

Tom Schoonover log

2-18-10

Interviewed by Michael Kline at Schoonover's house in Montrose

0:25 DOB 8-14-25, raised in Montrose. Dad was rural mailbox carrier, born in 1885.
1:35 1 sister, passed away; house damaged in tornado of 1944. family moved to cherry fork. Enough sons for baseball team
2:45 education, air force. Got out 1945. worked on rr from 12-12-45 to 9-18-86
3:50 wife's father worked on b+o and helped me get job. Thought I'd return for 2nd year of college, but had daughter, so I kept working.
4:45 started with shovel – fired, stoker. Fired engines – steam, then diesel. Then changes in diesel.
5:20 stoker – fired
6:20 first day on job – story
10:15 first year was fireman. Then test. Starting on promotion toward engineer. Then after 3rd year, more tests.
11:30 first trip as fireman after big snow in 1950. I had to break road for my first day.
12:30 bis now of 1950, Saturday after thanksgiving
13:20 went out that day – story
14:40 drove e27-ca engine that day – defines
16:40 rudy rohr (a.r. rohr) – my engineer, musician in dance band, trumpet player, played “Sugar Blues”
18:30 gathering up coal – Norton mines, Belington, elkins. Experience helped a lot to get them downhill to Belington
20:50 “handling the air” – air brakes, had brakes on engine and cars. Engine handled all.
22:50 the air car – test to learn how to handle air
23:30 hand-shoveled coal in Belington
24:15 Gassaway, Buckhannon, etc. had mechanical system of getting coal into engine.
26:25 story of engineer who had accident going up hill with load of cattle; anticipating the landscape – grades, learning the road was part of years learning
29:11 1957 – 1st diesel on our trains; some had come in 1950, but I worked mostly in Belington. I worked as close to home as seniority allowed – juggling family life. Away at least overnight, driving to and from work too, in grafton or wherever, I had 3 kids, 3 kids in college kept me working to make all the money I could
32:35 regular turns – regular time to start work. Never regular quitting time
34:35 transition to diesel – Belington one of last places. People yelling – “the fireman was featherbedding” – not needed. Fireman still needed to monitor for a while
38:00 reduction in labor today – 2 men versus 5 back then
39:40 union – closed shop, separate unions, now merged. I joined fireman's union when started; joined engineer's union to add to hd ct rt before retiring
41:40 union power – week stoppages – fed. Injunctions against railroad striking
45:20 transition to diesel. No one thought diesel would be able to haul all the coal. Lots of labor cuts. When diesel came, I was oldest foreman, ready to become engineer. I then became youngest man working under diesel after all the layoffs and got demoted to “hostler” at Cowan. When I quit I was oldest man on seniority.

47:50 we retired to this home and moved here in '78. from '78 to '86 I commuted to grafton.

48:00 life of a railroad wife – deserves to be covered in medals, war saint – describes

51:00 son William Ronald Schoonover's path toward becoming railroader

Track 2

Son working for Carbide and then got job on B+O as trackman. I helped him get on as Engine Service as student, and then fireman. Then engineers' school at Cumberland.

1:30 son became engineer and retired after 33 years on RR. Son better employee than I, loved his job. I loved job when steam, before C+O mergers. When I started everybody knew you. When I quit you were a number on a payroll. For him it was same when retired as when started. He loved it.

2:50 son fired for me. Other engineers taught him, too.

4:20 I had two accidents on RR. 5-1-49: story. No one was injured, but flipped engine upside down. Happened near Heaters, near Flatwoods.

5:40 determined why derailed – “sunk kink”

8:20 2nd accident in 1960s, '68 or '9 hit on earth mover at Buckhannon, huge with engine on each end. Dredging out Buckhannon River. Was sitting on track and knocked it about 80 feet. Derailed our engine and 2-3 cars. Looked for man on equipment. Thought we'd killed him. Story about it.

12:25 steam whistles – 2897 had chime whistle I loved. Rudy rohr an expert. Put some extra pig tails on the whistle – story.

14:14 getting health insurance on RR.

14:30 I worked on B+O and retired on CSX. B+O and Western Maryland shared tracks.

15:30 a lot of old B+O men had on use for W. Md., called them strikebreakers from 1926 strike when hired replacements.

16:45 turn-arounds and Ys.