



### **Acknowledgments**

Cover photo of locomotive and crew at Cranberry, North Carolina, courtesy of Archives and Special Collections (James Dowdy Sr. Collection), East Tennessee State University.

Special thanks to Penelope Lane and Dr. James Reece for their technical assistance, as well as the staff of the Archives and Special Collections Department of the Sherrod Library. Without their support, this collection would not have been possible.

Additional gratitude must be expressed to Mr. Jack Hawkins, who allowed me to record his experiences for this project. It must also be noted that while this work represents a thorough examination of the railroad's history and vernacular, it should not be viewed as a complete and final analysis. Such an endeavor would require much more time and effort than was available for this study.

---

## Table of Contents

Section A	ESSAY Benjamin Cramer, "Reflections of the Clinchfield"	A-1 thru A-5
Section B	WORD LIST Glossary of Railroad Terms	B-1 thru B-6
Section C	TRANSCRIPT Interview With Jack Hawkins of the Clinchfield Railroad (Retired)	C-1 thru C-13
	BIBLIOGRAPHY Works Cited	C-14

---

**"Reflections of the Clinchfield"**  
Essay/Analysis of Research Into  
the Operation of the Clinchfield Railroad

The story behind the post World War II operation of the Clinchfield Railroad reveals much about the ingenuity and pride of the men who ran it. One needs only to speak with a Conductor, Engineer or Yardman who worked on the line, to realize what obstacles (both geographic and technological) they had to overcome.

During my conversation with Jack Hawkins about his career with the Clinchfield Railroad, I gained insight to the many behind-the-scenes aspects of life on the Iron Road. The most fascinating of which was the practice of putting sand on the rails to get traction. "Sand is a very important ingredient in your operation of an engine" began Mr. Hawkins. "When the wheel hits that sand, it gives you traction where otherwise the wheel would spin on the metal; metal on metal, steel on steel." When it was needed, the engineer would open an air valve and the pressure would force sand through a tube, onto the track under the drive wheels. If the sand was wet it would clog the air hoses, so it was kept on the tender car around a heated, cast-iron cylinder which the railroad men called a pot-bellied stove. It was the fireman's responsibility to then shovel the sand, as needed, into a box on the engine for application to the track.

Several sources of sand have been used throughout the years but now the railway gets sand out of Georgia for its locomotives. "In the early years, we got the standard sand from Brooks Sand & Gravel. . . that was located in Erwin but is there no more." The Clinchfield experimented with producing their own sand by grinding up North Carolina feldspar for a while, but modern transportation technology makes it more economical to purchase sand from one supplier dedicated to the process.

When widespread sale of automobiles during the 1930's caused far-reaching road expansion projects, passenger train service fell into a slump. Many small railroads, including the Clinchfield, discontinued passenger services altogether, a decision that had fatal consequences for one local, mountain community. The people of Lost Cove, in ~~Union County~~ <sup>YALDY CO., NC <sup>1930</sup></sup>, had relied on the services provided to them by the railroad since its completion in 1915. "We had what we called a peddler car and people from Lost Cove would send a message that they needed flour, meal, whatever and the peddler car would stop at Lost Cove and the people there would meet. .[it] and get their supplies" When local service to the flag station at Lost Cove stopped, people there no longer had a supply line to the nearest town of Erwin - many miles of rugged travel away. As a result, the inhabitants of Lost Cove packed up their belongings and moved away from their mountain homes, some of which still stand as ghostly remembrances of the way things used to be.

Phrases like "peddler car" and "flag station" are as unique to the railroad vernacular as *voir dire* & *habeas corpus* are to legal professionals. So specialized is the work done by railmen that unique words and word combinations, have developed around the intricate complexities of the trade. Railroad cars, for instance, are often named for the function that they perform. Camp car, stock car and Tanker car are all examples of this and refer to cars that house maintenance crews, haul livestock & massive volumes of liquid, respectively.

The job descriptions of railroad workers are as numerous and diverse as the vocabulary that they use. Almost everyone is familiar with the train's engineer who

operates the locomotive, but there are numerous behind-the-scenes workmen who are vital to the safe and efficient operation of a railroad. A yard brakeman, for instance, classifies blocks of cars by their destination and orients them for departure. Switchmen oversee the operation of switching trains from one line to another and mechanics (also known as carpecks) inspect the trains to ensure that, among other things, the axles are operating with enough oil. "The United Transportation Union represents basically all your brakemen, switchmen, carpecks & hostlers, we called 'em. Hostlers are people that move the engines around the shop areas and fuel 'em and sand 'em to see that they're put together however many the company wants to run on a certain train."

Train crews in Jack Hawkins day had to have non-verbal ways of communicating with one another. Today railroad workers have 2-way radios that allow them to talk back and forth but before the development of such technology men had to signal each other with lanterns or semaphores - sometimes from locations a half-mile apart. "You had signals for all the track numbers that you gave. . .then you'd give a signal to stop. . .which was just a swing back and forth like this. In other words, instead of using the lantern, now you've got the radio; you're in direct contact with the engineer and you can say go ahead slow, go ahead fast, go ahead ten cars - whatever. . ."

Communications technology eventually led to a centralized traffic control system [CTC] which allowed one dispatcher to monitor operations and relay information to engineers and section crews simultaneously. "Of course, when I went

to work on the railroad, we still worked by what we called traffic orders." There were certain trains that held priority over other trains in both direction and time. The workers "on the road" would get a set of orders when they went to work outlining the traffic timetable for that day. "You would have to figure out where he [the priority train] was supposed to be when you met him up here somewhere and not have a head on collision. . .in other words, he was the selective train." According to Jack, priority was determined by what the given train was hauling and by any connections that needed to be made with larger railroads such as the Norfolk & Western to the north or the Charleston & Western- Carolina to the south. At times, the north-bound freights would have priority over south-bounders of the same class: "It was really a complicated system but that's where your watches came in. You had to have a standard [pocket] watch, at least a 21 jewel and it had to be lever set. . .so you wouldn't make a mistake." When the men reported to work, they synchronized their watches with the office clock that ran on Eastern Standard Naval Time. Once radios came into use, the process improved somewhat but those legendary timepieces still played a vital role in the operation. "If I was working in Johnson City and I was in and out of the main-line, I would call in and say: 'I need to go so-and-so on the main-line.' Then he'd say [the dispatcher]: 'I'll give you twenty minutes from this minute and you be in the clear in twenty minutes.' You're supposed to clear the main-line in Johnson City when he's due the next station up, to make sure you were off the track. So they'd say: 'you clear the main-line when he's due by the Okolona passing track.' Well that's where your watch came in because if you wasn't in the clear - well there's



a locomotive comin' through there!"

