate time of it.

M: He was quite serious about it then?

O: Oh, yes. He was very serious about it. Most of those troop operations were more or less secret. I handled many of them. I was conductor on the movements of troop trains.

M: What do you remember about the troop trains in particular, say an average train that would carry troops?

O: Generally, there would be anywhere from fourteen to twenty cars. There would be several commanding officers on there.

The balance would consist of troops. You take a twenty car train; that would be a movement of somewhere between 1500 and 1800 men. Then we also had quite a few hospital train operations. I handled a lot of the operations between the different parts of the railroad. Those were trains that were set up as complete hospitals. You would have doctors, nurses, attendants of all different description on those types of trains.

M: Why was that? Was that for returning soldiers who had been wounded?

O: No, actually they were moving the equipment from one point to another for some operations that they were going to have at one of the specific camps over there out through the country. Most generally, there wouldn't be too many troops on there. There may be a number of nurses, doctors, and attendants, but there wouldn't actually be troops on there.

M: What was a typical day like for you during the war?

O: Sixteen hours of hard work out of every twenty-four for several years.

M: Can you remember the various jobs you did during the war?

O: Well, I was on various runs. I was on passenger trains between Marion and Meadville and between Cleveland and Youngstown and various freight train operations. For a long while I was conductor on the Warren, Ohio. We used to go out at Briar Hill and go to Warren and do our switching and bring a train back into Briar Hill.

M: Do you remember any significant or major events that occurred during the war years?

O: I can remember one vividly, the time the Ninety-eight freight train hit the commuter train when it was backing over at the arsenal plant. That was a passenger train that operated between Youngstown and the arsenal. They used to haul employees from Youngstown. At one time they had two sections of it that hauled the employees of the arsenal plant from Youngstown to the arsenal at Ravenna. We used to take the employees right into the arsenal plant. As we went west on the Erie at AD--there was a point on the Erie that was identified as AD station--we used to back over there with this train and then pull into the arsenal plant. This morning this train was in the process of backing over. This freight train, New York Ninety-eight, came down the east-mounted track and went right into the middle of the train.

M: Not knowing that it was backing over it at the time?

O: There was a lot of dispute about it. There were investigations held. This Ninety-eight freight train insisted they had a clear signal of the outlying signal which by all reality couldn't have been. But everybody figured that he had passed that signal in a stop position and missed the signal and come down through the middle of the passenger train.

M: A clear signal should have meant that the track should have been clear.

When you said you got your next promotion as passenger conductor in 1947, how did that change your daily work?

O: Of course, I ran a lot of passenger trains before I was ever promoted to a conductor.

M: How did that occur? Why were you allowed to do that?

O: Well, I never went through the promotion and I was used in advance at that time because I was a freight conductor and because there was a shortage of men. During the Second World War, there was a terrible shortage of men. You would have just clashed as not being very patriotic if you didn't go out and do your bit on the railroad. You should have been with a gun outside in some front line. It was expected of you, and I think the railroads got pretty good cooperation from all of their employees during that war period.

M: What was the difference between a freight conductor's job and a passenger conductor's job after the war?

O: Essentially, the obligation of the conductor was the same thing, only the freight conductor was operating a freight train and the passenger conductor was operating a passenger train. Of course, something the freight conductor didn't have was the handling of transportation, the collection of tickets, the selling of tickets or cash fares with returns on the trains. That was something that the freight conductors didn't have to bother with.

M: So you did have more responsibilities as a passenger conductor.

O: Oh yes, as a passenger conductor.

M: Which cities as a passenger conductor did you travel between?

O: Mostly between Youngstown and Cleveland and occasionally on the main line between Marion and Meadville.

M: What other passenger runs were there besides the two you just mentioned? What were the destination and the termination of the passenger runs that you were part of?

O: We used to handle a lot of trains at that time. We would have trains that would come out of Chicago and out of Detroit over the New York Central. At Cleveland they would be operated then from Cleveland to Youngstown over to Erie. Most of them would go on to the P&LE to Pittsburgh, and we would handle them between Cleveland and Youngstown or Youngstown to Cleveland. But the origination of the train would probably be Washington, D.C., coming by the old B&O into Pittsburgh, the P&LE from Pittsburgh to Youngstown, the Erie from Youngstown to Cleveland, and then the New York Central from Cleveland to Detroit or Cleveland to Toledo or Cleveland to Chicago. We were in the middle, and we operated between the Youngstown and Cleveland act.

