YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Erie Railroad Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 423

BYRON SKIPTON

Interviewed

by

Jerry Mullen

on

November 16, 1975

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: BYRON SKIPTON

INTERVIEWER: Jerry Mullen

SUBJECT: Washington County, Steam Engines, Career, Family

DATE: November 16, 1975

M: This is an interview with Mr. Byron Skipton for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Erie Railroad, by Jerry Mullen at Mr. Skipton's home at 86 Terrace Drive on November 16, 1975, at 6:30 p.m.

First of all, just to get to know you, could you tell us something about your parents and your family when you were growing up?

S: My family owned a farm in Washington County. Marietta is the county seat of Washington County. I worked for Pure Oil Company. It was a pipeline.

M: Are your parents from Washington County too?

S: Yes.

M: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

S: I have one sister. She is in Le Sueur, Minnesota. I had two sisters. The oldest one died.

M: What was your father's occupation?

S: Farmer and justice of the peace for years.

M: Could you describe this farm?

S: He was a man who stood around six foot. It was just a

regular farm.

M: Was it a big farm?

S: It was 165 acres.

M: Then you said that you worked at the oil company later.

S: When my mother died in 1919, we sold the farm. My father had a brother in Minnesota, so we went to Minnesota. I spent a year out there and then I enlisted in the Army. I spent ten months and twenty-one days in the Army. I enlisted for three years and then they reduced the Army down from three million to four hundred and fifty thousand or something like that. Anyone who wanted a discharge put in for it. The Army had too much favoritism and I got sick of that, so I put in for a discharge. I was one of the first ones to get it.

M: What do you mean by favoritism?

S: I took up welding and the instructor got transferred. He got to nipping a little bit and he got transferred. They made me the acting instructor. I enlisted when I was sixteen, and I was only seventeen when I was acting instructor. They were going to make a permanent job out of it and send the instructor to school over at Air Reduction Corporation in Newark, New Jersey. Instead of sending me they gave it to an older fellow who was a student under me. They had an ex-lieutenant civilian in charge of the school, like a dean in college. He was in my corner; he was fighting for me. The commander of the whole camp was in this older guy's corner. One day this ex-lieutenant came in and told me that we lost. He said that the other fellow was getting the job. I said, "Well, good-bye." I gathered up my tuff and went up to company headquarter's and asked for a transfer from the school to the guard company. I went in and did guard duty until I got the chance of getting the discharge.

M: What was the name of the fort you were in and do you remember the commanders?

S: Raritan Arsenal in Metuchen, New Jersey. It was at that time the largest arsenal in the United States. Now it is back to twenty or twenty-one.

M: What did you do after you got out of the service?

S: I went to telegraphy school for awhile, and then I worked for the farmers around home and the oil company when they had an emergency. I had an automobile and I also could handle a telegraphy instrument, so they would send me out when they had a leak. I would have to go out and put a

saddle, they called it, to stop a leak. I would call in and tell them that it was repaired and then I would come back in and the next day or so they would send out a crew to put in a good pipe.

M: Was this oil country?

S: The oil country is down in around Marietta.

I have a grandson who goes to Marietta College. He is taking petroleum engineering. He graduates this year.

M: Your mother was still in Minnesota at this time?

S: No, my mother and father were both from down here, but after my mother died we sold the farm and went to Minnesota. My uncle lived in Minnesota.

M: This is before you got out of the service though?

S: This was before I went into the service. I enlisted in the Army from Mankato, Minnesota.

M: Upon your discharge from the service, you returned to Washington County then?

S: Yes. My father in the meantime had come back to Washington County and bought a home in a little town there, Watertown. They made him justice of the peace in that town for . . . he was there for about five years.

M: Where did he hold court, in his home?

S: Sometimes and sometimes he would hold it at the townhouse.

M: Do you remember any strange cases?

S: Oh yes. A fellow came there one day and wanted to file an assault against his brother-in-law. His brother-in-law was very wealthy. He was a successful farmer in the first place and he had a lot of oil and gas on his place. He was a great, big brute. My father said, "Well, what did he do?" He said, "Give him a good kick in the butt." My father said to call him in, so he sent his constable, the neighbor--he made a constable out of his neighbor--out to bring him in. My father read him the charges and asked him how did plead. He said, "Fred (that's my father's name), I want a trial." My father said, "That's going to cost you money." He said, "I want a trial down at that townhouse on Saturday afternoon. Everybody can be there." My father said again that it was going to cost him money. He said that that was what he wanted and that he had the money. They had the trial. It wasn't really a trial. He stated

the charges and said, "How do you plead?" He said, "Well, I guess, I'm guilty; I gave him a good one." (Laughter) Father fined him fifty dollars in crop I think it was. It ran eight-five dollars altogether.

M: Did he ever say why he gave the guy a good one?

S: No, they were always arguing. It just all mounded up. I carried his law books out to the car and put them in my car. This old guy followed him out.

M: The one that was hit?