The efficiency and seemingly effortless manner with which they managed such an arduous task is daunting. Certainly without their efforts, Southern Appalachia would not have developed in the manner that it has. The story, though, doesn't exactly end here, because the future of the railroad has yet to unfold. Still today, hundreds of men and women labor on the railroad, keeping this viaduct of raw materials and manufactured goods flowing from the industrial centers of the north to the port cities of the south and beyond. Modern innovations like ribbon rail (continuous rail) and concrete cross-ties perpetuate safer, lower maintenance lines of transportation for business and pleasure seekers alike. But when economic viability is no longer a reality, comfort can be found in the fact that old railroad lines, snaking their way through the land, can be reclaimed as recreational trails - so that all can enjoy the natural splendor railroad crews have treasured for decades.

**Word List Compiled From  
The Northern Pacific Railroad  
Operations Manual  
And  
Personal Interviews With:  
Jack Hawkins  
Hank Johnson  
Ted Lynch**

### Glossary of Railroad Terms

- 1.) Bad Order  
A freight car loaded improperly or mechanically defective.
- 2.) Block  
A unit of train cars classified for departure.
- 3.) Big Office  
Administrative offices of clerks, managers and superintendents.
- 4.) Board  
Train order signal.
- 5.) Brake Beam  
The rigging under a freight car that connects the brake shoe with the air cylinder.
- 6.) Brake Club  
A wooden club, similar to a pick handle, used to apply leverage to the brake wheel on a railroad car.
- 7.) Brake Shoe  
A mechanical device activated by air pressure or by a chain assembly, which pushes against the wheel and creates friction to slow the car.
- 8.) Cars, Railroad [types of]:
  - a. Big Hook -large crane or derrick car used for righting wrecks.
  - b. Bi-level -a freight car that has two decks (upper & lower) designed for transporting automobiles.
  - c. Box Car -enclosed freight car with sliding doors on either side.
  - d. Burro Crane -small crane with a long boom and scoop used to load coal cars.
  - e. Caboose -The last car on a train, having kitchen and sleeping facilities for the train crew.
  - f. Camp Car -sleeping quarters for section crews doing extensive, on-site maintenance to a section of track.
  - g. Crummy -the caboose.
  - h. Damage Free Car -a car designed to handle freight with a minimum of damage to the lading.
  - i. Derrick Car -large crane (big hook) used for righting wrecks.
  - j. Engine -the locomotive power unit [steam or electric/diesel].
  - k. Flat Car -low, freight cars without sides or a roof.

- l. Hopper Car -a high-sided freight car with funnel shaped compartments and doors in the floor through which materials are unloaded.
- m. Long Car -a freight car longer than 50 feet.
- n. Low Car -a flat car placed just ahead of the caboose so that the conductor and rear brakeman have a better view of the train as it moves over the rails.
- o. Passenger Car -a railroad car that conveys people from one place to another without effort on their part.
- p. Peddler Car -a merchant car used to bring supplies to remote communities along the railroad.
- q. Reefer Car -a refrigerator car.
- r. Stock Car -an enclosed, well ventilated box car for hauling livestock.
- s. Tanker Car -cylindrical tank mounted on wheel assemblies used for transporting large amounts of liquid freight.
- t. Tender -a railroad car attached to the rear of a locomotive and designed to carry fuel and water.
- u. Yard Engine -a locomotive assigned for yard service only.

9.) Classify

To assemble train cars into blocks and orient them in their direction of departure.

10.) Common Carrier

A company whose business is moving people or goods for pay.

11.) Coupling

The joining of two or more railroad cars together on a track.

12.) CTC

[Centralized Traffic Control] A block signal system under which train movements are authorized by block signals whose indications supersede the superiority of trains for both opposing and following movements on the same track.

13.) Cupola

The dome or bay-window in a caboose, designed so that the conductor and rear brakeman can observe the conditions of the train as it moves over the rails.

14.) Deadhead

The movement of an employee in a non-working capacity.

15.) Deadman Control

A safety device; a pedal in the cab of diesel locomotives which must be depressed to keep the brakes from applying and the engine from dying.

- 16.) Demurrage  
The detention of a freight car during loading or unloading beyond the scheduled time of departure; often resulting in compensation.
- 17.) Derail  
To run or cause to be run off the rails.
- 18.) Down-load  
The process of unloading from the chute of a hopper car.
- 19.) Drag  
A long freight train consisting of empties, company cargo, etc.
- 20.) Draw Bar  
The assembly used in coupling one car to another, or to an engine.
- 21.) Draw Head  
Large cross-member at the front of a car to which the wheel trucks are mounted
- 22.) Drop  
The act of pulling cars with an engine, uncoupling the engine from the cars while in motion, increasing the speed of the engine to provide sufficient space between the engine and the cars to realign a switch, permitting the cars to enter a siding.
- 23.) Extra-board  
List of railroad employees qualified for each given job in order of their seniority and used to pick substitutes and extras for jobs.
- 24.) Fire-box  
The chamber of a steam locomotive in which fuel is burned.
- 25.) Flag Station  
Unmanned, self-service, passenger stations where "flags" were hung to signal the engineer that passengers wanted to board the train.
- 26.) Flat Wheel  
A flat spot on a wheel caused by movement of a car when its brakes were stuck or locked in place.
- 27.) Grab Iron  
Ladder of metal rungs welded to the side of a car.
- 28.) Grade Crossing  
A point at which a public or private road crosses a railroad track at the same grade level.
- 29.) Hand-brake  
A wheel-and-chain assembly turned by hand which applies the brake-shoe to the wheel allowing the brakeman to slow and control the car.

