YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Railroad Project

Employee Experience

O. H. 825

KENNETH WALTER

Interviewed

by

Lillian Eminhizer

on

June 10, 1975

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: KENNETH WALTER

INTERVIEWER: Lillian Eminhizer

SUBJECT: age of steam locomotive, occupations

DATE: June 10, 1975

E: This is an interview with Kenneth Walter for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program at 14 Outlook, in Poland, Ohio, on June 10, 1975. It is about 6:00. The interviewer is Lillian Eminhizer.

What railroad did you work for?

W: Baltimore & Ohio.

E: What was your job? Tell me how you hired out?

W: I hired out as an apprentice on a machinist's trade. I put in three and a half months--January, February, and March--and was laid off a few days to go to my grandparents. When I had come back they had taken my name off the list. The man who had asked to be off had resigned. They took both our names off the list.

I had to hire out again April 1, 1911. Instead of an apprentice I went on as a machinist's helper. My cousin, Jack Walter, was enginehouse foreman. Harry Reese was general foreman of the shops at New Castle. Mr. Hodges was master mechanic.

I put in my time as a machinist's helper. I worked everyplace. I worked in the office; I clerked; I called crews. I went to Mahoning town and called crews when Davey Jones was ill. I worked his job for three of four months. Then I came back in the roundhouse. I worked on every job. I worked on injectors, lubricators, water glasses, and then floor work, and then taking out wheels and putting in wheels until

I had my time in, four years. When my four years were up they made a machinist out of me. I worked stripping engines and filling them back up again. We had to take off wheels and put on rods and all that stuff.

The 1229 came in from Warwick, Ohio and I had had about two years in as a machinist. When they told me to strip her for main wheels, I stripped the engine down, had her all ready and I told Mr. Reese, the general foreman, "She's ready for the drop table, give me a drop table and I'll have the wheels out in an hour." I went out the next morning and the engine was still on the number six stall in the roundhouse. I had seen both drop tables had big engines on them and I wouldn't be able to get my engine on there before later in the afternoon.

I was standing there talking to the boys that had come in. The last mechanic came in, Mr. Hodges. He was black and dirty. He had been out all night over here around Youngstown. An engine that had been dispatched out of New Castle had broken down and the work had been reported by the engineer and the inspector, both, when the engine came into New Castle. The outside foreman had neglected to do anything about it, so the superintendent called Mr. Hodges and told him to go over and get the engine going.

He was out all night and he came in, as I said, black and dirty. I said, "Good morning, Mr. Hodges." "Good morning, Kenneth." He walked about thirty feet and he turned around and came back, pulled a little notebook out of his pocket and looked at it, came over to me and said, "Who in the goddamn hell tore the rods off that engine?" I said, "I did." He said, "What did you do that for?" I said, "You can't take the main wheels out with the rods on. I told the stripper for the main wheels if he would give me the drop table I would have them out in an hour." "Damn it," he said, "I wanted that engine to go to Glenwood." I said, "I don't know anything about that Mr. Hodges. All I know is that I was told to strip her."

The men coming in had heard the conversation, and when they got their timecards off the general foreman, Mr. Reese and Jack Walter, my cousin, they told him, "Kenny is getting bawled out for stripping the 1229." Reese said, "I told him to strip it."

I walked down there and waited until my helper came. I took my box of tools and told the foreman where I was at. I didn't think I would run into him, but I did. Mr. Reese called me over and said, "Kenneth, what's the trouble?" I told him, "I guess I'm being fired for stripping the 1229. The engine is supposed to go to Glenwood." He said, "I told you to

strip that engine. If there is anybody being fired around here it will be me, and there will be a little fun if they do." As I said, he knew how to handle there miffs.