S: The one that did the kicking. My father said, "Now Tom, mend your ways. It was a pretty expensive lesson." He said, "It was the best eighty-five dollars I ever spent, Fred." We all got a kick out of that. He thought that was the funniest thing he ever heard. All he wanted was the crowd there so he could tell how he kicked . . . (Laughter)

M: Do you remember Tom's last name?

S: I don't know if I should give the last name on the recorder. Old Tom was quite a character. We lived three miles from the little town and my mother sent me after school for groceries. I remember when I was around twelve, I was waiting for the grocery man who was waiting on somebody else and old Tom was telling me that last night his nephew called him. His nephew said, "Uncle Tom, I got a new boy." He said, "That nice." He said, "I bet you can't guess what we called him." Tom said that he didn't know. His nephew said that they were going to call him Tom. Tom told him, "Hell, that's nothing. Half of the cats in the United States are called Tom," and hung up the phone. He said, "I know what he wants." He said that he would get it but he thought he would have a little fun out of it. He slapped me on the back and pretty near knocked me out of my shoes. (Laughter) He was a good man even if he did kick his brother-in-law.

M: Was he a friend of your family?

S: Yes. At that time, everybody had been raised together and everybody knew everybody else. Now you go back there and they are all stangers. New people have moved in and they have died off. In those days, there was no change. You grew up and the farm was handed down from one generation to another. Naturally, you know everybody.

M: Tell me something about your education?

S: I went to an old country school. I went through the eighth

grade. I took the eighth grade examination when I was thirteen and I passed. Every winter I would go back to school. When there was nothing to do on the farm, I would go back to school.

M: You mean you worked in the summertime . . .

S: On the farm, but if I had any spare time I would go back and take a few lessons. That's as far as my education ever went, to eighth grade.

M: What kind of a school was it?

S: Just a little country school.

M: One room?

S: Yes.

M: Were all of the grades in the same class?

S: Yes, it went first grade right on up to the eighth grade. Our school was large as a country school. Once we had as high as forty-eight students in the one building.

M: What was the teacher like?

S: The teacher generally was some girl from the neighborhood. Sometimes she was right out of our neighborhood. But as a rule, she was from six or eight miles away. We had three men teachers. Two of them were old dogs; one was a young man.

M: Which years were these, that you went to grade school?

S: 1908 to 1909 until 1916 or something like that.

M: Did your dad own a car?

S: No. He never did own a car. I never owned a car until I got back from the Army in 1921.

M: After you got out of grade school, did you want to go onto high school or did you decide to go into the service?

S: My mother was sick for three years before she died. We had the farm there and my older sister was going to high school in Waterford, Ohio which was five miles away. We would take her in Monday morning and she would stay until Friday in a room in the old town. We had to take turns doing the housework and farming. I was large for my age; I did a man's work from the time I was twelve.

M: What kind of crops did you raise?

S: Corn, wheat, oat, and hay. We raised beef cattle mostly. We did have sheep for awhile. We raised hogs. We had quite a bit of orchard. We raised quite a few apples. We had other fruit, pears and plums.

M: What were your mother and brother's and sisters' names?

S: My mother's name was Daisy; Leget is her maiden name. My father's name was Fred SKipton. My older sister's name was Marie Skipton--Marie Abbott after she was married. My younger sister was Zilpha; she married Clem Randall and they live in Le Sueur, Minnesota. Well, it is outside of Le Sueur, close to St. Peter.

M: Did both of your sisters stay in Minnesota?

S: No. My older sister was there at home. They went to Minnesota with us. My older sister got her teacher's training at Mankato College in Mankato, Minnesota. My father and the two girls returned to Ohio while I was in the Army. She taught a couple of years in Minnesota and then she came back and taught in Ohio.

M: Did she teach at the same school that you attended?

S: No.

M: You are out of the service now and you were working at the oil company. What did you do after you finished, after you quit working for the oil company?

S: Things were slow at the oil company. The neighbor and I went into the Buckeye pipeline for the Standard Oil. They sent us to Warren, Ohio to work on the pipeline. We did repair work if there would be a leak. We worked there awhile. We were laying under a tree eating our dinner and a Pennsylvania train went up through there. It runs from Niles to Alliance. I said to the guy next to me that I would like to have a job firing engines. He said that he had fired for awhile. He was from Youngstown.

M: What was his name?

S: Clarence Shay. That was all that was ever said. He got discharged off of the pipeline for insubordination there. About six of us were in a big room in Warren on a Sunday morning, about 2:00 in the morning, when I heard someone hollering. I got up and went to the window and this fellow said, "Do you still want that job firing? Meet me down on the corner of the square under the big clock in Youngstown at 10:30." My buddy and I got up in the

morning and didn't have anything else to do, so we got the bus and went down there. We figured that he was all looped up and that he would never think about it again, but sure enough, he was there under the big clock. That's where the central tower is now. There's a big clock hung on the corner of the building and that is where we met him. He took us up to Tom Maher who was the road foreman of the Erie at that time. He hired us firing.

M: What year was this?