- 30.) Head End  
The front end of a train.
- 31.) Hy-rail Vehicle  
A vehicle that can travel over the highway or on the railroad by use of flange type guide wheels.
- 32.) Ice Breaker  
Steel attachment to a locomotive used to break off icicles in tunnels.
- 33.) In The Clear  
Off of the main-line and clear of any on-coming railroad traffic.
- 34.) Local  
A freight train that does station work between its originating and terminating stations.
- 35.) Main-line  
Term meaning the main track.
- 36.) Piggy-back  
Term referring to the method of hauling trailers loaded on a flat car.
- 37.) Relay Station  
A designated point where messages are received from various locations and are transmitted or delivered to their final destination.
- 38.) Ribbon Rail  
Very long - "continuous" - sections of rail; safety innovation to reduce the likelihood of derailment.
- 39.) Round House  
A building used for repairing or storing locomotives.
- 40.) Shoo-fly  
A temporary track built for the movement of trains around a bad section of track.
- 41.) Siding  
A section of track parallel to the main track, having switches at both ends and used for passing trains or storing cars.
- 42.) Slide Fence  
Fence designed to withstand rock-slides and signal oncoming trains of slide danger.
- 43.) Spur-track  
A section of track connected to the main track or some other track at one end only.
- 44.) Stoker  
An mechanical device that aids the fireman of a locomotive in spreading the coal out evenly within the firebox (furnace).

- 45.) Switch  
A mechanical device so constructed to change the routing of cars or trains from one track to another.
- 46.) Tipple  
A raised structure where hopper cars are unloaded or loaded.
- 47.) Train Orders  
Before Centralized Traffic Control [CTC]; a set of orders outlining traffic schedules and priority trains.
- 48.) Trucks  
An assembly under each end of a railroad car and engine which consists of wheels, springs, axles, etc.
- 49.) Tunnel Scaler  
Platform mounted atop a train car which workers would stand upon and scale the calcium deposits from the tunnel roof.
- 50.) Turn  
A train movement from one point to another and return.
- 51.) Turntable  
A circular platform equipped with railway track, used for turning locomotives and cars in place.
- 52.) Unit  
Unit of power; a locomotive.
- 53.) Vocations
- a. Blacksmith -steel-worker
  - b. Brakeman -slows & controls cars
  - c. Brass  
Pounder -telegraph operator
  - d. Carpecks -inspect and maintain cars; mechanics
  - e. Carpenter -manufactures locomotive beams & cross members
  - f. Cinder Dick -railroad detective
  - g. Conductor -train supervisor
  - h. Dispatcher -coordinates rail traffic
  - i. Drayman -local delivery man
  - j. Electrician -locomotive & car wiring
  - k. Engineer -operates locomotive
  - l. Fireman -fuels steam locomotive by coal-firing
  - m. Flagman -travels ahead of train to ensure safe passage
  - n. Gandy  
Dancer -section laborer
  - o. Hog Head -locomotive engineer
  - p. Hostler -operator of yard engine
  - q. Mud Hop -yard clerk

- r. Pin Puller -switchman who uncouples & switches cars
- s. Towerman -operates tower signals

54.) Washout

Gravel & debris washed across and covering the tracks after flooding.

55.) Water Tank

Large tank on the rear of a tender car for holding water used by steam locomotives to produce power.

56.) Wheel Report

Documentation showing the engine, caboose and cars handled on a train from one point to another.



**Transcript of  
Interview With Jack Hawkins  
About His Forty-year Career  
on The Clinchfield Railroad.**

East Tennessee State University's  
American Folklore Class # 3650-001

Occupational Word-list  
Clinchfield Railroad

Thank you for participating in the railroad folklore project. By signing below, you give your permission to include the information gathered from this interview in a public archive where it will be available to researchers and the public for scholarly and educational purposes including publications and exhibitions. By giving your permission, you do not give up any copyright or performance rights that you may hold.

I agree to the uses of these materials described above.

Jack E. Hawkins  
(signature)

May 14, 1996  
(date)

Benjamin Cramer  
(researcher's signature)

This tape contains conversation with Jack Hawkins, long-time Unicoi County resident about his early involvement with the Clinchfield Railroad.

[Jack] Now here's one that I didn't know existed; my sister-in-law sent me this from Denver, Colorado - I don't know where she found it. Its got the story of the Embreeville mines and the railroad and everything going into there. Its got quite a story in here, there's five or six pages, pictures and all. Its even got the maps showing where its at and all sorts of stuff in there - but anyway its the Southern Railroad Historical Association Magazine; that's what it is.

Well, I see Ted Lynch everyday about, in fact, I was - uh - basically in charge - I was the one that organized this Railroad Reflections [railroad history celebration] through the tourism program. And I see Ted about every mornin'. It used to be just the tourism council and now its under the chamber of commerce [Erwin]. The commission changed the funding to the chamber instead of the tourism council a couple of years ago.

But uh, of course this book, I've got several pictures in here of engines - old engines. And then I've got pictures in here that belong to my brother-in-law [Ted Lynch] that's some of the first houses were built in Erwin; an before they paved the streets and he uh, hand-colored them, he used a paste-like. But they is several of those in here, and uh - quite interesting and several of these are my pictures but the ones with old homes and everything - are uh - belong to my brother-in-law by marriage. So there's quite a bit there to look at and see.

**Question:** When did you first start working for the railroad?

Well, I was in the Navy during World War II. I went in right out of high school in '43 and I didn't get out until '46. I went to work on the railroad in uh, early January 19 and 47. I work there through May of 19 and 84 at which time I retired. This first of June will be 12 years I've been retired.

**Q:** When you started-out at the railroad, what was your first job?

I was a yard brakeman. Well, you have yards in Erwin, Johnson City and Kingsport and of course other places on the railroad too. But we have seniority in those three places - Erwin, Johnson City and Kingsport. And uh, in Erwin, basically you classify trains and line them up to go out - in other words. . .

**Q:** Do you set them up in units?

Yes, as uh - in blocks - you'd put Johnson City traffic on the end of the train, and then Kingsport traffic and then St. Paul, Virginia traffic, Dante traffic, an on to Elk Horn and we would - the trains would come in here from the south all mixed up, just going north. We had to classify them in blocks like that so when the train - all they had to do in Johnson City was just however many they had for Johnson City they'd just go back and cut off/set off, and the same way to Kingsport on the line and it worked the same way on the south end.

**Q:** Is that the same way they still do it?

Well yes, basically. Of course there's been considerable changes since I quit and

uh, some of the routes go farther now than they did when I was working. They classify them beyond Elk Horn now and beyond Spartanburg I understand. But that was our job and then we took care of the industrial, uh, facilities in Erwin, Johnson City and/or Kingsport. In other words, uh, in Erwin - when I first went to work, you still had several coal yards. We would set up a car of coal for this and that one, then we worked the old pottery - Southern Pottery - which is something a lot of people know about now you know. It was one of the major employers in Erwin and uh, of course they got all kinds of materials, uh, when they switched from coal to gas why we would deliver the gas products, the clay, the sand, and all those materials that it took to make dishes. At that time, when I first went to work, the dishes were transported by rail. They had certain sized box cars that they used to pack those dishes in and they went all over the country.

Q: The cars were pretty-much dedicated to that?

Yes, we had a certain kind of car that was set up for that purpose. In Johnson City of course, most of your oils and gases and things - and coal - came into Johnson City by rail. I'm talking about the coal yards back over at East Tennessee State, they used to have a coal tipple there and I put coal on that tipple many times. And then another thing we did when I first worked on the railroad - they would have stock; they had a stock market down in the Carnegie area for cattle, they would ship cattle by rail. They had stock cars that had slits in the sides for the purposes of air and -um- we used to have to handle the stock car traffic. Uh - they had a pen in Erwin that if stock came through from elsewhere they would be times when we'd have to let them out of the boxcars and feed 'em and water 'em in that pen. It wasn't a very big holding area, it didn't take that long. We wouldn't have over a few cars at a time but there was times that we would have to - uh - of course we didn't do it as brakemen, but other people on the railroad did that - let them out of the boxcars; and of course for feedin' and waterin'; that type of thing. So that was in my early days, all that's changed of course.

Q: As a brakeman, would you be at one end of a unit and crank the big wheel?

That's the handbrake. That's the way we -uh- we rode the cars personally; one or two or three or four at a time, depending on how many you had going to different places and we'd use those handbrakes to -uh- slow and control the car. You had to climb one and take it to its destination, come back and get another one - that was it for your day - all day basically. But when also when I went to work, they had what they called stem-winder brakes. They were small wheels with a chain going around them. They were hard to get pressure on and we carried what we called a brake club to put in the wheel to enhance your leverage and give you more power - in other words, that was one of your tools just like a pair of gloves.

Q: Is a brake-club a steel rod?

No it's wooden like a pick handle. A lot of fellas had theirs, they'd smooth them out with glass and work on 'em an you kept them in your locker just like you did your other equipment.

Q: Are any of those in the museum?

Yes, uh-huh.

Q: Is the museum open seasonally?

Yes, it normally opens in may, I don't know what day. I'm on that board and I'm in charge of the railroad room. Well, I don't say in charge, but that's part of my project there. But they usually open Tuesday through Sunday, from one 'till five when they do open - and they will open on special occasions for groups or whoever; in other words we opened at Christmas time and decorated the whole building.

Of course,also when I went to work, we had the electric lanterns, they still do I'm sure, but what was for several purposes because we didn't have radios at that time to communicate back and forth and uh you had to carry that lantern of the night and uh in daytime you'd get a piece of paper or something that would be quite visible that you'd give your signals with. In other words, you had signals for all the track numbers that you gave and uh. In other words - one, two, three, four, and you could transfer signals like that. Then you'd give a signal like this to go ahead or one in a circle like this to back up and then a stop was just a swing back and forth like this. So -uh- there was so many things like that that don't exist today - in other words instead of using the lantern now you've got the radio; your in direct contact with the Engineer and you can say go ahead slow, go ahead fast, go ahead ten cars whatever and that's some of the improvements.

Of course, I worked with steam engines for several years and well, I worked four or five years before we ever got the first diesel and then we kept some of the steam engines for some years after that. When I went to work on the railroad, you had a passenger train that run Spartanburg to Elk Horn and from Elk Horn from Spartanburg -uh- once each day. And of course, we had a pass to ride that train for whatever purpose. A lot of times you were ridin' to and from work, in other words, they'd call me to work in Johnson City when I was working out of Erwin on the extra-board, so you go up and you start out on the extra-board as a brakeman and you just go whenever they call you.

Q: The extra-board is sort of like a fill-in/substitute.

That's right. Sometimes you need extra crews and -uh- I worked extra-board for several years and there would be times that you may not work three or four days at a time or more, and then if it snowed real deep or got real cold, why people would lay-off and they'd call you. They would call me and say "Dead-head to Johnson City on the passenger train, work the evening job and that type thing - you know.

Q: That term "Dead-head", what does that mean?

Well, that means that you've got to get yourself to the job and you don't get any pay for that. Now the road people, I think they basically got dead-head pay - and we did eventually, but when we first started out we didn't get pay for dead-head service. Then when I went to work, we didn't have the forty-hour week on the railroad. We didn't get the forty-hour week until -uh- I think I worked nine years before we ever got the forty-hour week. In other words, your jobs were assigned, basically, for a seven day a week jobs with no basic over-time except over eight hours in a day. Also when in that era they had a sixteen hour law that you couldn't work over sixteen hours

except in special emergencies or something of that nature.

Q: For safety mostly?

Yes. Now the law is twelve hours.

So those are some of the things that -uh- were early-on and of course an lot of people don't realize that the railroad was built in the late 1800's and early 1900's and some of these structures weren't built until 1923, 1924 - in that general era - in other words your depot. I believe it was built in 1923 or 24 - in that general bracket of time. When I went to work in '47, really the railroad was a young railroad, we're talking about twenty-some years old, or even up to forty in some areas but they didn't complete the railroad beyond Spruce Pine, for instance, 'till early 1900's - 1910 or maybe even later than that. Your early passenger trains, which I don't remember or anything, but they just went to Spruce Pine and back. Then at that time you had people lived in Lost Cove and -uh- we had what we called a peddler car and -uh- people from Lost Cove would send a message that they needed flour, meal, whatever and the peddler car would stop at Lost Cove and the people there would meet the peddler car and get their supplies.

Q: Was the peddler car like a steam locomotive?

Well, it was on a regular train, we called it a local. It always had a peddler car - what we called it - and -uh- they would stop up there and unload whatever those people had ordered because that was the only way in and out of Lost Cove.

Q: When you're in the gorge there [Nolichucky Gorge] and you come to Lost Cove, was there a special side-track or would they just stop along the mainline?

Well, they had a little spur track they called it and they could put the car there - because there's not much room between the mountain and the river there - just the railroad, the mountain and the river then you go right straight up for a long, long ways to Lost Cove - it's right up on top of the mountain - it's quite a ways. I've been up there one time; walked up there but the peddler car stopped at other places too. And then in your passenger train, you had what you call flag stations. Unless someone was there to show up the flag and identify themselves as a passenger, why they'd just go on but you had regular stations where they stopped regularly and unloaded mail and you had a baggage car that carried mail and all sorts of things like that.

But you had engines set up for passenger service - steam. One of the first units they got diesel was -uh- equipped for passenger service; it had a steam generator on it that would heat the passenger cars. And that first one was -uh- I'm almost sure was number 200 which was an odd number for a diesel. It was and -uh- you could tell a little difference in it 'cause it was a little longer than the other diesels because of this steam unit. Of course then they cut the passenger train out after some years, I don't know what year.

Q: Just for lack of interest?

Well, you just didn't have that many passengers on the railroad and on this railroad especially; and that's another thing we called a lot of them -uh- talking about the dead-heads, there was no pay involved there and we had a lot of people goin' back and forth from section crews and things like you had a section crew workin' up in the

gorge and they lived in Johnson City, why they'd -uh- ride back and forth on the passenger train. 'Course they had camp cars that they stayed in on-sight and on weekends why they'd ride the passenger train back and forth to -uh- get back and forth to wherever the location was. And then -uh- I had also -uh- I believe it was after five years you were eligible for an annual pass which gave you the opportunity for you and your family to travel anywhere in the United States once-a-year on the passenger train; round-trip. So I took advantage of that on a number of occasions. In fact, I rode the passenger train; me and my wife and son and her father and mother, in 1956 to New York City and saw the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Yankees play the first four games of the world series. Due to the passenger service that's how we got there and back - otherwise we probably couldn't have went because -uh- but I don't know, as time went on, why I served as a union representative - I was -uh- through the years and worked with the union on such things as safety, holidays, vacation, insurances and that type of thing. 'Course that's another thing, when we went to work on the railroad, you didn't have any insurance coverage.

Q: No workman's comp?

Nothing of that nature. You didn't have any holiday pay for any of the holidays and -uh- of course you didn't have the forty-hour week and -uh- -uh- we worked on all those things and through the years certainly accomplished a lot of them you know for the men's benefit.

Q: What's the name of the union?

United Transportation Union now. It used to be what they called the Trainmen's Union and then they had a Conductors Union and they had a Switchman's Unions and the various crafts - they had Electrician Unions, even Blacksmith Union, you name it all those things.

Q: Are they all now combined under the United Transportation Union?

No not all. There's still some separated but you still have an Engineers Union I understand. But your United Transportation Union represents basically all your Brakemen, Conductors and Hostlers we called 'em. Hostlers are people that move the engines around the shop areas and fuel 'em and sand 'em and see that they're - put together however many the company wants to run on a certain train. But they work basically in the yard at Erwin and do those things. But your Transportation Union covers basically all your transportation employees now except the Hostlers - I mean including the Hostlers, except the Engineers and I'm not sure whether they're have ever merged with them or not.

Q: What is a Tonnage Master?

You know I've never heard that for sure - Tonnage Master. He would -uh- he would probable work out of your office areas. Now another thing - when I went to work on the railroad, we had the -uh- offices in Erwin that handled all the office work for the Clinchfield Railroad. In other words, you had your Paymaster, you had your Clerks, you had your General Manager and your Superintendent and all those officials and we called that the Big Office. That's where all the bosses worked plus your accounting department and -uh- your Dispatchers and people of that, in those crafts.

But I don't know how many separate unions you had on the railroad. You had a, of course you had a Switchman's Union that -uh- represented Yard-Men, which I was. Then they merged with -uh- the Trainmen; Transportation Union then you had the Conductors Union which was in and apart from - in other words they were in charge of the crew. Then you had - one time had the Firemans' Union, then the Engineers Union and -uh- all of that merger run into the United Transportation Union. Basically they were all on the same trains and all. But you had the -uh- Carpenters Union. . .

Q: There were Carpenters that worked for the railroad?

Oh yes. You had a Carpenters shop and they would repair - 'course a lot of the cars back in that day were wood and they would do a lot of repair work on those. And then you had -uh- you even had an upholsterer that upholstered the cushions in the cabooses and in you -uh- special cars and all. You had -uh- well, lets see -uh- well your mechanics were - we called 'em Car-pecks -uh- they inspected the trains to see if the journals on the axles were -uh- operatin' with enough oil and everything to keep from gettin' too hot and they hooked your air together that supplies your brakins' equipment and -uh- they just generally inspected the car to see if there was anything wrong with it; basically safety -uh- you had some of what we call grab-irons where you climb up and down the car - that had been broken or something like that, they would take the car out of the - take it to the shops, repair it, put it back in and then you had cars that -uh- would have defects in the wheels - they'd take and replace the wheels and that's the shop area that did that and we called them -uh-uh- mechanics and/or car-pecks. And -uh- like I say, you had Electricians, you had -uh- Labors Union that did basically everything from Janitors service on up to Section Men that repaired the tracks and kept the tracks in shape and all.