I walked back through the engine roundhouse and then through the enginehouse foreman's office. The general foreman is always back in the master mechanic's office. He said, "Kenneth, take those overalls off." I still figured I was being fired. I said, "You don't want me to take them off in here; I'll take them off when I go down to my locker where I can hang them up." He said, "I want you to take that outside foreman's job." I said, "What does it pay?" "$140." I knew what it paid because I had worked the job. "$140? Hell, I can make more money than that working as a machinist here in the shop and I don't have the responsibility of dispatching the engines. I made $156 last month, that's a lot more than what you're going to pay me out there at that job." "Damn it," he said, "don't you think I don't know it. You made almost as much money as I did." "Yes, and I put the hours in to make it." He sat there for a little bit and said, "Will you take it at $145?" Well, the foreman above me on daylight only got $154, the general foreman got $160 so I couldn't hardly ask for anymore. I said, "I'll take it on one condition, if I don't like the job and things don't go right I can go back in the roundhouse as a mechanic." He said, "That's agreeable. You go out there and tell Mr. Reese, the general foreman, and Ernie Erwin to come in the office."

I went outside and both foremen were standing there. When I came out I said, "Well, Mr. Reese, I'm through in there." He started for the door and he said, "You are like hell! I'll see to that." I said, "Wait just a minute." I told him then what had happened, that I was to relieve Ernie Erwin outside; he was taking Ernie off the job. Reese called me over to the side and said, "Kenneth, any engine that comes over there that you're not satisfied with, that you don't think will make a successful trip, don't you run it, you come and get me or Jack. If we tell you to run it then we will be responsible, not you. If you need any more men out there to handle a job you let me know."

I went down and took my overalls off and put on my hat and walked outside and I said, "Ernie, I'm to relieve you until you come back out. Mr. Hodges wants you in the office." I asked him where the men were working. I had twenty-some men out there taking care of the engines. He told me where they were all working and all lined up. He left me and I think they fired him. I won't say for sure, but I think the master mechanic fired him for running this engine, dispatching this engine or else he put him back to work. I'm hesitating in my mind for sure just what he did do, but I'm pretty sure that he fired him.

Anyway, that's when I started in as a foreman. I worked that job for four or five years. I worked in the roundhouse when the enginehouse foreman, Jack Walter, would be off; I worked his job. I worked in the machine shop telling men what to do in the machine shop. I worked in the roundhouse again telling men what to do on the different steam engines and all that. Then I was back out on my own job outside.

That went on for about four years. Then they sent me to Willard, Ohio as the daylight enginehouse foreman. I worked that job for four years, then they sent me to Washington, Indiana as a general foreman. I worked about two months at Washington, Indiana. My three kids were going to school in Willard and they didn't want to quit school. The superintendent of the motor department came through. I can't think of his name right now, but anyway he came through with the master mechanic making their quarter inspection. I told them my troubles and all that: the kids were raising hell about having to move out here and wanted to finish their school in Willard. The superintendent of the motor department said, "Kenneth, that's easily taken care of. The general foreman at Akron Junction is open. You go to Akron Junction. I'll send a man out here and you stay with him three or four days and make him acquainted with the work and the men and you go to Akron Junction." You can ride 68 and 67. That will make you a thirteen hour day, but you can handle it." So I went to Akron Junction and worked that job for a little over a year.

Then they had trouble in New Castle. They sent me back to New Castle and I was on the daylight foreman job again. I worked there for about four or five years and then they sent me to Painesville, Ohio as general foreman of the shops there. I worked there two years and we moved to Painesville.

I had our home in New Castle rented. Everything was going good there, I don't know why they had more trouble at New Castle dispatching engines. It seems they had too many failures of one thing or another and work wasn't being taken care of so they sent me back to New Castle. I worked there on daylight for four or five more years. I don't know exactly how long.

Anyway, I had ten years to go when this job as general foreman at Hazelton came open. They asked me to take this job over here. This industry had trouble over here with this foreman that they had so I took this job as general foreman. That's where I stayed until I reached six months past my retirement. My last assistant foreman I had was a diesel man; he didn't know anything about steam engines. So the

master mechanic asked me if I would stay on until the diesels came in, which I did. It was six months past. On November 1, 1957 I retired. Here is where we have been ever since.

E: That's interesting.

W: Of course, when I had the passenger trains. . . My wife's family is from out west, out in Missouri and Albuquerque, New Mexico. We used to get on the train and go out there and visit them. We did a lot of running around until they took the passenger trains off. After they took the passenger trains off we drove a couple of times, but we're sticking right here.

E: Some of the engineers seem to feel that a man was never fired, he was just put on furlough for awhile. Did they actually fire men that worked in the shops?

