YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Railroading History

Railroading Experience

O. H. 454

DAVID SURRATT

Interviewed

by

Lillian Eminhizer

on

August 6, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: DAVID SURRATT

INTERVIEWER: Lillian Eminhizer

SUBJECT: Steam Engines, Southern Railroad, Roosevelt

DATE: August 6, 1975

E: This interview is being done by Lillian Eminhizer for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. The interviewee is David Surratt and he lives at 414 Croft Street in Greenville, South Carolina. The date is August 6, 1975.

When did you hire out on the railroad? When did you go to work?

S: In 1913.

E: What did you hire out as?

S: I went from a fireman up to an engineer.

E: What railroad did you work for?

S: Southern Railroad.

E: Did you work out of Greenville?

S: Yes, and Salisbury. We worked out of Salisbury some when I first started, but didn't come to Greenville to much then. As I went along, I stood for something to come all the way through.

E: When you first started out as a fireman, what did you have to do?

S: I had to keep steam up on the engine, throw coal in there and watch for signals.

E: What kind of coaldid you burn?

S: Just regular, old mountain coal, hard coal.

E: You had to shovel the coal?

S: Yes, ma'am.

E: And did anybody help you?

S: No, ma'am, sure didn't. (Laughter)

E: Did you work a single track or a double track railroad?

S: We had some single track when I came here, but there was double track in places. As a whole, it was more single than it was double. But they did this double tracking after I had been here a right good while.

E: What were some of the differences between working the single track and the double track?

S: Well, they can get the trains over the road so much quicker and it's not as dangerous as a single track railroad. They have an electric block system, and you just keep going as long as that signal stays clear.

E: Did you work with train orders on single tracks?

S: Yes, you had to have train orders. They gave you train orders when you went out on the track, when they had double track, but you would hardly get anything to amount to anything, just a card lots of times.

E: Even on the single track?

S: No, on the double track.

E: You worked from Greenville, South Carolina, to Salisbury, North Carolina?

S: Yes.

E: Were you in the pool to start with?

S: Well, yes. I'd call it a pool, I reckon.

E: What term did you use for it? What term did the Southern use for working swing shift or swing turn? The B&O calls these things pool turns where you are first in and first out. Is that what the Southern called it?

S: Yes. We would say the extra board to start off with. Then we got up and they put in a pool and that way we could kind of tell a little more about when we were

going to get out.

E: I understand they had call boys in the early days, little boys that came and called you to tell you it was time to go.

S: I don't quite get that.

E: Did you always have a telephone when you worked for the railroad?

S: Not until the last years.

E: How did you know when it was time to go?

S: We would always get a signal from a conductor on freight trains. But also on the passenger train, they had an air signal there that they would pull, the engineer ahead, two blows, and that's the way we did the passenger trains.

E: When were you promoted to engineer?

S: In 1918.

E: You weren't a fireman very long?

S: I fired for a good while. I'd be cut back lots of times and I'd have to go back on the extra board then.

E: You were working on the railroad during the First World War?

S: Yes, ma'am.

E: How was it different between then and regular running? What was it like during the War?

S: Well, we had single track during the First World War, most of it. They did make double track out of some of the single track before the war was over with. But most of it was single track.

E: Were you on passenger or freight?

S: I was in freight then. We had to stay on freight until we came up with the seniority to step up and get on a passenger train.

E: When did you move up to passenger?

S: Well, that's some time. I can't tell you much about it. I got up to extra passenger board after I had been here about two years off and on, not regular.

E: On the Southern, the people that worked out in the main line, they never worked anywhere else did they?

S: No, they didn't go in the yards and work.

E: What was the roadbed like between here and Salisbury?

S: It was a pretty good roadbed in those days, but as we kept getting bigger engines, they had to put more rocks under the track.

E: What kind of engine did you first run?

S: I started out first on a 300.

E: A 300?

S: Yes, ma'am. Then I got on up to a 600, then from that on up to a 4,500 and that was my last days in freight firing. Then I got up to 1,300 on passenger train.

E: Did you ever run diesel?

S: Yes, in my last days I ran diesel a long time.

E: When did you retire?

S: In 1968.

E: Oh, just recently.

S: Well, a pretty good while, too.

E: Yes. How many years does that make you on the railroad?

S: Well, I did know, but . . .

E: It was 1913 to 1968. That's about 55 years.

S: I think that's just about right.

E: What were the old steam engines like that you worked with? Did they operate pretty well?

S: Yes, really good for that kind of engine.

E: When did the stokers come in?

S: They came in along the first of the war when you figure that out.

E: Did the stokers work well?

S: Yes, ma'am, very good. You save your whole back. (Laughter)

E: The higher the number the larger the engine? Does the number on the engine indicate the size of the engine?

S: Yes.

E: How did the engines change from one size to the other?

S: It would have maybe higher driving wheels and bigger cylinders and a bigger boiler, and the engine would be a little longer, too.

E: How many wheels would you run on one of those big engines?

S: We would have three sets of wheels for a long time on 500 and 600. Then we got on to four wheels. I think the last engine we had in passenger service was three-wheeled, but they were higher wheels. They were made for speed. Now, freight engines had low wheels and had one more driving wheel than a passenger engine did.