You had -uh- Machinists in the shop area and they could basically rebuild a engine or anything of that nature. In-fact, the little Number One was rebuilt totally. And they could do the same thing for the diesels; 'course you, you had quite a few wrecks in those days. A lot of things could cause a wreck you know. We had engines that would go down over the banks in the gorge an places like that and they would even cut 'em apart and bring 'em out in pieces and bring 'em back and put 'em back together.

Q: What are some of the typical reasons why a locomotive would drive right off the tracks?

Well it could be a defect in the track for one thing; you could have a broken rail or in the latter years, you've got these big, high - what we called covered hoppers that haul phosphate and things of that nature and if the joints in the rail were weak or -uh- in the mud or something, your car would get to rockin' then on a curve they'd rock off. But normally, there would be a defect in a wheel or on the one of the cars or the track would be the basic causes and -uh- continuous rail has really helped a lot of that - your ribbon-rail they call it. That has really cured a lot of ills as far as wrecks are concerned.

Q: Do they still use sand today to get traction on the rails?

Oh yeah, it's on the diesels.



Q: Is that just to get them going?

Well, it just - in other words, when the wheel hits that sand, it gives you traction where otherwise the wheel would spin on the metal; metal against metal, steel against steel. And they had 'em on the steam engines and -uh- of-course we had what we called the coal-tipple when you had steam engines. In what we called the tender of the engine where you loaded the coal and they had a - what we called a pot-bellied stove with a frame around it and the sand went down around that stove and you could shovel it up out the bottom and put it in the engine but they wanted it dry. That was the - in other words, if it's wet why it's not gonna sift through. And they had a pot-bellied stove up there that they kept hot and they run that sand around that stove to keep it dry.

Q: Was there a lever that allowed the sand to fall down a tube to the track?

Right. Into a -a- container in the engine and then when they wanted a - to apply sand to the rail, of-course you had a pipe right under the wheel that come from the box and you had a little air pressure valve in the engine that you'd turn that and it would squirt some sand out. But -uh- the diesels have sand too, just like steam engines did. Of-course - and uh it's an air pressure situation with them, they just open a valve and it opens the gate for the pipe and the pipe runs right under the wheel where you can put the sand down and immediately get the traction from it.

Q: Does the Engineer still have control of that or is it computerized?

Well I think they still have control over it - of it. But -uh- I know on occasion back when I was working, if you had a long, heavy train for instance, -uh- and the wheels slipped on the engine that would cause a lurch when they picked back up and you would brake the train in two back here somewhere.

Q: That much force would actually brake the couplings?

That's right, and sometimes cause a wreck and sometimes pull the whole drawhead out of a car and it would drop down and cause a wreck - things like that. So the sand is a very important ingredient in your operation of an engine. I don't know where there sand comes from now but in the early years we got the standard sand from Brooks sand and gravel for instance that was located in Erwin which is there no more. Then they went to the ground feldspar from up around in Spruce Pine and that general area; they just make sand out of the rock. Then they began to bring it from somewhere on the CSX Railroad between here and Florida - out of Georgia or somewhere like that. But you had mentioned the stokers and things - you had several engines, including your passenger engines and your yard engines that were hand fired - you had no stoker.

Q: I'm a little mixed up then; would you explain just a little bit about what a stoker is?

Well, a stoker is actually a machine like you would have for a coal furnace in your home. It stokes it and spreads it out over the fire-box evenly but of-course you could open the fire-box and check to see how it was doing and -uh- but your stoker was hooked up to your coal bin on the back of the engine and you had the machinery that fed the fire-box through the stoker just like I say like you would a home furnace

that used coal. Then but the passenger engines, yard engines. . .

Q: The pushers? those were the yard engines?

No the yard engines were the type engines that we just used on the yard alone; they were a smaller engine than most and -uh- used to switch cars back and forth. They were all hand fired - including your passenger engines and this little number one when it was in operation it was hand-fired.

Q: So you needed a Fireman and an Engineer to operate that locomotive?

Right. That's right and you had a - what we called the doors on the fire-box - they were operated by air; you could step on a pedal and the doors would fly open and you'd hold your foot on the pedal and shovel the coal in. I don't know there is so many things that have changed, certainly, through the years. Of-course when I went to work on the railroad we still worked by what we called train orders - you didn't have centralized traffic control. There were certain trains that had rights over other trains; direction and time. And then you would get a set of orders when you want to work, if you were on the road especially. Say - for instance, 97 is runnin' one-hour and ten minutes late and you would have to figure out where he was supposed to be when you met him up here somewhere and not have a head-on collision in other words. He was the selective train. And -uh- then -uh- some south-bound trains had rights over north-bound trains of the same class. It was really a complicated system but that's where your watches came in. You had to have a standard watch, at least a 21 jewel and it had to be lever-set - in other words, they had a lever to change the time on your watch underneath the case; you had to screw the back off the case and pull the lever in order to set the watch so you wouldn't make a mistake. And then you had to have your watch inspected ever-so often by a jeweler and get a document to prove that you had a legitimate watch. You had to buy your own watch, your gloves, your lantern and any rain equipment or -uh- equipment for cold weather - Arctic - whatever, you had to buy your own. They did furnish the batteries for your lanterns but -uh- and then after I had worked some few years, they authorized the use of a wrist-watch and I still have mine on - it's an Acutron - had to be a twenty-one jewel. When you went to work, why you synchronized your watches with your clock in the offices where you reported. They had - I believe they called it Eastern Standard Naval Time - in other words it was supposed to be certainly accurate and -uh- for instance, if I was working in Johnson City and I was in and out of the main line, they'd say - I would call in and -uh- I'd say I need to go so-and-so on the main line an he'll say I'll give you twenty minutes from this minute - you be in the clear in twenty minutes. Well that's where your watch came in because if you wasn't in the clear - there's a locomotive commin' through there and -uh- that was the -uh- the passenger train for instance, and the same way with these class trains like 97, you're supposed to clear the main line in Erwin when he's due the next station up to be sure you were in the clear. And like over at Johnson City, they'd say -uh- you clear the main line in Johnson City when he's due by the Okolona passing track - you've got to be in the clear. So you work a lot with the same principal with CTC [Centralized Traffic Control] in the yards. In other words, if I want to get on the main-line in

Johnson City, I can unlock and throw the switch, but I'm not allowed to unless I get permission from the dispatcher to do that and he would say "I'll give you an hour on the main-line" 97's due by Okolona in one hour.