W: I never fired a man. I never had to fire a man. When they brought the diesels in we had to cut off; we didn't fire them; we told them that they were through. They weren't fired; we didn't fire them. When the steam engines left we had about forty or fifty men working down there at Hazelton on nights and days. With the diesels you only had to have two or three men to handle them. They did resign, that was the only thing they could do. As far as firing, I never fired a man. I threatened to fire two or three of them, but I put them back to work again.

E: What would a man do that would deserve to be fired?

W: When he left they had to give him so much pension -- if he was eligible for it -- or retirement benefits until he got another job as I understand it. Of course, I went on pension. I was old enough to take mine when I left. From that time on I never bothered with it. As I say, this man that relieved me, why, he had that all to do. I didn't have that all to do.

E: You hired out in 1911?

W: January 1, 1911. I've got some papers in there I want you to read and they've got me as July 7, 1912. Whoever made the papers up must have missed the date, but I never bothered having it corrected because it didn't bother me any.

E: How many years did you work then for the railroad?

W: From 1911 to 1957, forty-six years and ten months I had on the railroad.

E: In the shops who owns the tools? Did each man own his own tools?

W: Some of them they owned, yes, but the majority of them were furnished by the company. They had to have sledge hammers, hammers, and chisels, and all that was furnished by the company.

E: Did you have trouble with the men taking these tools home?

W: No, I never had any trouble with them. They were all good men that I had. I can't say a word against any of them.

Of course, at Hazelton, when I took Hazelton, I had charge of the shop at Warren. Bill Smith was up there, my foreman there. Davis, I think, was the night man up there. But Bill Smith was up there. Of course, I had two places to take care of. The engines up there, they didn't do any heavy work. Any heavy work they sent them to Hazelton. I did the boiler washing and boiler working all at Hazelton here.

E: How many pits did you have over at Hazelton?

W: We had four stalls in the roundhouse. They were long stalls. I could put seven or eight engines in. One stall I could put one engine in, the other two I could put three engines in each stall. It made me seven engines I could put in.

E: In the shops in order to work underneath. . .

W: We had pits to work under. They were hollowed out and your rails were on top here, nothing in between. They could run the engines in on that. You could work underneath there. You did your underneath work like on binders, tighten binder bolts or centric rods and all that. In those days when I had them, until they came to Hazelton practically, all your yard engines had the centric rods on the inside where today they are on the outside. They don't have any of the old engines left.

E: What are centric rods?

W: That was connected to your valve gear. It operated your valves and your engine.

E: On this pit, was it continuous?

W: Yes. It had a break in the middle. In the long stalls they had a break in the middle that you could go back and forth. Then the pit came out. It wasn't all one length.

E: How many pits did you have at Hazelton?

W: I could put seven engines on the pits.

E: I see. The pits are other than the roundhouse?

W: They were in the roundhouse. Then you had an outside pit where the engines came in over at the coal dock. When the engines came in they went on this pit. The inspector and the machinist's helper would look the engine over and pack the boxes. They had two outside pits, one on each side of the doal dock. Then the engine was coaled and sanded. Then they came up to the ash pit where the fire was either cleaned or not. Then they came up to the roundhouse and we would put them in the roundhouse or wherever they were to go.

E: What do you mean by packing the boxes?

W: Those are the driving boxes. They put grease and oil in the driving boxes, whatever they had.

E: Were some of the engines better than the others to work on?

W: The later engines were better to work on, yes, from what the earlier engines were. You take the engines around 1910, 1911, 1912, and 1915, they didn't have the outside centric rods as I said. Their valve gear was connected up underneath. You had more work on them underneath than what you had on the other engines. You had certain work that you had to lubricate everyday or every twenty-four hours as we used to call it and you had your engine trunk boxes and all that. Then your grease boxes, you had to see if they were full and the same with your trailers. When they had the trailers on the engines you had to fill them up.

E: Did you do any of the work on the cars, like boxcars and coal cars?

W: That was turned over to the car foreman. Here in Hazelton that was Mr. Lewis' job. Jimmy Lewis had that job. He's retired.

E: Where does Jimmy Lewis live?

W: He lives on the west side; I have it in the telephone book. He was a car foreman here at Hazelton.

E: How large was a firebox in one of these engines?