E: Were the freight engines different in other ways?

S: They would pull longer than a passenger engine. When a passenger engine started pulling, the wheels were so high till they kind of lost its speed, but if you got up to running, it would run off and leave that little low-wheeled engine then.

E: The firebox and the steam, water thing, how large were they on the engine?

S: They were about four or five feet high inside of the firebox. But the fireboxes would be about six, eight, ten, like that. The bigger the engine, the longer the flue would be. Flue is what the fire goes through as the water circulates around the flues; that's what heats the water.

E: And the water circulates back up to the boiler?

S: No, once it went through the cylinders, it disappeared then. (Laughter)

E: Did you ever get a cinder in your eye when you were working?

S: Lo me! I almost thought I had a bug in my eye. Yes, they get you right and left, especially those old 800's and 4,500's and all like that.

E: Did they have trouble with fires along the railroad much from the steam engines? Did they have trouble with sparks from the engine starting fires along the railroad?

S: No, not too much trouble with that.

E: Well, how fast would you have to put the coal in to keep the fire going?

S: It was coming along pretty fast. We would put four or five scoopfuls in and sit down just a little bit, and then it was ready for some more.

E: How did you know when it was ready for more?

S: It would tell you pretty quick, look up at that clock, it would be coming back on you.

E: You mean the gauge.

S: The steam was coming back. They carried two hundred pounds of steam on the engines. Then the later engines got it on up to 220 and something like that.

E: Did you ever have any trouble with leaks in the boiler and anything like that when you were on the road?

S: I never did have too much trouble with losing steam.

E: Did they keep those engines in good repair?

S: They did pretty good at it. We went all through the War and didn't have much trouble.

E: When did they switch off from the steam engines to the diesels?

S: That's hard to say that because it has been a long time since I've passed that notch. Along about the time . . . the middle of the First World War we got bigger engines and very high steam pressure.

E: Which side does the engineer ride on in the cab?

S: The left hand side, until you get to run the engine, then you ride the right hand side.

E: The fireman rides on the left hand side.

S: Yes.

He just watched out for anybody getting on the track or something wrong or somebody might flag you; you

might be going around a curve and the engineer couldn't see.

E: You're supposed to put the coal in the fire and watch at the same time.

S: Yes, ma'am.

E: Did the brakeman ride up in the cab?

S: Yes, he did. Years later they had a little caboose on the back of the tank that they rode in. They could see that train going around a curve. You would always see them come out and look. They had a handrail in there for him to hold on to. Then he could walk over on the other side going around the next curve and see hot boxes or anything wrong. Sometimes a brake rigging would get down and just raise big dust back there. It would soon put you on the ground if you didn't watch.

E: Did you ever get put on the ground?

S: No. (Laughter) We were pretty lucky there.

E: Did you ever have any accidents?

S: Never had any accidents.

E: Boy, you were lucky.

S: Yes, I'm pretty lucky, I guess. The only thing, I lost one finger during the War, along about the middle of it. We came to Charlotte and were having a new coal chute built. Rain and snow would blow in the old coal chute. It was an awful cold winter that winter, too. The coal got froze up in the chute. All the men that worked on the chute went home, quit. So we had been there a good while and the dispatcher wanted to know if we all would get out there and see if we could get enough coal to get fifteen cars from out of Salisbury. We went back out there to do that. The conductor found some of these big iron rods down on the ground where they were building the new chute and he said, "Here's something you can punch that loose with up there," and he gave it to me and I punched up there. It was froze, and when it did get started, I couldn't shut the lid. It knocked me off and cut one of my fingers off.

E: They ended up taking you to the hospital?

S: No, I went home to Salisbury; I didn't go to the hospital. When I got up there, he wanted to take my finger off out of here and sew it to this other one over here. I said,

"No sir, you just sew that little nub up, I'll make the rest." And so I still have my finger. I hardly ever notice that it's gone.

E: Just lost one knuckle?

S: Yes.

E: Where were thecoal chutes between here and Salisbury?

S: Charlotte and Spartanburg and here.

E: Now, did you take water the same time you took coal?

S: We would get more water several times on the road between the coal chutes.

E: Did you always have to take water at every one of the water stops?

S: No, not every one of them. We always figured about what we would have to do. Now you can make water runs right from Charlotte to Spartanburg on a passenger train, but you couldn't do that on a freight train.

E: Why?

S: Because you were longer on the road. You couldn't tell where you might get slowed up and they wouldn't let you move. Then you would be out of water.

E: Did they give the passenger trains preference over the freight trains?

S: Yes, they gave them preference.

E: Did you like to get run around?

S: Did I love to get run around? I didn't let them run around me much, I'll tell you that. (Laughter)

E: When they had double track, did they have separate water tanks?

S: No. Of course, there would be a spout on one side or the other, but the tank would just be the same.

E: Was it located on one side of the railroad?

S: Yes, and the pipes would go down under the track and you could get water over on the other side. All they had to do is just put extra pipe across the track underneath the ground.

E: There would be enough force to put the water into the . . .

S: Oh, yes. The tank would be pretty high over yonder and all that pressure of the water in the tank would make it flow.