M: How many coaches and how many people rode an average train between Youngstown and Cleveland?

O: During the wartime after the First World War, the passenger trains were full practically all of the time. After the First World War, we used to get an awful lot of people coming into this country into Hoboken and Jersey City of course on the Erie. We used to have representatives there that would pick up these immigrants that would come into the country on the boats. They would be picked up there by the railroads. Our representatives in Hoboken and Jersey City would be grabbing for this business to take them to their destination. We used to get people going to Youngstown, Meadville, Ravenna, Marion, Chicago, California, all over the country. We would handle them as far as the Erie went from Jersey City or Hoboken to Chicago. If they were going west, they were transferred to the San Jose or some of the other railroads. At that time, they would come in with big steamer trunks that we used to have in the baggage cars. We used to have sometimes two baggage cars on the head end and a baggage man and a train baggage agent and a helper. Many trains I worked as a baggage man where we wouldn't be able to take all of the baggage. We would have two carloads completely full of steamer trunks which were the property of the immigrants coming into the country.

M: Do you mean they kind of followed the Erie instead of picking up?

O: No. They used to follow all of the railroads. As I said, various railroads would have representatives in the Hoboken and Jersey City to grapple with the other

railroads trying to get the traffic onto the Erie.

M: Do you remember any notable or famous travelers that you had?

O: There were lots of them. We used to have show trains all over the country. Right here in Youngstown in the Princess Theater they used to have burlesque shows. We used to move them. They would come in by train. It was all done by train.

M: Do you remember some of the names of the people?

O: I can remember Sally Rand, a fan dancer. She used to be here in town time and again. I remember Thurston and Blackstone, the magicians, when they came in here with their trains and operated into the city and out of the city all by train.

M: Did you ever get their autographs?

O: I never thought too much about autographs at that time. We used to always get tickets for their shows. Many times I had free tickets or passes to go to the show.

M: Do you remember any movie stars or politicians?

O: I can remember Clark Gable. I can remember one time when Al Landon ran for president. I can't even tell you what year it was, but it was back around the Depression time.

M: He ran against Roosevelt, didn't he?

O: Yes. His home was in West Middlesex. We had the train; I was the brakeman on it. An old conductor by the name of Harry Moore was the conductor. We had four or five trains that went down to West Middlesex for the visits he made on his campaign for the presidency. I just saw in the paper where he passed away maybe six months ago. I remember that trip very vividly. Al Landon was on the train.

We had a number of train operations during the candidacy of some of the presidents. Even Jack Kennedy when he ran for president did his campaigning by the rear end of the passenger trains that he rode on, but not in this particular area too much. I remember the day he was here on his campaign down at the old Tod House. They had a platform for him to speak on. I remember his speech very well. The politicians around election time, there was train after train; they would be handled all over the railroads campaigning for president.

M: Do you remember when the Erie and Lackawanna merged?

O: Very well. I was General Chairman at that time. I was in the depth of all of it.

M: General Chairman of what?

O: The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen.

M: How did things change after they merged?

O: Of course, prior to the merger we had the coordination of the DL&W between the Erie and the DL&W, between Gibson and Binghamton, New York. That was about ninety miles of track. They coordinated the two railroads into the operation of one just in that particular area. Then in 1960, of course, they had started the negotiations for the merger between the Erie and the DL&W sometime prior to that. But in 1960, I got directly involved in it. The merger was authorized in 1960. As General Chairman, I was involved directly with the General Chairman of the former DL&W, John Kelly, and with the management. The President of the DL&W was Perry Shoemaker; the President of the Erie at that time was P. W. Johnson, one of the finest men I ever knew in railroading. I think he's still living. He has a son that has some official position in Cleveland. We were in negotiations for several years trying to iron out the percentages of work that were due to the former Erie men, particularly in the merged territory which involved east of Buffalo, New York, on the former DL&W and east of Hornell, New York on the former Erie.

M: What kind of arrangements did you have to make?