W: They were different sizes; it depended on the size of the engine. The early engines didn't have the arch bricks in them. They just had a small firebox where you shoveled coal in and all of that. Then, of course, as the later engines

came on, they had long tubes that ran across and they put arch brick up above here to hold the heat. We had that to take care of.

When I first went on very few engines had electric on them; it was all oil burners. Your headlights, taillights, and cab lights on the tank were all oil.

E: When did they switch to electric burning?

W: I think electric came in around 1916. They started the electric engines somewhere around there. I couldn't exactly say.

E: What were some of the numbers on some of those old engines when you first started to work?

W: I couldn't tell you right now. I know the one that I got that made foreman out of me was 1229. That was way back in the early days. There was 284, the steam engine that took the passenger trains from New Castle Junction to New Castle. I do know that because I used to have to work on that engine a lot. It was a passenger engine at that time. All the engines, of course, would come up to 500, 600, and 700. As the later ones came on. . . The 284 used to run between New Castle Junction and New Castle, taking the passengers up to New Castle. They didn't have the station in New Castle then, in those days, the passenger station.

E: When did they build that?

W: They must have built that in the 1930's. I know it was late.

E: During the Depression?

W: Yes, they built that passenger station.

E: The passengers were dropped at New Castle Junction?

W: New Castle Junction. If you wanted to go to Youngstown or Pittsburgh from New Castle, you got on this train of two cars, I think two or three cars that they had. They had an express car, a baggage car, a smoking car, and a regular passenger car for the women to ride in from New Castle to New Castle Junction. Then all the passenger trains--5 and 6, 7 and 8, 9 and 10, 13 and 14--stopped at New Castle Junction. They took water there and some of them took coal. They had another engine to put on; if it came from Pittsburgh they had another engine to put on there. They went into Willard, Ohio and then from Willard on to Chicago.

E: When they changed the engineer crews, they also changed the engine?

W: Yes, the majority of the time they changed the engine, until later years. Then they had to build bigger engines. They ran them from Pittsburgh to Willard, Ohio. Then they changed at Willard, and Willard, Ohio to Chicago. For years they changed passenger engines right there at New Castle until they got larger engines later and they could handle the business as they ran from Pittsburgh to Willard, then Willard to Chicago.

E: You worked on both the freight and passenger engines?

W: Yes.

E: Which group of engines required the most work?

W: They all had about the same amount of work. They came into the inspection pit and were inspected and if you had to put brake shoes on or dry the brake shoes and all of that stuff, why, they were reported and we did it on all of them.

E: The engineers that ran these engines, were some of the engineers easier on the engines than others?

W: No. They all had to sit on the right-hand side and they opened up the throttle and away they went. The engine had to do the work. Of course, if they had a little tightening up when they stopped at these different stations, like they left New Castle and they went to Youngstown, most generally the engineer would get down with the oil can and oil around. He might have a hammer in the other hand and tap them up and see if any of the nuts were loose on the rods or anything like that. They very seldom had anything to do after they left the shop, but they always looked the engine over two or three times before it got to Willard. Then they made out a work report of any defects that they saw on the engines themselves that they took care of.

E: Did you take care of the engines for the local runs like to Painseville?

W: Yes. We had passenger engines going to Painesville.

E: What was the number of that passenger run?

W: I couldn't tell you just what those numbers were anymore. 5 and 6 were the fast passenger trains, they were the main ones, then 7 and 8, 9 and 10, 13 and 14. Most all of your passenger trains going to Painesville came out of Hazelton at that time. Of course, if we had any heavy work, we had to do it there at New Castle.

We ran freight trains to Painesville, a lot of freight

trains. We had engines going up there that hauled the coal up and the ore back. We had all those to take care of. As I say, we had over 100 men working at New Castle Junction at one time, that is on the three turns.

E: How many did you employ over at Hazelton?

W: When I came to Hazelton I had about thirty-some men, between thirty and thirty-five men working down there.

E: What about Willard?

W: Willard had maybe a couple hundred men working there because they had a big machine shop and a big roundhouse and they took care of all the engines that went down to Washington, Indiana and all around in that territory.

E: On some of the parts that you might have like in repairing the boiler, did you have to make your own pieces?