E: The only tanks I've ever seen were the ones where they brought the hose around or the chute around over the water tank and they just opened it and it just rolled in, just went in straight. How tall is one of those big old engines?

S: Oh, they're fifteen or twenty feet high.

E: That high?

S: Yes. The passenger engine's wheels would be six feet.

E: Oh, really?

S: Yes. That's your steam engine.

E: When you stopped the engine, did you have to inspect your own engine?

S: Well, when we went around our engines--all the engineers around--we would alway sort of look around to see if there was anything wrong. You could have a bolt or something work out and maybe sometime break a few pins, lost a cotter key--it would work out of it hit the wheel. It wouldn't be long till you break it off, you see, then the spring would give.

E: Did you carry extra cotter pins with you or things like that?

S: We would have such material as that in a tool box up on the corner of the tank.

E: Where did you put your coffee pot on the engine?

S: In the firebox. That's where I made the coffee. I put the coffee in the oil can on there until we got the coffee boiling.

E: What kind of coffee did you make out there?

S: Maxwell House, Sears-Roebuck, any kind was good out there, really.

E: Did it come out like lye?

S: No, we made pretty good coffee. I'll tell you, I used to fire for an engineer and he thought I could make better

coffee than anybody, and I reckon I could. The way we made that; outdoors, the steam engines would butterfly, when you put your foot on that pedal, that door would open up, and you would take the foot off, that's when we threw the coal in. Then it closed back up. We would always take a coffee pot, set it in the door and stick a little rod in it to keep the engine exhaust from pulling it on in.

E: I understand there was quite a pull of air through the firebox.

S: Yes, that exhaust pulled and it jerked that fire and coal. That's where you would get your cinders from, out the stack.

E: Is that what you used to get the coal distributed in the firebox?

S: No, that didn't hurt you. It would burn and then as it burned, it would make ashes in there, clinkers that get right hard like.

E: What are clinkers?

S: That's the coal that's burned up; the ash that has been taken out of the coal.

E: The impurities in the coal?

S: Yes.

E: Now, what did you do with those?

S: Well, when we got to where we could dump it out, we let it out underneath the engine. Then if we had to shake the grates again, we had a place to put more cinders. But if you shook it too much down there, you would have your ash bin full of cinders and you couldn't get any more fire to burn if it couldn't get air.

E: Some of the northern railroads had trouble with those cinder boxes freezing shut. Did you have any trouble with those?

S: Yes, they freeze up if you don't keep them cleaned out because waste water from where you put that injector on goes in the ash bin. You run it in there to keep them burning hot. That fire falls down in there and it dies, kind of, but the air will make it brighten back up and catch fire again. It may not have gotten all the fuel.

E: Now, you put water down in that . . .

S: When the engineer puts the injector on it, it primes, it goes in the fan.

E: That puts out the coals?

S: It puts out the fire in the ash bin.

E: That's interesting.

S: You've got to do all that, though, when you're standing still, like when you're cleaning your fan because you can't get down there and do that running.

E: They don't climb out on the engine when it's going?

S: No, I don't like that much, might slip off.

E: Are there any tunnels between here and Salisbury?

S: No, no tunnels. Now, I worked on the Asheville Division some. I worked up there one time and we go through several tunnels up there.

E: From Salisbury to Asheville?

S: Yes.

E: What's that road like up through there?

S: It's pretty hilly and mountains, Blue Ridge Mountain. We would cross the Blue Ridge Mountain between Old Fort, N.C., and Ridgecrest. You poke along. It's a long hill from Old Fort to Ridgecrest. It's right on up the hill.

E: Do you have speed limits for up in there?

S: No, no speed limits.

E: Do you have a lot of curves?

S: Yes.

E: How did you know how fast to run the engine?

S: If you ride one long enough, you can tell about how fast you're running. When these telephone poles go past you pretty fast, you can tell about what you're doing. But since we got the diesels and the later model engines, they had speedometers on them so it could tell you how fast you were running.

E: Speed engines didn't have speedometers?

S: No.

E: Like up there on that Asheville Run, how did you know how fast to let the train go?

S: I knew about what the curves would take, you see, and we would prepare ourselves, ease off the throttle, ease them down to where you wouldn't go around the place too fast to keep from putting the brake on. A lot of people ran up there right fast and put the brake on and just killed the speed, and then they had a hard hill to get out of there.

E: Was there anything other than the mountains and the curves that was different about the Asheville Run from down here on the main line?

S: Yes, there's a right smart a difference in it.

E: What?

S: They don't handle as long a train on the mountains as we handle, and they don't run as fast.

E: Does it have as much mileage to it?

S: No, it isn't as long. The division from Salisbury to Asheville isn't as long as from Greenville to Salisbury. Cut your mileage down, you see, it's a little nearer across that way.

E: Did the sixteen hour law get to you very often?

S: Not very many times.

E: What would happen if it did?

S: Well, we would always notify the dispatcher that we were going in for the law. If he couldn't move us, why, we would just have to go in.

E: But sometimes you worked more than sixteen hours?

S: No, never did do that. We've had a little close time a few times getting in, but we would just put off and keep the law from getting us. You weren't supposed to do that, but nobody wanted to lay out there about three or four miles from home when he could come on home.