O: We had to set up agreements, and I wouldn't even want to venture to say how many agreements I've signed in connection with that merger. We had the involvement of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and the Switchmen's Union of North American who held the contract for the yardmen on the former DL&W, and that was all they held. The order of railway conductors held no agreement but had many members in that organization on the Erie. Those three organizations, now along with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, are merged into what is now the United Transportation Union, but they were all separate organizations at that time. At the time of the merger, we had not only the dealings with the company, but the dealings with these other organizations that were invovled with men of the crafts we were representing. It would take a book trying to explain what my part of it was and our negotiations with both managements. We got into the courts. We were suing. We were in various matters over things that were supposedly done right as far as we were concerned and done wrong as far as the switchmen's union was concerned. They had to sue the courts in Jersey City and in Buffalo. It was not only a negotiation with

the management, but it was one organization bickering with the other.

M: How did the rolling stock change from the 1920's to the 1950's or 1960's, the rolling stock and engines and all?

O: Well, do you mean with respect to engines?

M: Yes, sir.

O: The question was going out of the steam engine era into the diesel era. They changed considerably. With the steam engines, you had to have turntables, roundhouses, and Y's. I don't know if you know what a Y is or not, but it's a piece of track laid out in the shape of a Y where in order to accomplish the turning of an engine, you would head in at one end and back out the other, and you would have the engine operating in the opposite direction. Do you follow me?

M: So you can turn the front of the engine from one direction to the other?

O: Right. If the engine was headed west, you would head in at the west leg of the Y and up in the end of it and then back out of the other end, or you would have the turntable. That was all eliminated with the diesels because the diesels operated from either end. Maybe you had two or three or four units, and generally one unit at each end could operate the diesel in either direction. Much of the shop requirements with the diesel you filled with fuel oil. With the steam engine, when they went in the roundhouse they were in there for a period of no less than three or four hours in order to have the fires cleaned, the lubricators filled, water tanks filled, and the engines put on the turntable and turned. Many other operations with the old steam engines were not required with the diesels. They just kept going and going. The management got service out of the diesel for twenty-four hours out of twenty-four hours. With the old steam engines they would be in the shops being repaired; as I said before, the fires cleaned, water put in the water tank for several hours out of every twenty-four that they would lose that operation from the steam engine.

M: When men stayed away from home in the evenings, and they stayed in bunkhouses, I suppose that changed from bunkhouses as you mentioned to hotels. What year was that when the changeover occurred?

O: From bunkhouses to hotels, the changeover became effective July 29, 1965.

M: Would you describe an old bunkhouse and how they changed

through the 1920's to the 1950's?

O: The bunkhouses began to deteriorate so bad. When they were first built, they weren't too bad. The maintenance was the big thing. At one time, each of the bunkhouses, particularly at Kent, Ohio, Marion, and Salamanca, New York, had their own resting facilities. They were fairly good. With the different management, they would be better or less better at times. They used to have caretakers for the bunk rooms that would take care of them. Over the years, the management kept reducing their hours and the time that they put in taking care of the bunk rooms to the point where the bunkroom just became an undesirable place for a man to even try to rest.

M: Were they privately owned or owned by the railroad?

O: They were owned by the railroads, owned and operated by the railroads. Now, at some point, we had some that were operated by the men themselves. At Marion, Ohio, we used to have a bunk room there that was operated entirely by the men. The management did used to pay some compensation to the committee that operated them. I would say that it was fairly well operated. They used to have deliveries made into the iceboxes. There would be milk and bacon and eggs and different supplies that would be in the iceboxes. If men went in and wanted to fry themselves a couple strips of bacon and two eggs, they would take it out of the refrigerator and put the price in the kitty there so as they could pay the grocery man. They used to have many of those types of operations, but particularly at Marion I was thinking of. They had what they called a bungalow there. It wasn't a bungalow, but it was a big, old-fashioned home that was converted into this resting place for the men. They turned it into a bunk room.

M: Do you know who owned it?

O: I really don't.

M: I suppose there were bunkhouses in Youngstown.

O: Oh, yes. We used to have a bunk room at Briar Hill. We had bunk rooms at Kent. Years ago, the bunk room at Kent was nothing but an old passenger coach that was converted into a bunk room.

M: How often would you spend in a bunk room, say in a week's time?

O: That varies. You might be in the bunk room three or four times a week, and you may not be in there again for a

month. It just depends on what runs you were operating on. You may go all the way to Kent, Ohio, and turn right back with a train, or maybe you were taken off of duty for two hours and turned right back. Again, you might be taken off of duty for eight to sixteen hours. Of course, when you were taken off of duty for that long, you would spend it in the bunk rooms.