S: I started September 17, 1922.

M: On the Erie Railroad?

S: Yes.

M: What kind of training did they give you when you first started?

S: They put you out and you had to work one day to break in. The job they sent me out on was what they called the Trumbull Steel job. They had two jobs that went to Warren; the one Warren run went up and did the freight house work and the low jobs around town and the other one went up and took care of Republic with the scrap and coal. They took their outbound out of the Republic and brought it out into the Erie and switched out and brought what came east to Brier Hill. What went west, they would line up there to be picked up and taken away.

M: What did you have to do to perform your job?

S: Well, you have to keep up your steam you know. The fellow they put me with that day was a man close to forty.

M: The engineer?

S: No, the fireman. The engineer was an older fellow; he was in his sixties. I broke in that day and then the next day they called me out on my own and I went to Niles and fired the seven o'clock yard job.

M: How did you fire an engine?

S: You had quite a lot of area, surface, in a firebox; I forget the dimensions of the box. You had to spread your coal over the whole surface of your grate to keep the fire burning, to get the proper amount of steam. It was quite difficult for a new man. The hole was round . . .

M: That was three feet across?

S: No, it wasn't three feet, I suppose, it was about eighteen inches. Most of them were butterfly doors. You would step on a peddle on the floor and the doors would swing open. You would throw coal in and then take your foot off and the doors would come shut.

M: What kind of fuel did you use?

S: Coal.

M: How much work did you have to do per hour to keep the engine running?

S: That would be according to how hard you were working the engine. Switching around the yard, you would put in maybe six or seven scoops of coal and then maybe it would be twenty minutes before you put any more coal in. There would be times when the connector would go to the yard office to get further instructions or you would be in a mill . . . that was a difficult job, especially when you had to go into the building. You had to arrange your fire so that your smoke was cleared up before you went in. For instance, up at the Republic in Niles that is beyond Niles, we used to have to go in there and to several different places in the mill. You had to watch what was going on and arrange it so that you put in your coal and it got cleared up so that all you had was coals coke. In those hot mills, those fellows didn't need smoke. It was bad enough without any smoke in there, so you had to be pretty careful. You would watch and figure out what they were going to do. You would get your engine hot, but you didn't want it hot enough so that the engine would pop in there.

M: What do you mean by popping?

S: Say your engine carried 180 pounds of steam, if it got over 180 then your safety valve would open up and pop off steam until it dropped back a couple of pounds, at least four, until it quit popping.

M: Do you remember the names of the engines? Did they give them names?

S: At that time we had what they called, on those jobs, the B5. They were made purposely for that kind of work. They only had three pair of driving wheels and they would have a short radius so that you would go around short curves into the mills. They were around 140,000 pounds. I think that was their weight. That was our small engines that we had here which when I started, paid $5.08 for eight hours. Those engines were numbered starting at 50 and running up to 89; that was the highest I ever saw. We had engines with 1800; they were a little heavier

engines and they paid four cents a day more; they paid $5.12 a day.

M: Because they were bigger?

S: A little heavier. The way that they based our pay was on the weight on the drivers. They still do that today with they diesels, you pay is based on the weight on the drivers.

M: You mean the bigger the engine, the ore work that you as a fireman would do, so you would get paid more?

S: Yes, you bet. I started I suppose at the hardest time because I had only been here a year or so when they boosted the steam pressure on the engines ten pounds. Like if you go to Kent, it used to be that you hauled twenty-two hundred and fifty tons and that was called arbitrary tons; it wasn't actual tons. It was based on your actual tons plus seven tons per car. When they boosted the steam pressure, they cut off the arbitrary tons, seven tons per car, and you hauled actual tons. You still hauled twenty-two fifty, but it was actual tons instead of including arbitrary tons.

M: Why was that, because of the engines getting hauled?

S: By boosting the steam pressure ten pounds they could handle the difference.

M: How long did you stay in the yards?

S: At that time, you had to qualify to do the road. You fired the yard until you thought you could handle a road job and then you would make a trip on the road with another fireman. If the engineer on the job said you were qualified and if you were on the fireman's extra list, then they would start calling you for road firing. We had hostled engines from Holmes Street or Fifth Avenue. It was Holmes Street to Brier Hill and back. There were a lot of jobs worked out at Holmes Street; they had engines down here at the east end bridge. Some of the crew started down there; some started on Holmes Street.

All passenger engines at that time were changed. They were changed here. You had to take all of the passenger engines to Brier Hill and bring the fresh ones down. You would have a fresh one down there and the passenger train would come in and take the engine off and put the fresh engine on and take that engine to Brier Hill to be serviced with coal and water.

M: Do you remember which year it was when you got out on the road permanently?

S: I suppose that I was here a year maybe before I went out on the road. I was here about two months and they put on a second trick job down to New Castle. The engineer that took the job down there asked me to come down and fire for him, so I applied for the job and they gave it to me because no one else wanted it. I fired down there for six weeks or so. Then they took the job off and put a job on. I had a P&LE pass; we would ride on the P&LE train down to New Castle Junction and get the Hoodlebug to go up to New Castle.