E: You just altered your time a little bit?

S: Then you just keep that off of the time ticket.

E: What is it like to go through a tunnel on the railroad?

S: Well, that's just like someone is sticking your head in a hole, and you can't get the right kind of breath. You see, that exhaust from that steam engine--now I never did go through a tunnel with a diesel, but I expect those gases would be a little bad on them--the exhaust from a stack, you couldn't fire much in that tunnel because then it would stifle you out with the smoke. You didn't have any way of getting the smoke out.

E: How long are the tunnels up through there?

S: I expect some of them are a half a mile or three-quarters of a mile long. But we didn't have any tunnels on my division here.

E: Not on the main line?

S: No.

E: Were the railroad tunnels usually built on a straight-away or were some of them on an elevation?

S: Some of them were on an elevation.

E: That would be kind of hard to run a train up through a tunnel if you had to go on an elevated roadbed?

S: Yes. We know about what speed, the kind of movement of the engine and sometimes water would leak on the overhead and get the track wet. We had to put sand down there to keep them from slipping.

E: On the sand, did you have something in the cab that you . . . a gear or a lever that put the sand down from the sand boxes?

S: We had a little lever connected up with the sandbox and the air. It would take sand out of the doom, out there on the top of the engine, and blow it down where you needed it. If you didn't need it, you shut the air off and then it didn't come out.

E: Did you ever run any special trains?

S: Yes, ma'am.

E: What?

S: The president's.

E: Which president?

S: Roosevelt.

E: Tell me about it.

S: I brought him from Salisbury to Greenville, and that's as far as I went. After he passed away, my brother had him back north as a corpse. They doubleheaded him back with another engine because they didn't want anything to happen, breakdown or anything on the train. So my brother had another engine there, and he just was on the second engine.

E: This trip that you had him on, was it the last trip south that he made?

S: Yes, that was his last trip.

E: How was that train different from other trains?

S: Not a whole lot, but they were just about the best railroads could put out. His car was a special car made and he had lots of things on that that you wouldn't have on the others.

E: Did they have a lot of bodyguards or anything like that?

S: Oh, there were some.

E: What did you think when they told you you were going to haul the president's train.

S: I told them to get somebody else. (Laughter) He said, "No sir. I want you. You're the best."

E: Why did they choose you?

S: Well, I reckon because they thought I would do a good job of it.

E: Did you ever take the dishes off the dining car tables?

S: Never! (Laughter) I've heard of people doing that.

E: Did you ever get called in to explain things that happened on the railroad?

S: No.

E: You never did?

S: No.

E: Boy, you must have been a good engineer?

S: Well, I reckon I was about as good as any of them around.

E: Sometimes both superintendents would ride these trains. Where would they ride?

S: They would ride up in the engine most of the time.

E: Did you ever have them ride with you?

S: Yes, ma'am.

E: What would happen?

S: Nothing happened. He would just ride up there.

E: How large is a cab on the engine?

S: A cab of an engine, it sits out on the boiler. It would be about as long from here on over to that door.

E: About eight feet wide?

S: And about ten feet long.

E: So, it would be about eight by ten?

S: Yes.

E: So you had a lot of room up in there?

S: Yes, right much room. But the boiler didn't come all the way back in there. It came back about four feet inside the cab.

E: How many people could you ride up in that cab safely?

S: I guess eight or ten.

E: Really?

S: They might have to stand up.

E: Did you ever have very many people in there at a time?

S: No. I've had a few. I had several after we had gotten diesels and they got more room on diesels.

E: What gauges did a diesel have that the steam engines didn't have?

S: They were just a little smoother. Now, a steam engine will slip, and if you don't watch then you'll catch a wheel

on that sand and it will kind of make it jerk. But a diesel, if it slips, it won't make any jerk in the train that much because it has space enough in there to take care of that.

E: What is the difference between a passenger train and a freight train?

S: A freight train, it's just old boxcars, and a passenger train has good seats and everything and you go in there and sit down.

E: Did you have to take any special precautions with passenger trains?

S: Yes, you had to sort of handle them right. If you didn't, you would throw them out of the seat sometimes; hit a corner too fast, put the brake on too hard, things of that kind.

E: When you were firing on the railroad, did the trainmen or the brakemen ever help you or anything like that?

S: I've had brakemen that would fire a little bit for me sometimes, but they would just do that on their own.

E: Now going from here up to Salisbury, do you have any good grades up that way?

S: Yes.

E: Where are they?

S: We have a grade right out of Greenville here and then ups and downs all the way from here to Spartanburg. After you leave Spartanburg, you've got a pretty long hill. You get on about Cowpens and then you get a downhill pull on over to Blacksburg, and then when you get to Blacksburg, it's a pretty long hill from there to Kings Mountain. That's kind of the last of the hills. It will have some upgrades, but it won't be as steep as these others.

E: What would the percentage of the grades be?

S: Years back I could have told you that, but I don't remember how much it would be. They have a percent on how much it would be.

E: Did you ever have trouble with the signal lights not working?

S: Not too much.

E: I was just wondering what you would do if your signals weren't working?

S: Stop and proceed with caution, expecting to find broken rail or somebody in the block.

