

Recording Log

Interview: Philmore Kelley

Date: 1/29/2010

Interviewed by: Carrie Kline

Place of Interview: Philmore Kelley's house in Elkins, WV

Also Present: Sam Bollier, Carrie Kline

- 0:26 introduces himself
- 1:09 loves doing manual work
- 1:49 grandparents from North Carolina; great-grandmother was Cherokee
- 3:40 talks about his first time in North Carolina; it was very poor then
- 5:23 grandpa had a third grade education, and disappeared from his home from age 14 to 21 to work
- 5:50 grandpa worked in CCC camps
- 6:11 grandfather was also a railroad man
- 7:10 tells story about how his grandfather cut off a part of a train because it had a yellow ribbon around it, even though he wasn't supposed to cut it off
- 7:40 his grandfather got Philmore interested in working on the railroads
- 8:22 Philmore built houses as a teenager
- 9:24 started working on the railroads in 1947
- 10:11 explains how he got his job – through his grandfather
- 11:23 talks about Ernie, a railroad man and musician from Spruce
- 13:40 tells story about filling out forms to get a job as a railroader
- 15:15 when hired, went into the locomotives department
- 16:08 explains how the job was structured
- 16:53 his first job was working on the turntable
- 18:57 he was initially unsatisfied with his job
- 19:30 worked with a carman on cabs for a while
- 20:50 railroaders bid on jobs, and were chosen based on their seniority
- 22:18 talks about A.D. Cook, the boss, who wanted Philmore to bid on a job
- 23:30 Philmore didn't bid, which was lucky for him, since he probably would have lost his job when diesel engines came
- 24:27 chopped up asbestos for insulation
- 26:24 mentions Strat
- 26:34 pride of the railroad was the 200 class of engines
- 27:08 explains how the engines worked
- 28:45 the 200 engines had great acceleration
- 28:57 Lloyd Simpson was a machinist who later became boss
- 29:46 talks about oil base in hot water of boilers – unclear exactly what this meant
- 30:30 explains the term “clinker” – coal with rock in it
- 31:30 the problem with bad coal was that it dirtied the engine
- 32:50 talks about what you wore on train to keep ashes from getting down your shirt
- 34:26 wore gloves, didn't wear safety goggles
- 35:10 often got cinders in eyes, which was painful
- 35:50 sometimes had to dump the fire out of the car and start over again
- 37:35 explains how this dumping would occur

39:56 talks about wheels and flangers (or phalangers?)
41:30 talks more about fire
43:41 firemen had a seat they could sit down on
44:06 800 engines had superheated steam engines
44:43 trains only went 15-18 mph when they had heavy loads
45:02 boilers had “eyes” so that people could see how much water was in the engine
45:46 explains what a “crown sheet” is
46:32 explains what happened if water ran out – explosions!
47:23 often difficult to gauge water levels, since when the train was going up or down you couldn’t tell how much water there was very easily
48:00 reloaded water at Montrose, Hendricks, etc.
49:30 some railroads took water on the go
50:00 sometimes as much as 35 engines at once ran a train – Philmore had to run around constantly, checking to see if water would run out, prime engines, responding to alarms, etc.
52:15 he spent most of his 8-hour shift running from engine to engine
52:50 tells story about New Year’s Day, when he didn’t have to work very hard
53:10 the train was “alive” – had to eat and drink
54:20 engine was reversible so it could go backwards
54:58 valves sometimes got “carboned up” and had to be cleaned
56:18 explains how railroad pistons worked
58:04 Granville Hess was a boilermaker with whom Philmore often worked with
59:36 steel tubes ran through the boiler
1:01:03 a steel bolt went through the boiler to hold it together
1:02:51 people sometimes went in boilers to make repairs – skinny guys
1:04:00 talks more about fire
1:05:19 talks about accidents, like time when boiler blew up
1:07:00 explains word “pops” – like a valve or thermostat
1:09:14 valves
1:11:41 talks about cleaning the fires
1:12:18 story about water level dropping in roundhouse, leading to a possible explosion
1:14:30 talks about how railroad men were often hot from their torso up but cold lower down while working
1:16:05 job consisted of “dirt, soot, and grease”
1:16:18 joined union when he started the job – joined the International Brotherhood of Firemen and Oilers
1:17:37 had to sign a union petition against his will, which made A.D. Cook angry
1:18:30 A.D. Cook was very nice, but anti-union. Story about how Cook reached in Philmore’s back pocket for tobacco, which showed that he’d forgiven Philmore for joining the union

Track 2

- 0:25 carpet brooms only lasted three days of use
- 1:00 asbestos spilled all over the floors, and got in the air
- 2:40 railroaders had to bur grease off the floors; when diesel came, floors were no longer nearly as dirty
- 3:46 talks about asbestosis
- 4:46 Philmore got a settlement for his exposure to asbestos
- 5:04 sand dirt was also bad to breathe
- 5:35 the engineer threw sand on the tracks to keep the wheels from spinning
- 8:00 talks about very technical stuff
- 9:40 later, railroaders had respirators. Another job he had was chipping paint (presumably lead paint) off the engines
- 10:33 diesel came in 1953, though machinists were skeptical that the diesels would make it through snowy passes
- 12:14 had to wash snow off the diesels. They went through snowy passes very well
- 14:40 snow got stuck in cogs of turntable, men had to chip it out
- 15:30 called to work on New Year's Eve once. Lloyd Simpson was the foreman at the time.
- 17:33 turntable was 100 feet long.
- 19:09 RR companies experimented with diesel before 1953
- 20:18 explains how diesel engines work
- 20:50 passenger trains always carried mail cars
- 22:37 talks about railroad routes – where they went, and when
- 24:58 people went to Cumberland to shop; went by train because gas was so expensive
- 25:58 worked for 756 days repairing and building coal cars
- 26:32 the Elkins yard made 5 cars a day, an incredibly large output
- 28:00 talks about rivets
- 28:54 explains what a “huck gun” is
- 31:45 there was deadly powder and lye present when they were building cars
- 32:15 jobs changed very quickly on the railroad
- 33:20 the carman job paid well
- 34:30 explains how railroaders could change jobs
- 35:13 Philmore's clothes burned all the time while making coal cars
- 35:32 some women were hired as coach cleaners
- 36:44 Philmore worked for a while at Maryland Junction, then at the B&O shop
- 37:00 railroad's decline
- 37:40 hundreds of people working at Elkins
- 38:10 explains how you can tell a railroad man
- 38:40 with diesel, railroad men looked different - much cleaner
- 40:00 had to bring icewater to the engineers once diesel took over
- 40:56 although Philmore had worked for a long time, he was always a laborer; never had a full-time position
- 41:39 Philmore was told that he was great at using forklifts
- 42:16 story about talking back to boss
- 43:09 was a sergeant in the National Guard

- 43:34 worked from 1947 to 1987 on railroads
- 44:12 explains what Article 4 means
- 45:10 explains “service months” – if you work at least one day a month, you get money in your retirement fund
- 47:45 companies tried to cut back on expenses, that’s why they didn’t work him full-time
- 48:28 did side-work too, such as building
- 50:41 story about picking up draft gears in Maryland