M: What is a Hoodlebug?

S: Two cars and engine. It is the train that makes the connection between New Castle and New Castle Junction. It was just a shuttle back and forth.

M: Between the Erie station and the P&LE?

S: P&LE has a lease over that clear to Sharon. They met all of the through trains. We had trains that ran out of there to Pittsburgh besides the Hoodlebug. They made a trip back and forth. They ran four in the morning, and five at night. They ran out of New Castle straight to Pittsburgh. At that time, on the average, a train ran one way or the other, every twenty minutes between New Castle and New Castle Junction. We, on the yard job, had to use the main track to work there, and trying to work when there was a passenger train every twenty minutes you didn't get a whole lot done.

M: That was single track from Sharon and New Castle, right?

S: Yes. It was single track right at the New Castle . . . it was double track up until you got half of a mile from the depot then it was single track. It would be double track from there clear on around the yard to the junction.

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

S: That's when they increased the steam pressure. That was then the limit of a man's capacity. That was it.

M: You couldn't shovel anymore?

S: He couldn't do anymore, so they had to put stokers on.

M: You worked all through the 1920's as a fireman?

S: Yes. I got promoted in 1929. I could have worked as an engineer in 1929 but I would make more money firing on the road, so I fired on the road.

M: What cities did you travel between?

S: Most of our work was from here to Shenango. At that time, Ohio Works Steel had the Farrell works in Sharon. We would get stuck out of Shenango. It was just all thrown together in Shenango on the Bessemer. We would bring it to Ferona and set it off at Verona. They would have a train switched out for Youngstown and we would get the train for Youngstown out of there and go to the Brier Hill yard. That was where most of our work was at that time. Of course, we used to go to Kent, Cleveland, and once in awhile we got a trip down to Lisbon, to get an extra train of some kind or to the New Castle Branch and get some extra freight that came out of there.

M: When the Depression started, how did that hit you? How did it affect you?

S: I was furloughed January 6, 1931. I went back a little while in the fall of 1933; I was called back the first day of April in 1934. When I was laid off, I went to Barberton and worked for the boiler works over there. Then I was called back to work again in the fall of 1935.

M: They would call you occasionally?

S: No. Whenever I was laid off that way I would go down to my wife's home down in Washington County and I would be down there until they would call me back on the railroad. They would call me back and I would come back to work maybe a month, six weeks, two months. In 1934, the first of April, I think I worked until the last of July or maybe the middle of August. I finally decided that I couldn't make a living and I went to the boiler works.

M: When did you get married in this period?

S: I was married in 1925. I wasn't working very good. I got married and then I got laid off.

M: Was business as good in the 1920's as compared to the 1930's?

S: The 1930's of course, you had your Depression. We had a slow spell in 1924 and 1925. I was furloughed in 1924 for about eight months and in 1925 for a couple of months. I worked good until the first of January of 1931 and then I was furloughed; the Depression really hit then.

M: Back in 1935 now, when you were recalled to the railroad, when did you start working again continuously?

S: I was called back in 1936 around the first of April and

I worked continuously then until the middle of December of 1937 and then I was furloughed for about ten months. That is what they called the recession. In 1938, I got a call to come back and I worked until 1941. I was set up running on the 23rd of July in 1941 and outside of strikes I ran the engine from then on until I retired.

M: Do you remember some of the fellows who you worked with during the 1920's and 1930's?

S: The 1920's, yes. I worked with Bill Ridinger who is Wayne Ridinger's, the eye doctor, dad. Wayne fired on the railroad for several years too, after he got old enough to. I fired for his dad for quite awhile. Owen Sweeney, I worked with him on the road.

M: An old conductor of yours said that your name was Skip. How did you get that name?

S: I always had that name from the time I started there . . . Even the superintendent called me Skip; no one ever used my full name.

M: Who were some of the superintendents and the supervision officials?

S: Buckholtz was the superintendent when I fired out here. At that time, a superintendent . . . he was the king. It was his empire. All of the major decisions had to come from the main office. The buck stopped there. Buck was a character; he was a very good railroad man. Swore like a steamboat captain, knew every man, woman, and child in Mahoning County. They were a different breed of things as to what we have now.

M: What were they like?

S: They were men who you could go in and talk to. It was you and him and that was it. He had the authority and he would sooner have it stop there than to carry anything to the main office because then you got into a lot of paperwork; it was better that it could be handled locally.

M: Did you ever get into any scrapes?

S: No, I was very fortunate. It was just minor things that would stop at the road foreman. The road foreman was for minor things and you would thrash it out between you and him and if there was anything more, then it would have to be taken to the superintendent.

M: Do you remember where you were December 7, 1941, when you found out about the Second World War?

S: I think I was sleeping more than likely. I worked on the engineer's extra list. I lived up here in an apartment on the corner of this street at that time.

M: On Terrace Drive?

S: Yes. I was sleeping when the news came.