E: I understand that there are several roads that come out of Asheville. One that goes to Salisbury, and one comes to Spartanburg, out Saluda Mountain, right?

S: Yes, if you come to Spartanburg, you can get off and go to Asheville, but we couldn't do that unless they asked us to. We didn't know the road up there too good.

E: Did you have to have a pilot with you when you went up Saluda Mountain?

S: No, see, I knew the road. They won't hardly run you unless you know the road on another division. But I have been a few times, in the case of an emergency, when they had wash-outs up there. What year was that when we had the washouts, 1916? Boy, they would run us every which way then to get us somewhere.

E: What was the Saluda Mountain run like?

S: It's kind of like the other one, only it's a little more hilly.

E: I understand the Southern had an electric train control or something like that?

S: If you got by a signal, that would put the brake down, stopped it.

E: Automatically stopped it?

S: Yes, automatically.

E: Did you have trouble with that interfering if there was a signal out?

S: Well, we have. Maybe there wouldn't be anything the matter with it, but it's just one of those things. It would go wrong sometimes; even if it was lightning way over yonder and it would make a flash on that line, why, that would cause the electricity on the engine to be overloaded and then that put the brake on.

E: The lightning that would strike a rail?

S: Yes, lightning would fly over the rail you see.

E: And that could cause the electricity on an engine to overload?

S: Yes, the wires carried a lot of electricty when we were having storms.

E: Did you ever have any interesting experiences on the railroad?

S: No.

E: No interesting experiences?

S: No.

E: Pretty somber engineer, huh?

S: Yes.

E: When you were a fireman, did you cook in the caboose?

S: We didn't cook in the caboose because we would have to go somewhere else to get back to the caboose. See, the caboose would stop over in the yard. We would stop our engines over close to the roundhouse and then they always had an eating place over there where we can get something to eat.

E: Which yard are you talking about?

S: Salisbury.

E: And you say Salisbury has a restaurant?

S: Oh yes, we used to have a YMCA there, a pretty good sized, brick building. They furnish you hot water and a place with reduced rates to sleep. They made it pretty good for us.

E: Did they have a YMCA here at Greenville too?

S: No, they didn't have one here.

E: And at Atlanta?

S: No.

E: They didn't have one there either?

S: They had one in Washington, but they didn't have one in Greenville.

E: Where did the fellows stay then when they would come into Greenville?

S: They just gave them rooms around at different places.

E: When you came in to get your train in the yard, it was all made up for you?

S: Yes, it would be made up. My brakeman would come down and

get on the front and we would go to the other end of the yard and couple up with a train.

E: You picked up your train over at the roundhouse?

S: Yes.

E: Was the engine on the ready track?

S: Most times it would be ready.

E: Did the Southern have what they called a ready track for the engines--a separate place where they put the engines that were ready to go?

S: They had a going-out and a coming-in track and as one went out, the others moved up. When you came in, you had to come in where they clean the fire. We got off down there.

E: Then the hostler would take over the engine after you got off?

S: Yes.

E: The yard crew then would take care of the train?

S: Yes.

E: Did you ever have any arguments with the inspectors?

S: No, no arguments.

E: Where were the different divisions on the Southern? One division came out of Washington.

S: Yes, one came out of Washington to Salisbury. From Salisbury--as long as you were in freight service--to Greenville and then from Greenville to Atlanta would be another division.

E: And then from Atlanta to New Orleans?

S: Yes.

E: Is that two divisions there?

S: I don't know too much about that railroad after it gets to Atlanta. I think it's another railroad.

E: That crew that comes out of Washington, where does it change?

S: They change in Monroe. They divided up the divisions the best they could before they could have the shops. Some would have a little more mileage than the others and some would be shorter than the others, but not too much difference.

E: Did they just have shops at the terminals?

S: Yes.

E: Every yard did not have a shop?

S: No.

E: If you knew there was something definitely wrong with an engine, could you report it?

S: Yes, if I didn't think I could get in, I could report it to the dispatcher from some telegraph office or something like that, but I never had that happen.

E: If you did get in with an engine and you knew something was wrong with it, did you tell the hostler or make out a report on it or what?

S: Well, you had to make out what you thought was wrong with it or what was wrong with it.

E: A report?

S: Yes.

E: How many crews worked out of Greenville at one time?

S: A pretty good bunch. Of course, it wasn't all on passenger trains; they kept some on freight.

E: You don't know how many crews they ran out of here?

S: No, I don't.

E: Do you know how many passenger crews there were?

S: Well, we would have about six different crews going to Greenville in twelve hours, that's just one way.

E: How many tons of coal would a freight train use between Greenville and Salisbury?

S: Fifteen to twenty.

E: You had to shovel all that?

S: That's on the freight now. You don't burn that much on the passenger train. You use about half as much on a passenger train as you do on a freight train.

E: That's a lot of coal. You must have a pretty strong back. Did any of the firemen ever come up with back trouble from

shoveling so much?

S: No, not too much. I can feel mine sometimes.

E: There's quite a number of railroad men where several members of the family were on the railroad.

S: Yes.

E: You had two brothers that worked the railroads.

S: Yes, I did.

E: One here in Greenville.