M: Why was there such a difference in times that you were off of duty?

O: That varied. Let's take for instance, a trip to Kent. You might go over to Kent and there would be a train ready for you to bring back. You may go over there and there wouldn't be a half a dozen cars in the yard for you to bring back, so they would take you off of duty until they had an accumulation of cars for the Mahoning Division to come back to Youngstown. It may be that they take you off because of a derailment somewhere on the railroad, and they weren't able to get the freight in from the west to make up a train for Youngstown or Cleveland. They used to operate from Cleveland to Kent by Braceville. They went over the New York Central from Great Lakes to Braceville. They used to tie up at Kent for rest considerably.

M: I suppose you didn't like spending time away from home. How about your wife?

O: Oh, no. We never did like it. The men were always tickled to death when they got to go over to Kent and turned right back, or be taken off of duty for two hours. We used to make trips to Kent in later years . . . I went over and back to Kent in less than eight hours. The roundtrip, I've probably been forty-eight hours making a roundtrip to Kent.

M: Could you describe your union activities in a little more detail, when you started, and the positions you held?

O: Well, I was first elected, as I said previously, in 1937 as Local Chairman for the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen which was to represent the conductors and the trainmen on the Mahoning Division First District. There were forty such local chairmen on the entire system. I used to represent men in investigations and time claims; we used to progress their time claims. It would be my obligation to handle it with the local superintendent. If they were denied, then an appeal was made to the General Chairman and he would handle it with the highest operating officer, generally the Vice-President of Labor Relations. That became my job in 1959, when I was elected General Chairman.

Then I was chairman of this committee of forty, local chairmen that was spread all over the railroad. I would handle

the appeals from the Local Chairman to the General Manager of Labor Relations. Of course, if they were denied there, then we would progress those claims onto the First Division of the National Railroad Adjustment Board. In later years, we got to the point where we had labor boards that were set up on the property for the handling of cases. They would have the same right as the First Division of the National Railroad Adjustment Board, but they were set up on the property by agreement between the head of the organization, the General Chairman and the Vice-President of Labor Relations. These appeals would be heard before those boards and the decision that would be rendered would be binding on both parties. It was an arbitration procedure. These boards would consist of a representative of the railroad and a representative of the organization. I handled many, many cases to those boards. We would have to prepare reprimand submissions to the board, and of course, the management would prepare a like submission to the board explaining their position. Then we would have an oral hearing before the board. Their determination would be binding.

At first the boards were set up to handle the big bulk of business that was going to the First Division of the National Railroad Adjustment Board; they were set up for the purpose of eliminating that congestion. We were waiting eight and ten years for a decision of the First Division of the Adjustment Board. With these special boards of adjustments, we could handle a case within less than a year and have a decision rendered. It was handled a lot faster. When these special boards of adjustment were first set up, there was a question of when you could eliminate the First Division of the Adjustment Board and go to a special board of adjustment and have the agreement by both parties. If one party declined to go to a special board, the case had to go then to the First Division of the Adjustment Board. Later on, I think about 1968, we came up with a new determination whereby the boards were no longer called special boards of adjustment but a Public Law Board. Then either party could go to this Public Law Board on their own insistance. If the General Chairman wanted to go to the Public Law Board and the railroad refused, he could go by himself. Of course, the company would have to protect their interest and go along with him. Most generally, they would agree to go to the Public Law Board, but it didn't take the agreement of both parties when they went to the Public Law Boards. Either party could insist on going.

M: What kind of problems were involved in these disagreements?

O: Most generally time claims.

M: What are they?

O: Claims for men who have maybe not been called for duty. They were violations of the scheduled agreement between the organization and the railroad. Most schedule agreements are something that are vital to the men that are operating the trains, or the yardmen that are switching the trains. Those agreements involved hundreds and hundreds of different things whereby if a man is not called on his turn, he is entitled to fifty miles of runaround and he remains first out. Probably that didn't happen in this case. The man claimed fifty miles because he wasn't called, or maybe they would have a yardman that would claim time because a road man had done work in the yard that he wasn't supposed to do. Or you could have a road man claim time because a yardman had done work outside of his respected limits that he wasn't entitled to do. There are so many various types of time claims that it would be hard to enumerate all of them.