M: How did the war effect you, as an engineer in the railroad, once it got into swing?

S: That was something. The oldest guy maybe had only been on the job a month or so, so it was strictly up to you. You were responsible for the whole thing.

M: You have to have a lot of good fellows.

S: Oh yes. Some of them would hire out to dodge the draft. Other would hire out and then would be drafted, and then there were others who hired out and they wouldn't last. I know one night I was called for an extra job. We were going to drag ore from Mosier yard just above Ohio Leather to Sheet & Tube down at Campbell. We were going up there just by the Ohio Leather. I don't think this kid who was firing had ever been out of the house after dark before. Up there right before you get to Ohio Leather is where the Ohio Works dumped their slag. It was raining and black as the inside of a cow and all at once they dumped a double kettle of slag over the bank towards us, of course, it was over across the river a quarter of a mile away. That poor fireman just ran over and jumped in my lap. (Laughter) He finished out the night but I think he had had it. His curiosity had been satisfied. He didn't come back for any more.

M: What kind of freight did you ship during the war? Was it different from the freight that you had shipped before?

S: I think I had the first car of explosives for the arsenal out of Meadville. I was coming out of Meadville and there were all kinds of forms that they would give you and they made a big deal about it. It had to be in a certain place in your train. Most of our stuff went east for export and then you would run to Meadville, take a train over, and maybe you would come back out of there with just the caboose or very few cars. You would pick up at Shenango if there was anything to pick up and at Verona and Hubbard. After the convoy had been on the coast and they unloaded all of the cars, most would be mostly gondolas of steel. When the gondolas would come back to Meadville, there would be just miles of them.

M: Do you recall any odd occurrences that normally didn't happen during the war, but that happened to you?

S: I suppose there were a lot of them. We were very fortunate that we had no bad accidents. When I look back at it, it seems like something next to impossible. That's the way that it went.

M: Did you ever work around Ravenna Arsenal?

S: Yes.

M: What was that like?

S: When you went in there they gave you a pass and you had to show your pass to get in. We had fellows with foreign names and bad dialect and they wouldn't let them in.

M: They worked on the railroad?

S: Yes. When they came to the gate, they had to stay with the policeman there and the rest of the crew would take the stuff in.

M: They didn't trust them?

S: They didn't trust them. They would come out and look all around the engine before they let you in to see that there was nobody hiding on the engine. The policeman told us that he could hide on the engine and get in, and we asked where, so he showed us. We had an engine with a large tank with a ladder running down from where the hole was at where you put the spout down in to take water. You raise a lid; there's a lide there, and then the steps went down in, the ladder went down in . . .

M: . . . to the engine itself.

S: Into the tank, the water tank. He shined his light down in and told us that a fellow could get down in that ladder and pull the lid down and we would never know that he was in there. From then on they would be looking to see that no one was in there.

M: Were you ever an engineer on a troop train?

S: Yes.

M: What was that like?

S: There wasn't much to it.

M: Where would you pick up the trains and where would you leave them off?

S: Take them to Youngstown or Kent, or take them out of Kent and bring them to Youngstown. Most of the troop trains went over the main lines. They would go right through north Warren and go that way. Very few of them came around this way unless it was for a special reason, then they would bring them through Youngstown.

M: Did you get to know any of the fellows who were on the the train?

S: Jimmy O'Connor.

M: After the war, what position did you have then?

S: Engineer, all of the time.

M: When did you become a passenger engineer?

S: Officially in 1948.

M: Which runs did you make?

S: Between here and Cleveland, here and Meadville. The first regular train I had was this twelve and eleven, this express train that ran from here to Meadville and back. I would get it out of here, go to Meadville and then I would lay for three or four hours over there until the train that had started out in New York would come through going west and I would bring it bacck to Youngstown. Most of our work was between here and Cleveland. At that time, they ran so many excursions, like, baseball and hockey specials, football, and all of that stuff. At that time we ran into the old depot down on the big four . . .

M: In Chicago?

S: Yes. They were steam engines so we couldn't go into the Union Terminal on account of the steam engines. We got the diesels in 1948 and then we started running into the Union Terminal.

M: How did you feel when they changed it over from steam to diesel?

S: Of course, they were nice and clean, but it took all of the fun out of it. People won't believe it . . . some say that it was just a general change, but it seemed like the personality of the men changed when they changed from steam to diesel. It used to be that when you went out on a steam engine, you were close-knit. After they got the diesels, it was just another job. Every man wanted his own way. Before that it was a unit.

They didn't come until 1948 here, in Youngstown. The first diesels that came came in the winter of 1944, between Christmas and New Year's of 1944 and 1945, that's when they came along the main line, but here we didn't get diesels until 1948. We got some passenger diesels. Our first yard diesels came in 1949.

M: Were you fellows ever in competition with other railroads on passenger runs?

S: No. You would have your schedule and you would try to follow it the best that you could. There was really no competition there.