S: Yes, the one was here in Greenville, but he's been dead a right good long time. He had an operation and the doctor told him he wouldn't be there but a few days. His folks came after him at the hospital; he was doing fine and going home. He had a heart attack on the way home.

E: What did your brother do on the railroad?

S: He was a fireman. He was older than I was on the road and on age too.

E: And you had a younger brother that just died a couple weeks ago.

S: Yes. He came up on the Winston-Salem run; that was a southbound railroad.

E: Part of the Southern?

S: No, the N&W controlled the Winston-Salem Southbound.

E: So he worked with the N&W?

S: Yes, I think he operated that railroad.

E: Was he an engineer?

S: No, he was a brakeman and a flagman and he got up to where he could run extra conductor. He got his foot in the throw of the switch and they had to take it off. It never would heal and finally turned into cancer.

E: That's too bad.

You were going to tell me here about a few things. Tell me about the first run that you ever made. When you first hired out, you went down and signed up one day and what happened?

S: I went down with this man on this little short line and you didn't have time to sit down. You just stood up and held on to the back of the cab. The engineer wouldn't let me put any coal in when we were crossing little trestles because he was afraid I would fall off. It was weaving. He had one eye and I didn't even know it until we got down. But he could see all right. He was a mighty good man.

E: He was born with one eye?

S: Yes. He lived a long, long time. They let him run as long as he lived, on that little road.

E: What road was that?

S: It was just a little cutoff from Salisbury down to Albemarle, North Carolina. They made connections with the ACL down there and that Winston-Salem Southbound.

E: What's the ACL?

S: That's the Atlantic Coastline.

E: We were looking at a picture here of this last engine that you ran, this #1401. It's all painted up real pretty and you say it's down in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.

S: Yes.

E: You were telling me a little bit about it. How high were the wheels?

S: I would say they were seven feet. They were higher than my head. I used to know how high it was. I believe ninety-three inche high. I wouldn't be sure, but I wouldn't want you to put that in there. That's the highest wheeled passenger engine, I think, ever built.

E: Is it the most powerful passenger train?

S: Yes. We could run this engine on the run from here to Salisbury without getting water.

E: You could? What was the capacity of the water tank on this engine?

S: Fourteen thousand.

E: Fourteen thousand gallons?

S: Yes. That's a whole lot of water, isn't it?

E: Yes, it sure is.

Tell me about the running lights up there on the front. (Referring to picture)

S: He's running extra there.

E: Yes, he has got white lights.

S: If they want to carry signals, well, you go out there and flip a little button. That caused the white to go out and made you have a green signal then. That's carrying signals for another train of the same class. If a foreman is on a freight train and I'm in the sidetrack and that man comes by there and blows signals at me--one long and two short--I stay there until somebody gives me orders to leave.

E: When you're carrying signals for another train, what does that mean?

S: There's another train following, same place.

E: Do they just run the two colors, white and green?

S: Yes.

E: You said that you've had to get out and knock the sand loose?

S: Yes, the sand dune is right along here, you see that? (Points to picture)

E: Yes.

S: There's the sand dune up here where that number is.

E: Oh, on top of the engine, yes. I often wondered on top of the engine what these round domes were. Now, there's the bell. What's in that next one up?

S: That's where the whistle is connected, up in there. That's the highest place. It has to be big enough that it will blow the whistles good.

That sandbox, I don't know how much that would hold, but it would hold a whole lot.

E: What would cause that sandpipe to get clogged up?

S: They have pipes about as big as your wrist, but they have little sand traps. Sometimes they don't screen the sand good enough or maybe it's a little too coarse or the screen may be getting a little bad and the gravel gets down in there and stops it up.

E: On the front of the engine, what's all this stuff up here?

S: Now, that's a water heater. The water comes from that tank and goes through a whole lot of little cubes in there and then it goes back down and in the engine.

E: And down here on the side? What are these?

S: This is a cylinder, and these are driving rods all coupled up together. Now those two small ones there are . . .

E: Two small wheels.

S: That's what they call the engine trucks. There's a wheel here and a wheel here, one on each side. That's to take care of the weight. They have springs that go up underneath the engine and take care of all the weight. You've got to equalize all that weight. If you didn't, you would break all the rails in the country, wouldn't you?

E: The weight is not on those big driving wheels?

S: Yes, they have weight on the drive wheels, but I don't just remember about what it was.

E: I see, the little wheels are supposed to help distribute the weight of the engine?

S: Yes.

E: This was the largest passenger steam engine that they ever ran on the Southern?

S: Yes, that's the largest.

E: Is this the type of engine you had when youpulled President Roosevelt?

S: Yes.

E: Was it the same engine?

S: Just offhand I couldn't say that it was, but that was the kind that they had on there. Now, we had some that were 1300's. They went from 1300's to 1400's, but they were the same size as the 1400's.

E: They didn't make any changes in them?

S: There was no change in them except the numbers.

E: Did each railroad number their own engines?

S: Yes.

E: I was wondering. On some railroads they had much higher numbers, like 4500 and this sort of thing.

S: Well, we used to have 4500's here.

E: When you first started working on steam engines, did you have big smokestacks?

S: No.

E: You didn't have them. They were streamlined?

S: Yes.