M: Looking back on your career as a passenger conductor and freight conductor, what changes would you like to see on the railroad? What changes would you have liked to see on the railroad?

O: I think one of the changes that I have always wanted to see was a better relationship between the management and the employees. I think that would resolve a lot of dissension that is created with the employees because of a poor relationship with management. If you've got a superintendent or train master or yardmaster or dispatcher or any of those people within supervision and they are having a closer contact with the fellow that is actually doing the work, you've got a much better situation than when you've got a dispatcher that says to do as you are told or a superintendent who says to the dispatcher to do as he says. I think that when those times are gone, the railroads will be in a much better position to say that they are actually doing business as a railroad and as a combined effort of all the employees including the supervision and the employees who are actually doing the work. I think what would be the biggest accomplishment that the railroads could ever have is a better relationship between the employees and the management.

M: How would that improve conditions on the railroad?

O: Well, as I said, there are so many things that could be done to improve conditions: Better track conditions, better maintenance of power, better maintenance of equipment. I was speaking previously as to the relationship,

what one thing could be done for the betterment of the railroad. I think that the outstanding thing, in my opinion, is this better relationship that I just talked about.

M: Do you think that will improve business?

O: I think it would improve business. I've seen it deteriorate from the man. When I was first employed, we used to solicit business for the railroad. We had no right to do it. It wasn't one of our jobs, but we used to go to shippers and say, "Hey, why don't you get a boxcar in here and haul that freight from here to there." Of course, in those days in they used to go in for the LCL shipments which was less than carload lots. We used to have weight freights that would handle lawn mowers, household equipment, furniture being shipped all over the country by LCL shipment. As a brakeman and conductor on weight freights, we used to pull up to a station in Mantua, Aurora, Geagua Lake, or Solon and maybe be there for four or five hours unloading freight out of boxcars and reloading those boxcars with freight that was being shipped out at those points, but that business had all gone to the trucks. You don't have that on the railroads today anymore at all. We used to call those humpback locals. You put in a lot of hard work loading and unloading cars with furniture and, as I said, lawn mowers, farm equipment, and household goods. It was nothing to maybe pull into Aurora and unload fifteen or twenty refrigerators, iceboxes at that time. There wasn't such a thing as a refrigerator. We would maybe unload bedroom suites, or living rooms suites, or washing machines, all different furniture. That type of operation on the railroad is long gone.

M: What does the railroad mean to you today?

O: I think the railroad will always mean a lot to me. I read an awful lot about the railroads, Conrail, Amtrak, and the happenings of the bankruptcy of the northeastern railroads. It's a pity. It's really devastating for me to read all that and think the things that used to happen on the railroads and to see them go down the drain the way they are. The only thing I can attribute it to is the damn, poor management. I think the railroads have been poorly managed for a good many years.

M: Can you say why?

O: One thing I think is the atttitude of the management toward the employees. I think that's the great thing. Another thing, particularly in the passenger business, is the on-

coming of automobiles and the airplanes that move the passenger. That took the business away from the railroads. The freight business has gone to the trucks. Just look at the amount of freight that used to be hauled by the railroads that is now being hauled by the trucks.

M: Is there anything of importance that you feel you would like to add now?

O: No, not really. I've had a pleasant afternoon with you. It was nice meeting you. I certainly hope that there will be railroads for you to enjoy through your life. I've certainly enjoyed them.

M: I hope so.

O: I'm sure you will. I think the railroads will come back. With all that I've read here concerning Amtrak and Conrail and the northeastern situation, it seems a pity that they're going down that way. I think there will be something to bring the railroads back. If they don't, in the time of war, if we ever get into a confrontation with a foreign country and we don't have the railroads to do their part for their country, I think that this country is going to lose the biggest thing they ever had in the country. Industry is not going to be able to operate because no motor transportation today can move iron ore and coke and limestone and coal and the heavier commodities; they still go back to the railroads. It's a pity to me to see the railroads pay the taxes that they do. Here are trucking companies with free highway, outside of a small amount for a license plate. The air travel has the government building them airports. They build them highways for the trucks. The railroads are to the point where they pay heavy taxes throughout not only the federal government, but to cities and a lot of little towns and communities that operate. The entire expense of their community was paid by the railroad.

M: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW