

A Q&A with Nickel Plate
Railroad Supervisor

Barney Andrews

Talks About His Work Experience
and Recollections of the
Railroad in Tipton, Indiana

Recorded April 13, 1998



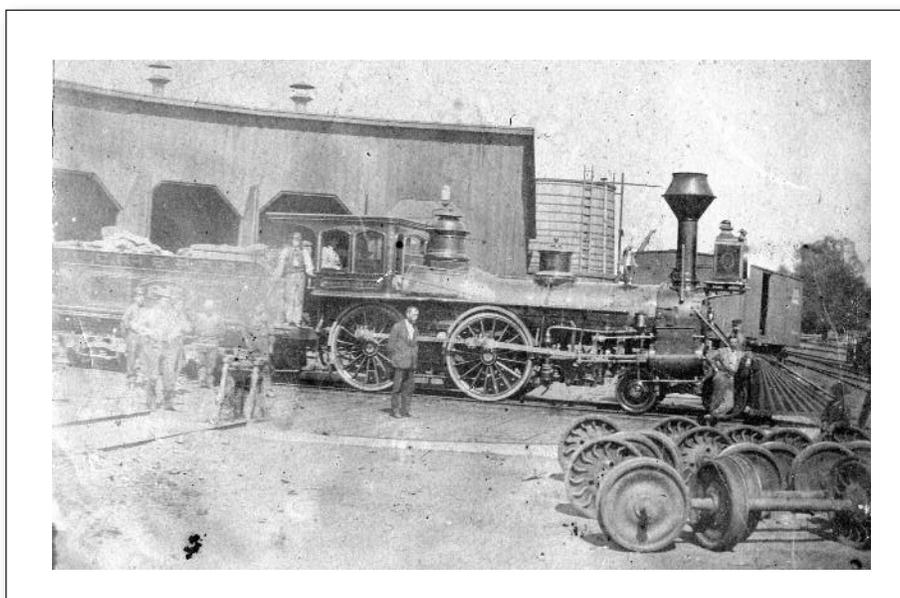
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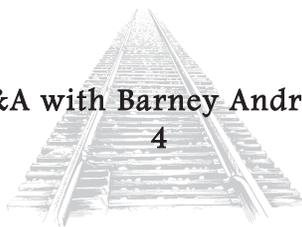
Interviewed and Recorded by Janis Thornton



B.O. “Barney” Andrews first started working for the New York Central Railroad in 1918 in Beech Grove, Indiana, for thirteen cents per hour. He was just 13 years old. He moved to Tipton, Indiana, in 1922 to work for the Nickel Plate Railroad. He worked for the Nickel Plate until he retired in 1969 as a mechanical supervisor. The following interview was conducted April 13, 1998, in his home, where he lived by himself until he was 98 years old. A few years after he gave this interview, Barney moved to Autumnwood Extended Care facility, where he remained a popular, active, and fun-loving resident. He reached his one hundredth birthday on April 22, 1904, and died almost six months later. His remembrances about his work and the impact of the railroad on his community are a valuable contribution to the local library’s Indiana Room.

Q&A with Barney Andrews

4



Q. Did you live in Tipton all your life?

A. No. I was born in Washington, Ind. I came to Tipton in 1922. The job on the railroad was what brought me to Tipton.

Q. Your first job on the railroad was in Tipton?

A. My first job on the railroad was when I was 14 years old, during World War I, and of course, help was scarce and I worked during school vacation at Beech Grove down in Indianapolis. My job was handing out tools to the mechanics. Then I went down to Washington, Ind. and ended up here.

Q. What's this picture for?

A. They presented us with a safety award. We didn't have any reportable injuries for the year, so we got an award. It shows how many days we worked without a reportable injury. Believe it or not, I'm the only man still living in that picture. That was part of the force of the Tipton car department.



Q. What was your job when you came to Tipton in 1922?

A. Car inspector. Back in those days that was one of the most important jobs in the trainyards. The trains would come in and your inspector would go over the trains before they were switched looking for defects. Back in those days, the trucks were as substantial as they are now. And you had journal boxes, and the journal boxes were filled with what we call dope, or packing, and that packing was saturated with oil and that's what lubricated the bearings on the wheels. If they don't get oil, they get hot and would create what we called a "hot box." They got hot and they burn. That's what causes derailments.

Q. Your first job was as a car inspector, what did you do next? Did you work at the roundhouse?

A. No, I never worked at the roundhouse. Later on I was the supervisor of the mechanical department here in Tipton, located in the west yards. It was west of the roundhouse.

Q. Were there buildings?

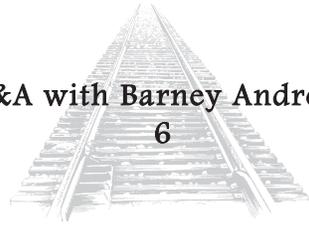
A. Yes, we had two buildings there. We had a wheel job and a mail room. Those buildings aren't there now, but the concrete floor and part of the side rails are still there. They were built in 1922. And there was also an addition to the roundhouse built in 1922. There was also a yard office for the yards.

Tipton was the terminal for the west end of the Sandusky Division and the east end of the Peoria Division. In other words, the Sandusky train crews couldn't run west of Tipton, and the Peoria Division men couldn't run east of Tipton. Tipton was a terminal. I've got the dates here of when Tipton became a terminal, but I can't remember them. I've got to read them off.

Q. Do you recall how the trains might have played a part in transporting troops or equipment during the wars?

A. There weren't too many troop trains through here. In one of these calendars it shows a troop train leaving Peru, but about the only troop trains we had leaving out of Tipton was when the National Guards were going on their 2-week encampments down in Ft. Knox, and they would have... They would start out at Peru and pick up the ones at Kokomo and the National Guard Unit from Elwood would come over here and pick up here and then go over the Noblesville and pick them up and go down to Kentucky. That's about the only troop movement I know of. And I don't know of any during the second world war.

I remember some passing through Muncie during World War I, but none here in Tipton.



Q&A with Barney Andrews

6

Q. How do you think the railroad was beneficial to the Tipton community?

A. I would say at the peak — around the late '20s — you see this was a repair point for box cars here. At one time we had about 250 employees in the car department, and we turned out three rebuilt boxcars a day. Rebuilt from the trucks up. They were brought in here and stripped down to the underframes and trucks and rebuilt. [Trucks=the wheels under the cars] And they had a special track production called spot repairs. Certain men would do certain jobs and they would go to the next spot and complete it. Those three box cars a day were rebuilt by 21 men.

Q. Was that what you worked on?

A. Yes, at one time, yes.

Q. To clarify, you were a car inspector, and then you were promoted to supervisor.

A. I went over to Lafayette in 1923 for about six months. I was car inspector over there. Then I came back to Tipton. Then I went on to be supervisor of the mechanical department.

Q. What year were you born?

A. 1904.

Q. What year were you married?

A. 1925.

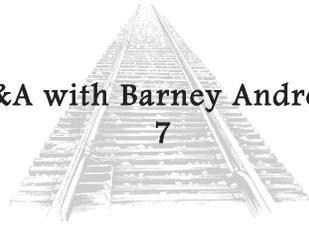
Q. Were you living in Tipton when you got married?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Do you remember when the number of railroad employees started to decrease?

A. They moved the yards from here to Frankfort, I would say it started to decrease about the start of the Depression — about 1929. That's when things started tapering off. And then the terminal, they lengthened the divisions and instead of running from Lima to Tipton, they lengthened it to Frankfort. Then the Sandusky Division ran from Lima to Frankfort. Then they did away with another terminal in Illinois named Rankin. Then they ran from Frankfort straight into Peoria, Illinois. Before they ran to Rankin and then from Rankin into Peoria.

So I would say it started decreasing right before the Depression in 1929. In 1933 they moved to Frankfort and men scattered every place. If they had enough



Q&A with Barney Andrews

7

seniority, some went to Frankfort, some went to Lima and some to Muncie, some to Finley, some to Bellevue, some to Cleveland. So it disrupted everything here in Tipton.

Q. When did they stop using the buildings out west of town?

A. Their intentions was to stop using them after 1933, and of course second world war came on ... In 1933, there was just one yard engineer here in Tipton. They thought one could take care of the interchange work between the two railroads. Of course, the war came along and business picked up and they reopened the yards out here to a certain extent. Of course that increased the force. In 1933 in the department I was in, they had only one man. But when business got better and the war continued, they mechanical department got up to about 30 men. That went on until about 1979, when they shut down completely out there.

Q. When did they tear them down?

A. They leased one to a manufacturer who made cheese boxes, and it burned. I don't remember exactly when that was.

Q. Did you ever get injured on the job?

A. Yes, I had a serious injury in 1959. I was off work for 14 months with a back injury. A door off a box car fell on me and pinned me down. That's the only serious injury I ever had. We had some fatalities.

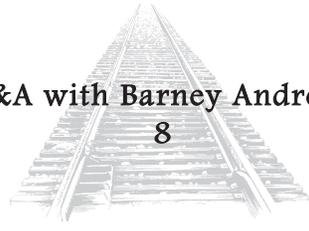
Q. Were there ever any kids hit by trains?