In 1930, I fired a freight out of here; the Steel Special went to Detroit. We ran through to Crestan. If we could get over Main Street in Akron before the Capital Limited caught us, we could hold ourselves pretty even . . . just before you get to Barberton, the Erie goes up over the hill and the B&O goes around. We would be running side by side until they switched off to the left and we switched off to the right. The people were looking out the windows.

M: Was it the Capital Special and Erie train?

S: No, it was a B&O. The Erie train was the Steel Special; we hauled steel out of here for Detroit. We had a special train that ran from here to Detroit. The steel would come up . . . they could get it out of the mill before eight o'clock at night,and we left here about ten o'clock; it could be in Detroit the next day. We hauled to Creston then Wheeling onto Toledo and then went on the Pere Marquette to Detroit. It was about a twelve hour delivery from here to Detroit which was very good. There was quite a bit of competition there, that was one place where there was competition between the railroads.

M: Did they give names to different trains?

S: No. One and two out of the Erie Limited; they started that in 1929. It was a pretty nice train when they put it on. Officially, all that we knew were the numbers: one two, seven, eight, fifteen,and fourteen. Fourteen was the Express train that ran over the main line. Trains like that were always a number, no name. They might have a name for it, but as far as we were concerned it was a number.

M: Did you ever have any famous passengers: statesmen, politicians, movie stars?

S: No, I never have.

M: When did you become a permanent passenger engineer?

S: I would have a job and then they would take it off and I wouldn't have a job for awhile.

M: How busy were you during the 1950's with passengers?

S: In 1958 things were terribly slow. I was working second trick, four to twelve down at NK yard job, and that was our slowest time outside of the steel strikes, coal strikes. The last time that I was set back firing was during the steel strike in 1949. I was set back in 1948; I had a steel strike in 1949; then I wasn't set back anymore.

M: When did you become an engineer on the 28th and 29th run on Youngstown to Cleveland?

S: Around the first of September 1968. I was on there a little better than three years.

M: What time did that train leave Youngstown?

S: It left Youngstown at 5:50 in the morning and it got back in here at 7:10 at night.

M: From the time that you started until the day that you retired, did business pick up or drop off? How was business when you started as an engineer?

S: Things were good when I was set up in 1941 on account of the approach of the war. Things stayed about the same on the 29 and 28 from the time that I went on there until I retired. Shortly after that, they boosted the fare and then things dropped off.

M: What was the fare in 1968?

S: I couldn't say for sure.

M: Approximately?

S: I think it was one dollar and forty-five cents for the round-trip. If you bought a book . . .

M: How much was it in 1938?

S: It wasn't too much less than that. You used to have these excursions and it would be less than that. We used to run a lot of excursions. When Pittsburgh played Cleveland in football, you would have five or six excursions. The four trains would come out of Pittsburgh and then we would have one out of here.

M: You said that when you changed from steam over to diesel things changed as far as you felt. Beside just the feeling about working on diesel, how did the railroad change from the time right after the Second World War up to the time that you retired? Anything you could describe, feelings, a change in philosphy or attitude on the railroad?

S: The change was all over the country. It got so that the local officials didn't have the say that they used to have and things were entirely different; there is no comparison before the war and after the war. Things, of course, changed during the Depression and then they changed again. From before the war until after the war, there was a big change.

M: In what way?

S: The officals were different. Before the war, they took local men and promoted them into official jobs. After the war, they would sooner bring somebody in from out, away from here, someone who wouldn't be acquainted with the boys or the conditions. It wasn't the same feeling.

M: Do you think the Erie was as good a railroad as other railroads in the country?

S: Oh yes. The Erie always was robbed, as you read in history.

M: What do you mean?

S: It was exploited for the benefits or the power . . . I think there was a lot of mismanagement in the railroad industries. If they ever investigated the Penn Central it would make Watergate look like a Sunday school picnic. That's a fact.

M: You retired in 1971. How do you feel about the Erie going out of business as it is predicted that it will in the near future?

S: I can't see it going out of business.

M: New ownership.

S: I think it would be a terrible calamity to close down. You take the Lisbon Branch . . . it might not be a proper paying proposition. Different industries would practically have to close. They might go to truck with it, but it would be a hardship on them. I don't know the solution.

M: How important do you think the railroad is to people today as compared to maybe twenty or thirty years ago? Do you think people respect the railroad as much?

S: I don't know. It is something that is there. You go to the grocery store, reach up and get a can of peaches off of the shelf; it is there. The railroads have always been there. If you wanted a car of freight, the railroad was there. They have never had to do without it.

M: You worked on the railroad most of your life?

S: That's right.

M: Do you think you would have been happy in another job?

S: No, I don't think so. When I went on the railroad, I went on there because I wanted to railroad. Now when they hire on, it is just another job. They don't necessarily want to railroad, it is just a job. Back then when you had to hump your back up and bail that coal in there, you had to like it or you didn't stay. The brakemen had to stand out there in the rain protecting his train or switching cars, while everything was covered with ice; you had to like it or you didn't stay; that's all there was to it.

M: Did you ever dream about being an engineer when you were a kid?