Q: You didn't have to be back at the same point you were?

Not necessarily, maybe wait another point until the train went by and call back and get another hour or another thirty minutes or whatever - so that's kinda the way it worked.

Q: Through-out your career you stayed in that capacity and just branched up through the ranks as a yardman?

Well, no I stayed as a yardman, I was a yard conductor for - well of-course I was promoted to conductor just a few years after I went to work and -uh- I was eligible to work as a conductor and I worked for I don't know how many years as a conductor.

Q: On the Extra-board, you could put your name up there?

Well if they needed you as a conductor they would call the oldest men first - you went on a seniority basis and -uh- if it come to the point that I was the oldest conductor on the Extra-board and they needed one why you would be the person. But For the last several years I worked I was the oldest person in yard service; in other words I had the seniority to work Erwin, Johnson City, Kingsport - any job I wanted as a conductor so that's kinda how that worked. But I basically worked the last number of years in Erwin because I did - was able to hold a regular job and I live close but -uh-

Q: Explain to me what a tipple is. Is it only related to coal or are there other types of tipples and is it just a place where a car pulls in and dumps or is it a place where a car pulls in and gets loaded or what is a tipple?

Well now they have tipples in the mine areas that you load cars from. Coal comes down out of a chute, across the tracks and off of a tipple and the cars run under chutes from the tipple and they load the cars. Now what we called a tipple on the yards, them all up and down the railroad, was a place to place coal for the engines to refuel. There were several of them; there was one in Kingsport and one in Erwin and there were several up and down the railroad because there would be times that they might run short on coal before they completed the trip. And also when you had steam engines, you had to have water tanks - the same way to replenish your water which was a big tank on the rear that was used to make the steam, to make the - and then you had a big spout out of the water tank an -um- you know where McDonald's is up near state college?

Q: Yes, yes - right there across from where the foundry sat?

Right. Just across the track from there and down toward town just a little bit is where your water tank was in Johnson City. And -uh- in other words there'd be times that they'd just have to stop and cut off and go down there an - keep from blockin' the crossin's an go down and replenish their water system -uh- fuel system. But a tipple was basically at a real steep slope and it would be probable 40-50 - forty feet high or so and -uh- my job basically a lot of times was to put coal up there. We'd go up and get the empties off and put a car of sand up on occasion and -uh- when the

coal cars got empty on the tippie, you had certain type of coal that the railroad kept in stock that - just for that use.

Q: You just had a front-end loader?

Well, no they loaded it at the mines - they got - well and in the winter-time a lot of times when they would possibly get short of coal they had a coal storage area - that you had a track run out over a big pile of coal and you would dump these cars and you had a thing they called a spreader that would just spread it out and you'd just keep buildin' up and you'd have probably 200 or so cars of coal on the ground - basically on the ground- then you would have a crane come - if you run short - and reload.

Q: With a bucket on the crane?

Right, just like - of course you didn't have a front-end loader but we had one of the old burro cranes - we called it - that had a boom on it - a big long boom with a clam-shell they called it and picked the coal up and reload the coal cars.

Q: Are those on rails?

Yea they run on rails under their own power.

Q: Is there one still sitting up here at the CSX yard next to where the new McDonalds is?

No now that's what you call a derrick car; that's what picks up your wrecks and all.

Q: A derrick car is different from a burrow crane?

Yea. Oh the derrick car is much more powerful and -uh- we called it the big hook, that's what we called the derrick car.

Q: Is that the same type of crane that was used to hang the elephant?

That's it. And they're the piece of equipment that drags your cars out of the river beds and resets 'em on the track or puts 'em on flat cars or whatever and they're extremely powerful.

Q: It's powerful enough to pick up a locomotive or at least a piece of it?

Oh yeah, oh yeah. And the first one - when I first went to work they were steam, now they're diesel. You couldn't believe how powerful they are. And they have to block them off; they've got clamps where they clamp them to the rails - they've got blocks that they run down and keep 'em from tilting over and then you clamp to the rails on top of that - in other words you'd be picking up yourself is basically is what you'd do in a case like that. Well, another thing that went on back then - I don't think they use them anymore - but when we started getting automobiles especially, the cars were open - they didn't have covers over them - and that type of thing; well you had water-drip in those tunnels and icicles would form - we had what we called the ice-breaker. They had that ice-breaker built with a steel frame that would put next to the engine and it would just chop off those icicles.

Q: They would maintain speed and the ice-breaker would just shear off the ice as they went through the tunnel?

Right. But if you run - for instance - now they run trains consistently and the locomotive would knock them down but back in those days you weren't that consistent and you had the automobiles that were open-faced and you'd break

windshields and whatever - you know. And then they had a car, they called it - they used it for what they called tunnel scaling. It had a big platform on top an men would stand on top of this thing and it wasn't ice but you know what they call those things - uh- calcium deposits, and they'd go through and scale the tunnel on occasion and they had this special car that they called the tunnel scaler.

Q: If the ice had built up across the track would a locomotive be heavy enough to crush that ice away?

Well sometimes it may not.

Q: Would that cause a derailment?

It's possible. And there's other situations like where you have -uh- course they've corrected a lot of them now but where you had gravel crossings and things like that - washouts would cause -ah- say a foot of gravel and dirt to cover the track and there's times that that would derail 'em.

Q: If the Engineer saw that this was the condition, would they be able to stop and then shovel it off?

Possibly, yeah or get somebody to come and do it or somethin' and -uh- but you have another system still in effect as far as I know up at what they call boulder. Your goin' right through the mountain and rock cliffs no tellin' how high; you have slides come down. They've got what they call a slide fence. If the rocks come down and hit that fence, that turns a red board on the train and he knows to stop.

Q: So it's just like a signal that would pop out?

Right, in other words you'd break the signal an that puts a stoplight on the train at the next stop. I do know that it happened at least once while I was on the railroad, the guy got by the stoplight and he saw the slide commin' down - too late to stop, and he hit the slide and the engines went all the way down in the river bed but nobody was hurt seriously but it can happen, it's a possibility but it's not likely that it would be that close - you know.