A. The only child I knew of who got injured was crawling under the train at the junction and got a leg cut off. I guess, he'd been over at the junction grocery and the train was there on the north and south and the boy crawled under the train, and it started up. That was back in the twenties.

Q. When the railroad activity started to decrease in Tipton, did it have any effect on the town's business or people?

A. Oh, yes. There were a number of people who had to moved. Businesses? I really don't know. Of course, down around the junction... at one time down around the junction there were four restaurants and four barber shops. Several families moved to other towns where they could get a job. It hurt the population. There's no doubt about that.

The notes I have here tells about the town even before they had the tracks. The tracks were laid from Muncie to Tipton in October 1875, and they went on to Frankfort in November, and by the end of the year they reached the IC&L (Indianapolis-Cincinnati-Lafayette) Railroad. The first train on the tracks was



Q&A with Barney Andrews

8

February 1876 (east & west).

I also did some research on the first locomotive... the first steam vehicle was built in Wales.

Here's something: The roundhouse was twelve-stalled and the turntable and we also had an ice house where they iced the refrigerator cars. The roundhouse and ice house were completed in 1892. That's when the two buildings and the car department were built also. In 1902 the passenger trains — of course they came in from all four directions and met at the junction three times daily...they arrived here at 8:40 a.m., 1:50 p.m., 8:50 p.m.

The first steam locomotive was built in 1803 in Wales. The first steam-propelled vehicle was built in Paris, France in 1769. But it wasn't designed to run on rails. The first railroads were like two-by-fours with a metal strap on top. I won't say they were two-by-fours, but they were wood with the metal strap. On the line from Indianapolis they were that way. The first railroad in the United States ran in 1830 up in the New England states. Baltimore, I think.

Q. What made you decide to work for the railroads?

A. My relatives on both sides of my family were all railroaders. Just a family tradition, I guess.

Q. Were the pay and benefits good?

A. No. The first job I had paid 13 cents an hour. Then we got an increase, I think, to 23 cents. When I was married in 1925 I was making \$5.04 a day — 63 cents an hour.

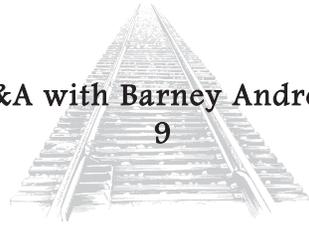
Q. Do you recall any newsworthy events in Tipton that the railroad played a part in? For example, Harry Truman's stop.

A. I remember when Harry Truman was here. I helped inspect the train he came in on. I had to be interviewed by the FBI and everything and they went along with us. There were Secret Service men positioned over Buck Creek. They watched everything pretty close.

Q. Where did you inspect the car?

A. Up on Jefferson Street. That's where he made his speech. While he stopped there we went over and made sure everything was okay. Like I said, I don't know if they were FBI or Secret Service, but they came along to see that we do anything that would hurt the train.

The other big event we had here was when Wilkie made his acceptance speech



Q&A with Barney Andrews

9

over in Elwood when he was running for president. I don't know how many passenger trains we had in here but all the passing tracks were full of passenger trains. We didn't have enough inspectors to do the work. We had inspectors that came here all the way from Buffalo, New York to help us out.

We had passenger trains in here from all over the country.

Q. Did your work pick up during World War II?

A. We had a lot of business through here and sometimes I'd be called out two or three times in one night. We did a lot of switching that they couldn't do in Frankfort and couldn't do in Lima, and they'd run them over here and I was just on the go all the time.

Q. What were you doing?

A. Making repairs. It was our job. It's hard to explain just what we did do.

After they did away with the steam locomotives and got the diesels, then I worked on the maintenance of the diesels also. Of course, we didn't do any repair work on them because they had to go in every 30 days for Federal inspection, and so forth. But we still had to maintain them and keep them running.

Q. Do you remember when the last passenger train went through Tipton?

A. Yes, October 17, 1959. They took it off more or less by degrees.

Q. What else can you tell me about ice house?

A. They had a regular crew and when the train came in that needed icing, they called a crew out. Of course, they didn't have mechanical refrigerators like they have now. They would run a lot of fruit in from the West Coast and had to be iced. They had a high platform up about as high as the box cars, and some of the cars required crushed ice and others required just chopped ice. And they put it in the bunkers in the end of the cars. Some of them had fans that worked off the axels on the truck that kept the air flowing through the cars. It was a much different railroad than what it used to be.

A. Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

A. Yes, did you know the first train robbery in this country was held in Indiana? It was in Seymour. They robbed two railroads down there. The guys were caught and hung at a place they call Hangman's Crossing. That was on Oct. 6, 1866 by the Reno Boys.