S: I suppose I did. My uncle in Minnesota was a shop man there and I would listen to stories that he would tell about the railroad. I had a desire to be an engineer. I think many kids did in those days.

I had a cousin who was a telegraph operator and that's how I came to take telegraphy. When I hired on, I hired on and told them that I would like to have a job as an operator when there was a job open. After I had been there three months, I had done all right and Tom Maher wrote that he wasn't about to let me get away from him, that's all, whether this job opened or not. By that time, I was hooked. I wouldn't have left if I could have.

M: If you could change anything on the railroad to make things better, what would it be?

S: It seemed like there could be better understanding or communication between the men and the powers in charge. It's entirely different now. I couldn't say. There seems like there is a communication gap there.

M: Do you think the management of the railroad deteriorated or the quality of leadership went down?

S: One night I was in Cleveland and got down along the side

of an engine when a well-dressed man came down there and was looking around. He asked me how I liked the job and I said, "Well, I'm counting the days." I only had a couple of months or something like that left. He said, "Don't you like your job?" I said that the job was all right, but I didn't care much about the local management. He reached over and grabbed me by the arm and said, "Listen, you go out and hire me somebody. Hire me a good man and we will put him to work." He figured you used what you got. We had a young fellow who worked on the railroad who went to college. He was taking up transportation. He was called to Cleveland and they were going to make him an official or start him as a special duty man. He went up on Monday and lasted until thursday and then he came home. He said that they were crazy. He had both, book learning and actual experience and it just didn't jive with what they were trying to do. He was from Girard. His father was killed in an accident. I don't know where he ever went. One year he went to Kent State; one year he went to the University of Mexico. He said he could afford to go to Mexico just as going to Kent. He took up the same study down there.

M: What have you been doing since you have retired?

S: I bowl, listen to the radio. I have a little garden at my son-in-law's place out on South Range Road.

M: Are you a member of any special clubs?

S: I belong to the Masons and the Shrine. I attend their doings. I go to the Erie whenever I can.

M: What are the Erie veterans? What do they do as a group?

S: It is more entertainment than anything else. Anybody who has over ten years of service can belong to them now. When I joined, it was twenty years. I guess that is even less than that now. It is mostly social. They do discuss things that are of interest to our congressman or senators, our pensions or something like that.

M: Is there anything that you would like to add?

S: No. I could sit and talk to you all night and tell you different stories.

M: Were you ever involved in any accidents?

S: No. I only hit one moving car and that was at Pine Street in Warren. When the train got down there, the lights were green for the straight through or a right turn.

M: The traffic light for the cars?

S: Yes. This guy he came down and ran around a truck and through the red light, right in front of me. I was only going about ten miles an hour because I was a little ahead of time and I was dogging it a little bit going into Warren, and I hit him. It snowed and the cars were practically snowed down like cement. He just spun like a top. He almost got the crossing watchman there. It didn't hurt him. He had a brand new Dodge and it hit right at the post between the two doors; it was a four door. That was the only moving car in all of my experiences that I hit and I worked the railroad almost continuously. I was very, very fortunate.

I have had several cars hit me, the train. Over at Pymatuming, I hit two cars, but they were already wrecked. The road came up to a hill and made a square turn right at the top of the bank. These guys had been to a Labor Day picnic. The lead car was a brand new Chevy and either had 46 or 64 miles on it. He came up the hill and didn't make it and he leaped right onto the track and landed upside down on the top. The fellow behind him saw him disappear and he jammed on the brake, but he couldn't stop and he went over. I guess he rolled over once and then on his wheels, between the track and the bank put him right close to the track. I was on what we called the moonlight run between here and Meadville. I came down and it was just getting dusk and I saw something. It didn't look natural; something was wrong there. Then I saw a white shirt and the guy was throwing his arms up. I thought it was an emergency. He had this white Buick setting between the track and the bank and I took the side out of that. The brand new Chevy was laying on its top on the right rail, I hit it and stood it up and it came right back. I didn't go a hundred feet until I got stopped after that. The operator at Shenango said, "Hey, Skip, look out for a couple of cars on the track at Pymatuming." I said, "Yes! I found them." (Laughter) Here, when it happened, just a couple hundred of yards up from there, there was a log house where a family lived. They saw it and they called right to the house around the mainline there. At night he used to work on the railroad; he used to be a dispatcher. He told him about it and he called Sharon; Sharon called the dispatcher, the dispatcher calls Shenango, and Shenango called me, but it was too late. In the meantime, they called the ambulance. The guy in the Chevy was hurt and they had already taken him to the hospital.

M: I suppose you spent a lot of time away from home?

S: Oh yes.

M: What was it like living in the bunkhouses?

S: Years ago, you just had army cots with the mattress-covered oil cloth. We all slept in one big room and it was pretty crude living you know. It was about 1963, 1964, or 1965; they made an agreement that they would put them up in a motel which is all right. You can get your rest and have a place to shower; it was just like an ordinary motel.

M: Where were the bunkhouses located?