E: You worked on that little, short run when you first started out up there out of Asheville. How long did you stay up there?

S: Oh, maybe just a day or two. That was somebody's regular job and he came back to work.

That was the way we had to sit in the steam engine. Do you see that engineer there? (Referring to picture)

E: You had to lean out the window?

S: Yes.

E: Now, what did you do if it was raining?

S: They had little side windows that took care of a whole lot of that.

E: These little windows on the front of the cab, were they clean enough or did you have to clean them once in a while?

S: We cleaned them ourselves sometimes, but most of the time they cleaned them at the roundhouse.

E: You've never had a wreck?

S: No.

E: Did you ever help clean up any wrecks?

S: Oh yes, I've been to several wrecks.

E: Where were they?

S: Just offhand I couldn't tell you. We never did have too many bad wrecks.

E: Did they tend to have more wrecks up in the mountain area than

they did down here?

S: Yes.

E: They have slides up there.

S: They're on the mountain. There are rocks and if so much rain gets up there, this dirt gets heavy and it will slide off and go down on the track; it could fill up on the track. There's no way to tell if the track is blocked. When you go down there and head into a pile of that dirt, something is going to happen.

E: What about the trestles around, were they wooden originally?

S: Oh yes. They used to have iron poles. They would drive them down in the ground. They would be twenty to twenty-five feet tall. Down here in this low country between here and Columbia after you get on in towards the coast, it gets awful high down in there and they're long. They used to drive them in and put the track down on that. I went over many an old trestle and you can feel it reeling. I used to be scared of them. But there was no used in being scared.

E: Was there any trick to going across a trestle? Did you have to be careful going across them?

S: Yes, kind of.

E: Did you fire, apply speed going across the trestle or did you . . .

S: No, I used to always try to fire before I went on the trestle. That one-eyed engineer taught me that. He said, "You keep a watch out and you see a trestle like that and you put in a little fire right quick." When you go over that trestle, the old engine reeled; it looked like it would jump off, but it stayed on the track. They shake around a little bit.

E: When did they start replacing the wooden trestles with steel?

S: Well, I couldn't tell you. It has been since I've come here.

E: What about in the spring when they would have so much water up in the mountains, did they have trouble with the trestles washing out?

S: Yes, ma'am. Yes, that's what I was starting to tell you there. That dirt will slide off of the mountains and come down and go down in on the railroad and that makes bad business. We used to have a lot of wrecks on account of slides.

E: What about where the water would loosen or weaken the trestles?

S: No, it wouldn't loosen the trestles so much as the weight and the dirt coming down would.

E: I see, that takes the track out.

S: Yes.

E: They used to do all of the track maintenance by hand didn't they?

S: Yes ma'am.

E: Did you ever come across any of the gandy dancers? They didn't have gandy dancers in this area that straightened the track?

S: Well, I've been across about everything there was here.

E: Going back to these trestles, now they had a lot of long, low ones down here in the lowlands.

S: Yes.

E: Now, up in the mountains, they must have had some pretty good high trestles.

S: Yes, they did. They had some high trestles. It would be high down on the low side, but it wouldn't be so high down on the other side. See, they slide off right there.

E: Did they havespecial crews that took care of these trestles?

S: Well, that extra crew would always get that out of the terminal.

They called me one night in Asheville to leave at once. When I got there they had the engine sitting out and maybe 100 niggers, shovels, picks, dynamite, log chains, and things of that kind. We left there and it took us two days to get from Asheville to Old Fort, about twenty miles, or thirty, not over thirty.

E: You had to rebuild a lot of track up in there?

S: We got a little piece and then cleaned off a track. Before we got away from there another slide would come. That was in 1916. We had an awful lot of them.

E: That's when they had all the washouts?

S: All that water up there.

E: Mostly Negroes worked on the track?

S: Yes, they used a lot of people in those days, but they don't have many people working on the railroad tracks now. You see, the track is put down by machinery. They used to have niggers to tamp that rock up onto the ties. It's all done by machinery now. That machine goes along there and it's got some way when you get enough rock under there it will give you a little red light, that way they move on up and put down more. They've got lots of improvements on keeping up the track. They used to have 200 or 300 niggers in on a work train that way, driving spikes and one thing or another. They've got the machines now. They just run it along there and it drives the spikes itself.

E: A lot of things have changed over the years haven't they?

S: Yes, they have. There's been a lot of changes and there will be more from now on.

E: What kind of changes wereyou happy to see on the railroad?

S: I couldn't figure that out I don't believe.

E: Which did you like the best, the steam or the diesel?

S: Well, I liked the diesel mighty well. They ride so much nicer and they're nicer in the cab. You can wear as good of clothes as I have on now up there and you won't get dirty. When you get to the other end of the road your eyes are not full of sparks. These busters right there, they were spark-shooting rascals.

E: Did you have some trains with those big stacks on?

S: They used to when I first came here on the little,short road. They had a lot of those little engines with those big headlights like that.

E: The carbide light?

S: Yes, carbide or just regular old oil.

E: Did they get to where they put screens in the top of those stacks to try and stop some of the cinders?

S: No, the screen is in the nose of that engine. See they are in an angle like this and that stuff comes like that and catches it.

E: I see. It stopped some of it from coming out.