W: They did most of that, yes. Whatever had to go in, the flues and all that . . . The flues they bought. They came shipped in here from Baltimore, Pittsburgh, or wherever they manufactured them. Of course, we put them in and corked them. Before they did electric welding we used to have to cork them. They had men to do that into the flue sheets. Then the side sheets were on the side.

E: What is corking?

W: That is, corked the leaks. With a flange on there, if one of them would happen to leak a little bit they would go in there with their hammer and tools and cork that leak so it wouldn't leak. They would bend it over and cork it in.

E: Did you have a forge down there that you used for making some of these cars?

W: Yes, at New Castle we had a big steam hammer. We didn't call it a forge, we called it a steam hammer. I had four blacksmiths in the blacksmith shop there making stuff like spring hangers and some other stuff. They made that and, of course, they had this big steam hammer. They had a man there and all he did was run the steam hammer. They would go in there with a piece of hot iron and put them together and wrap them a little bit and weld them right together.

E: Did you keep blacksmiths up there at Hazelton?

W: We had one.

E: Every shop had at least one?

W: Yes, they always had a blacksmith and blacksmith helper. Of course, they did a lot of car work too. There was only one here when I took charge. They did that work.

E: Are there any of these blacksmiths still living?

W: None that I know of.

The men that I worked with at New Castle, Willard, Painesville, and different places. . . I never worked in Cleveland but I worked at Painesville two years; I worked at Akron Junction, Washington, Indiana, and three times at New Castle.

If you had time, I would take you to New Castle. Of course, there's nothing there anymore. The old roundhouse is gone; the big office building is gone; the yard office and all that that they had there at that time is gone, but the pit is still there and the old turntable is there. You would have an idea of what we had to look after at that time. All it is is just tracks going in and out. I was over there last fall and I was lost; I didn't know how to get in. Where they do the office work now, that's where they all stay and the trainmasters; they used the old passenger station.

I don't know what is down there at Hazelton, whether they still have the old roundhouse down there or not. That would be a good place to go if you had time.

Of course, Jimmy Lewis couldn't give you much dope and my foreman under me is now in California. He lived here in town; he was a New Castle boy. As I say, he was an electrician. When he came out of his time as an electrician they put him on diesel and he ran diesels for a few years. Why they ever sent him over here to me as an enginehouse foreman, assistant foreman, I don't know. Of course, they figured the diesels were coming and he would make a good man on diesels. There were about three years that I had to work his job and my job both because he didn't know a thing about steam engines. As I say, I was a steam man.

E: When did they start bringing the diesels in?

W: 1957.

E: That late?

W: Went out as the yard engines here at Hazelton. When I left Hazelton I had three steam engines left, the rest of them were all diesel engines.

E: Where are the paint shops for the B & O?

W: Where did we paint them?

E: Yes.

W: We painted them right there in the roundhouse. When they would be in at New Castle or Pittsburgh, the Glenwood shop at Pittsburgh, they would paint them all up down there. They had better equipment to do it than we had here. Here we took a spray gun.

E: What did you do about the letters?

W: We painted them in.

E: Did you use a stencil?

W: Yes, but most of it was all done by hand. I had men down there that could go up there and make a seven or a five, whatever they wanted, just copy over the old number.

E: What is a hostler?

W: When the engines came in off the load he handled the engines to the coal docks, sand house, up on into the ash pits, and across over on the farm. He set them out for the engineers to take off the ready track, what we called the ready track. Three hostlers would handle the engines from the inspection pit until they went out. He took them out of the inspection pit and he took them up to the ash pit and that's about all the farther he got with them. Then another hostler took them over to the turntable or put them in the roundhouse or set them out on what we called the farm--that's where they had a bunch of tracks and they would put the engines out there to do the light repair work on them. Then they had a hostler take it from there and set them on a ready track. If they had to go for coal or sand he would take them back down to the coal dock and they would sand them and then bring them back out and put them on a ready track for the crews to take them to Pittsburgh or wherever they were designated to go.

E: What did they use sand for?