S: They would be close to the roundhouse. You would sleep regardless. A lot of times you would have to wait; the bunks would be full. You would have to wait until a crew was called and then you would have to take over the other guy's bunk.

M: Who was your favorite conductor when you worked on the railroad? Who was the man that you could work best with?

S: There were different ones as it turned over. Jimmy O'Connor and I were always close together; I always like to work with Jimmy. I worked the last three years with him and we got along pretty good; I liked Jimmy.

M: Do you remember any other names?

S: Oh yes. I remember a lot of names. Just like everybody else they all had different personalities. Some of them were very good and would help and other guys weren't much help. They would let the head man and the engine crew take care of things up there. They would take care of the writing and packing the caboose. Back in the old days, a lot of the conductors would ride the engine and help out with the work back in. It seemed like after they got the diesels . . . then you got to hauling the long trains. It used to be years ago, they had a lot of trouble with hotboxes, and every time you stopped to take water the headman would walk back and meet the conductor and they would walk over to the other side and the headman would walk back to the engine and the conductor would walk back to the caboose. That way they would look for the hotboxes.

M: What are hotboxes?

S: That's when the axle of a car starts running hot. The car rests down on a brass . . . its composition is brass and lead together and that rests on the journal, the wheel. If that would get broke or get too badly worn . . . in the bottom of a journal box there was a well that had oil and waste. It would get down away from the axle or journal and then it would run hot if you ran far enough.

After they changed the track up there in Warren, I was coming down and I had the road foreman of the engines and the train master was riding the engine with us and coming into Warren he said, "Slow down and let me off at the depot." The train master had his car up there and they were going to come back in his car. I said, "Yes, I'll let you off." I slowed down and they dropped off; I slowed down to about five miles an hour. I started picking up speed and the nineteenth car . . . we had seventy-nine cars and I guess I had four units maybe. When he got off there at the depot, he was watching the train and he said that he had seen a spark just like those brake shoes that had come loose. They would slap against the wheel and spark. He said that my car just got right in front of him and chugged. The journal burned off and the journal box dropped onto the rail. I was going around the curve away from him and there was no way he could signal me and he couldn't get a signal to anybody until sixty cars went by and he hollered at them in the caboose to stop me. They put the air on and stopped me; they put the train in emergency stopping. He said that that was the longest sixty cars that he ever saw. He was expecting any minute to take out cross country with that broken journal. It was very fortunate. He said that that train master almost jumped over the depot when it chugged right in front of him.

They had been breathing down our necks about being careless with the hotboxes. We came by the tower in Leavittsburg, three and a half miles from there. The tower man was as good as a man as there was. He was down there and he watched the train go by. The road foreman and the train master were sitting on the left side as you would go around the curve. When we would go around the curve, he would look back and you would look your train over. It was all dark on this side. you are supposed to do that. Then when you go around the curve to the right, the engineer is supposed to watch the train. And he would say, "All dark on this side." The fireman would repeat it all the way down. Every time we went around the curve, we would watch. Shortly after that, they had a book of rule meeting, where all of the boys had to go in once a year as a rule and they would check you over on your knowledge of the rules. The boys said that at the next book of rule meeting; they stressed that very much. He said, "I don't excuse you from watching but you can have a hotbox and not see it." He had watched and he was a very good man, this road foreman. Coming by that tower man up there . . . Robby was as good of a man as there was on the Erie Railroad for spotting anything wrong with your train. They had to come down on the ground to watch. Robby, as good as he was, . . . we come down there and burnt that journal off, so that kind of took the heat off of the boys because it was possible to have a burnt off

journal even when you were watching. If there were only nineteen cars to the engine, you could have seen it very easily if there were any indications, but sometimes you don't have any fire.

M: How do you think your wife and your kids liked your position on the railroad?

S: My wife has put in some miserable times. I had worked in the day and at night came home and said, "We got it made tonight. We can go out tonight." It was New Year's Eve. I had worked over thirteen hours and I thought there was no danger of them getting us tonight. We got ready to go out and the phone rang and I answered it. They said, "Get up to Brier Hill as quick as you can. There's a wreck in Kent. Take the wrecker." I said, "I've only got less than three hours to work." He said, "That doesn't make any difference. Get up here!" She just about had a fit.

We went up there and they put us on duty when we left; they had everything ready. We got to Kent and the road foreman said, "You are off duty," and he put us on another engine and had the crew take us down to the bunk room. In about four hours, they rerailed this car that had the main tracks blocked. They called us and put us back on the engine, took us out to the wrecker and when we got on the engine, "You are on duty." When we got back to Brier Hill, we got down in front of the yard office and out time was up, the whole time we had.

You would just get somewhere and the phone would ring and you would have to go to work. We used to gripe.

M: Your life wasn't your own.

S: That's right. I loved it. I would take a yard job and within a week she would say, "Okay, go on and get on the road. I would sooner be without you than be with you. You are like an old bear." I guess I wasn't cut to live like a civilized man.

END OF INTERVIEW