S: Yes.

E: Did they have single water tanks or did they have more than

one water tank in a place, the Southern?

S: They wouldn't have but more than one at the station, but you might be able to get water over yonder, on the other side of the creek or something. They would have water fixed so we could get it over there. They had to kind of put them where you wouldn't be on so many road crossings when you were getting water.

E: Anyplace between here and Salisbury that you crossed another railroad?

S: Yes, this road from Asheville, you come in contact with it over here at Spartanburg.

E: Who had the right-of-way?

S: Just whoever got there first I guess, because if the signal was green you just kept going.

E: Do you have any other intersections with railroads?

S: Well, Gastonia has got some. You come in contact with C&WC there.

E: What's that?

S: That's a little railroad, Charleston and Western Carolina. I couldn't tell you where that would be riding off of.

E: Any other intersections?

S: We cross our own railroad at Charlotte. They've got Seaboard crosses at Charlotte too. That Seaboard used to handle a lot of trains into Charlotte and they run right back up in the mountains. They used that to haul coal to Charleston and load ships with it, but they're not loading many ships anymore, they don't dig much coal.

E: The B&O had towers along the way that men would be in. They would watch the trains as they went by. Did the Southern have towers along the road too?

S: Yes.

E: I guess these fellows had telegraphs or somthing at their disposal.

On the passenger runs, did you stop at any station besides Greenville and Spartanburg? Where all did you stop on the passenger run?

S: The run that I was on when I quit didn't make but two stops; that would be Spartanburg and Charlotte.

E: What were the numbers of your runs?

S: 38 and 37 I believe it was. That would be the number of the train.

E: Does the Southern have some runs of freight that were regular scheduled runs?

S: Yes.

E: What do they call these? Do they have numbers?

S: Some of them were 52 and 54 and all like that. It didn't tell what the call number meant.

E: Do you remember back when they had single track railroads, did the north or south trains have right-of-way?

S: They didn't have right-of-way. You had to have orders. If you were meeting a man on single track, they had to give you orders: Meet a man there and take siding or he would take siding.

E: Some of these railroads had . . .

S: I know, you got some of them that they throw the switch; the operator controlled the switches that turned you in, sidetracking you and you kept on going until that train passed you and then you can come out and go on. That takes care of a right long delay sometimes. But this double track we've got can't be beat because if you've got a green signal everything is supposed to be all right.

E: Everywhere that you have double track, does it always run side-by-side?

S: Yes.

E: I was wondering if they ran one one place and moved the other one over.

S: We have had some cut-ins like that, but it was a long time ago.

E: Do you remember the big cow catchers on the front of the engine?

S: Yes.

E: Did you ever pick up anything on them?

S: Yes. They used to make them out of wood, but they don't make them out of wood anymore. It's a big sheet out there, maybe about an inch thick.

We would get some new fellows and they would be hostling and they would forget about the pilots out there. You couldn't couple the pilots. And they would come up there and couple and turn them over. They soon found out though.

E: By the pilot, do you mean the cow catcher?

S: Yes, that's the pilot.

E: What were some of the signals that you used with a whistle on the railroad? Let's say when you wanted to start out, what did you do? What did you call?

S: When you leave the station, you blow two blows. If you you pulled anything other than what you know about, you pull three blows; that's stop at the next station. You don't have much of that anymore, but when I came here we did have it.

E: Did you have such things as two longs and a short?

S: Well, those are road crossings.

E: What did you blow when you were calling your flagmen in?

S: Well, four from the south and five from the north.

E: Going north you had five and going south you had four?

S: Yes.

E: And were all the other whistle signals the same?

S: Yes.

E: How many engines could they put in this roundhouse here in Greenville?

S: I believe they put about ten or twelve. They built some around and they would leave one end open to come in on.

E: Was this the largest of the roundhouses?

S: Salisbury-Spencer was the biggest shop we had down in this country.

E: How many would they hold?

S: I wouldn't know. It was a big shop there. Everytime you wanted to get out of there, there would be somebody on it.

Half of the time I used to sort of play hookey on getting out of the way of the boss. You go down and get on the

turntable where it is cool and take a nap. One time they caught two fellows out on that and they turned the firehose on, turned the water on. The firehose, it has an awful force to it. It washed them out from under there. I don't think they went back under there anymore.

E: That was cool down in that pit, huh?

S: Yes, it cooled them off.

E: I suppose they had their ways of getting out of work.

S: That's when they first started streamlining the front. We did have some engines that were stoker fire engines for burning coal. They had a front like that and you couldn't see the stack; it was right behind that.

E: This is a very smooth type of engine here isn't it?

S: Yes.

E: Never burned anywhere on the railroad?

S: No.

E: Always coal?

S: Yes.

E: Did you haul very many private cars on the railroad?

S: We used to haul a lot of private cars. There's not so many of them anymore. They're just about all a thing of the past.

E: All of the superintendents and everybody had their own car?

S: Yes.

They got all kinds of communications. If they want to talk to somebody in Washington, they push a button and get them. There have been big improvements on the railroad for the last ten or twelve years.

E: The first passenger cars you remember, were they made of wood?

S: Yes ma'am. The others were steel.

END OF INTERVIEW