W: On your driving wheels you had to have sand; if you didn't, why, your wheels would be slipping all the time. When you started out they would turn the sanders on and that gave your wheels a chance on the rails to grab ahold until they got going and then they would shut the sand valve off. It set right up in front of the engineer. He had them right on the side. There were three valves there where the air would blow the sand out of the sand dome on the top down onto the rail. The wheels would get a chance to get ahold

and go. If you didn't you would be slipping all of the time because you wouldn't have anything for the driving wheels, the steel wheels, to take ahold on steel rails.

E: Did they only use sand when starting?

W: Mostly, and stopping a lot of times they used it, but mostly for starting.

E: Did they use the sand with the air?

W: They had to have the air to blow the sand out because your sand was up on top of the boiler in a box--a round, metal box, and then the pipes came down to your different wheels, your back, front, and intermediate wheels. It just depended on how many sets of drivers you had. He would reach here and turn this valve on, whatever one he wanted, mostly the front valve. If he was going ahead, he would turn the one on and that would give the train a chance to get started. Then he would shut them off. If he was backing up he would turn the back sanders on. Steel against steel doesn't go very good.

E: How long did it take to get an engine ready, I mean the fire ready for the engine to go?

W: That all depended on what you had to do when an engine came in, the boiler work that you had to do. If you only had a few flues to cork or side sheets, the engine, when it came across the turntable onto the farm or into the house, you would have 125 to 150 pounds of steam still left in the boilers. They went in there and corked those leaks and the fire-up man came along and threw the coal in and lit them all. For only just a few minutes you would have enough to move the engine around 150 pounds of steam. Generally, they never carried much over 200 pounds of steam in the boiler.

E: If you had an engine cold how long did it take to get it going then?

W: If you had an engine that had been in the roundhouse for four or five days that was cold, it would take about an hour to get it hot. You had a blower on the front end that you hooked on that drove the smoke up out of the smokestack. The coal and oil that you use to build the fire, it took quite a little bit. I would say it was near an hour to get an engine able to move under its own steam.

E: In working with these men did you ever have any interesting situations with some of them?

W: What do you mean by that?

E: Do you have any personal or human interest type situations that happened with the men?

W: The men that I had working for me were all good men. I never had any trouble with them; they all knew what their work was and what they had to do. All I had to do was tell them. If they made a mistake I would tell them not to do it again. I never fired a man. I threatened to fire some of them, but I never did; I would always talk things over. "Now you do better. You know what to do so do it." They did. They knew what their job was and what they had to do.

E: When a man was hired in the machine shop, he started out as an apprentice?

W: You started out as an apprentice if you started in as an apprentice. You had boilermaker helpers; they got about 8¢ or 10¢ an hour more than what an apprentice got. You had boilermaker helpers, machinist helpers, carpenter helpers, and all of them. Most of those men had to stay an apprentice for four years before they were made a mechanic.

They started out as an apprentice and you had to promote them to whatever craft they took in--a machinist, boilermaker, pipe fitter, or carpenter. You had to promote those men, but you had men that served as helpers. When their time was up, when they had their four years in, if we needed the men bad--which we did in those days--we most generally promoted those men to machinist, pipe fitter, or whatever craft they followed, to take care of the work.

E: Some of the helpers could be promoted in the same way that the apprentices could?

W: The same way as the apprentice, but very seldom. Unless it was a time when they were awfully scarce of mechanics, the men would come up that way. They're supposed to promote the apprentices ahead of anybody else. If you started as an apprentice you had to go ahead.

E: What did the carpenters do?

W: The carpenters put on tank brick shoes and did all the tank work, draw board, pulling board, and all of that stuff; that was their work--window glass, repairing the cabs, putting on cab curtains and all of that stuff that was on steam locomotives at that time.

E: What's a cab curtain?

W: It closed in the cab in the wintertime. You had a big cur-

tain in the cab of the engine that came clear down to the floor. On the side where they go on the engine from the outside, up on the steps and on into the cab, they had curtains there to keep the cold out. They used that in the wintertime just like the curtain here. That all came under carpenter work, putting the curtains on.

E: Who worked the boilers?

W: The boilermakers and the helpers.

E: The pipe fitters?

W: The pipe fitters did the pipe work, but they didn't work in the boilers. They took care of the sand pipes and all of that stuff, injector pipes and all of that. They did the regular pipe work; they didn't work on boilers.

END OF INTERVIEW