Q: They say that just past the Veteran's Affairs Medical Center is the longest cut that had to be made on this 270 miles of line is that true?

Well it's possible, I don't know for sure that that's a fact, but there is - you can see the railroad over some of the highway systems in that area and you can see the rock on both sides. Now the longest tunnel is at Trammel, Virginia and -uh- I'm not sure, but I believe it's a mile and eight-tenths long. And -uh- they call it Sandy Ridge Tunnel - but law there's numerous tunnels on the railroad. You used to have to get off and watch your train go by - to inspect it to see if everything's alright. There's a place there they call the loop - well see, your head brakeman would get off right here and watch the train go by and while he was a-goin' around here, he'd just step right up here and get back on the head-end again. So that was one of the ways that they inspected their train -an- to be sure that you didn't have any defects or. . .

Q: That was just a routine thing to do and this was just a good opportunity to do that?

That's right.

Q: How did the crew deal with the tremendous amount of smoke from the engine

going through those tunnels?

That was the reason they wore those handkerchiefs; they would wet those handkerchiefs and pull them up over their face so they didn't have to breath the smoke. I've rode them through there - I used to make road-trips on occasion, they'd run out of men and they'd call me to go to Elk Horn or Dante or Spartanburg or wherever and -uh- then -uh- its kinda, its a - has a smotherin' affect on you with all that smoke and everything. But that's why that you - your old-timers wore the handkerchief around their neck because they would wet that and then pull it up.

Q: The Old Number One - is it in the museum?

No, the Number One Engine is in Baltimore, in the museum.

Q: It's not here?

No, it's been up there several years. I've got -uh- a picture of it here; what it looks like the last time - well anybody saw it in Baltimore. See this card? That's what it looks like. That's in the museum in Baltimore and my niece went up there; was up there on vacation or whatever and she went to see it and they don't allow you on it but they let her on it because here uncles were the Engineer and the Fireman.

Q: Is this the tender? and this the Engine?

Right, you'd haul the coal on the upper portion of that tender and the water in the underneath; what you fire the engine with.

Q: Is this what's considered a unit? or is it this and any cars considered a unit?

Well this is just one - I guess you would consider just one engine like this a unit of power - you know. But -uh- here's some of the old engines; those were three brothers that -uh- Slagle brothers, -uh- here's the -uh- passenger engine that the only one that ever came here. And see Santa Claus? They ran that on the Santa Clause Special.

Here's what your yards look like. That's Erwin Yard right there. See all those tracks? That's where you'd classify cars; they'd come in these long tracks and you had what we called the lead down through here and you'd classify the cars. This is the shop area and . . .

Q: Which is the main-line? Is it visible here?

Well, yes, it's the track right here; that comes right through here.

Q: So it's like the most outside track in this group here?

Yeah. See here's your office buildings right there. Right now they're still standing you see.

Q: What is this called?

A turntable. That'll take an 85 foot piggy-back we called them that handles the trailers and it's got an electric motor on it and you place the car on there and scotch the car so it won't roll because once you start turning you've got places where there's no track except what you're sittin' on. And -uh- you push the button to turn it and you have to line it up exactly to get back the way you were on.

Q: Do pins hold it in place once you get it set right? Just itself?

Just itself. But they used to run those by air from the engine. In other words, you put an engine on there to turn it, you hooked up your air system to the table and that

would turn yourself, but now they've got electric motors.

Q: Do they still use those turntables?

Oh yeah, they still use this because there's times that - you get a boxcar for instance that will say unload from the other side; in other words they loaded the car to the point that you have to turn the car in order to get it to the platform in the right direction. But -uh- I don't know, there's just so many things like that that are still there. . .

Here's one thing that they put in in recent years. See this little white section here? You'd put an engine in there and if the wheel on the engine has a flat place or something, that is a wheel grinder. They set those up and grind that wheel - and -uh- used to you'd have to swap the wheel out and take it to the - put a new set under and take that to a certain area of the shop and regrind it but just the individual wheel, but they pull the whole engine in there and they've got mechanics or machinists that know how to set that thing up to make the proper cut to make the wheel smooth again. Now if you put the brakes on and you don't have sand down or you don't have sufficient traction the wheels will slide and it will build a gap in the metal.

Q: It will actually get a flat spot?

That's right and you see these cars go by - one of 'em a banging like that, well that's a hand-brake that's caused the wheels to slide and it will wear that spot off on that car and -uh- there's times that they will re-adjust through their turning why they'll bang themselves back almost normal but I've heard 'em bang just like your hittin' the track with a sledge hammer.

These pictures right here are some pictures of the different types of steam engines that were there when I was working. This one is the 400 and something; that's what they called the Mike, that was kind of a middle size engine; they were quite fast and they ran them on the fast freights and sometimes they'd hook up two or three and you had engineer and fireman on every one of 'em. That's where your diesels come in, you can hook up 2, 3, 4 or 5 and just have one [engineer] but see here's your coal tippie; like a trestle built only it comes up to a slope then levels off - see your coal car sittin' up here. You got the chutes from them that load the tippie.

Q: These are hopper cars?

Yeah.

Q: They down-load from the bottom and the chute directs the coal?

That's right, in other words, you've got a man that there and he'll lower the chute with a kind of a chain-fall type thing and -uh- when he gets enough coal in there why he'll crank it back up. But a lot of these were taken - now this number is 310 that was a yard engine - what we used on the yard; hand fired. Uh, this one is a 400 again, that was another one just about like the one we just saw.

### Works Cited

- Hawkins, Jack. Personal interview. 14 March, 1996.
- Hubbard, Freeman H. Railroad Avenue: Great Stories and Legends of American Railroading. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1945.
- Johnson, Hank. Personal interview (video-taped). October 1994.
- Lynch, Ted. Personal interview (video-taped). October 1994.
- Northern Pacific Railway. Terminal Office Manual. 01 April, 1969.
- Parmelee, Julius H. The Modern Railway. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940.
- "Railroads of Appalachia." Carroll Reece Museum Exhibit. East Tennessee State University. 21 Dec., 1995.