"Pioneer Memory Days"
Pioneer Village
Transcript 1978
by Bureau of Land Management Personnel

INTERVIEWEE: HENRY BOCK

INTERVIEWER: BILL PICKING

SUBJECT: RAILROADS IN BAKERSFIELD

DATE: OCTOBER 23, 1977

B.P.: This is an interview with Henry Bock for the Oral History of the Southern San Joaquin Valley by Bill Picking at Pioneer Village, October 23, 1977 at 2:30 p.m. Okay, we're ready to begin. Heinie, where were you born?

H.B.: Los Angeles.

B.P.: When?

H.B.: October 31, 1890.

B.P.: Who were your parents?

H.B.: Ernest Herman Bock, that'll be my dad, and Freda Franka was my mother.

B.P.: Where did they come from?

H.B.: Germany.

B.P.: When did they come over?

H.B.: Well, Pa, he come over here in, if I recollect, course I wasn't around here when that happened, let me see, if I remember right, pretty close to 1880, pretty close, maybe a little before that, maybe 1878. And my mother, she come, they didn't know each other back there. Oh no, they didn't know each other. She come, I think a little after that, and they met in the Lutheran Church of Los Angeles which was located at 8th and flower which

is now right in the middle of town this big high-rise building is there. And they got married in, it must have been around, or it should have been anyway, around 1889 because I saw the first light of day, like I say, October 31, 1890.

B.P.: What did they do for a living, your folks?

H.B.: My dad was a cabinet maker, he was a cabinet maker, he worked in - he made showcases and he worked in banks. That is, when I say banks, all the grille work where the tellers are, you know, well, all that was wood work and my dad, at the tellers windows you know, and so on he done all that kind of work. And he done showcase work too. And he done that until he was 60 years old; and at that time they got these power machines. They got these power machines that cut everything absolutely perfect.

B.P.: Is that a saw or metal cutter or what?

H.B.: oh, they were saws. Oh yes, saws. It was woodwork that he done and so when he was about 60, he might have been 62, why they thought that his age why he was too old to operate those machines.

B.P.: What year was that?

H.B.: Well, let me see, What year was that? I've really forgot but I'd been working on the railroad a long time. I'd been working on the railroad a long time. I think it must've happened, I think it must have happened around, maybe around 1930, something like that.

B.P.: You said he was working on the machines at the time. What was he doing when you say, he was getting ready to retire?

H.B.: Well, they thought he was too old to operate the machines and

that's the reason they retired him. But, he was still able to make all kinds of cabinets but for his age they just laid him off. He was a master at cabinet work, oh yes.

B.P.: Your mother, was she just a housewife then?

H.B.: Oh yeah. When she come over to this country, he brother lived in St. Louis, Missouri. And he was the one that got my mother to leave Germany and come over here. And do you know, do you know that they never corresponded, they all had brothers and sisters back there but, they never did correspond. And I often wondered, when I think back, I just wonder what my relations were. I just wondered if they were horse thieves or something like that because they never did, they never did correspond.

B.P.: Do you remember what the brother's name was? The brother's name to your mother?

H.B.: I think it was Arnold. Arnold Fanka.

B.P.: Heinie, when did you come to Kern County?

H.P.: I come to Kern County in 1908.

B.P.: Uh huh, I see. That was a year after you'd been with the railroad?

H.B.: I started with the railroad after I got out of grammar school, see and I'd just finished 8th grade; that's all. I didn't go to high school. I wanted to get a job. And I didn't care about being inside; I didn't care about studying. I didn't, I liked to be in the open space, that's what I liked. And you see, where my folks lived the back end of the place was right along the railroad track. And I would go down there to the fence and watch the trains go by. But, I was just a little kid, in

fact--in fact, when I was going to school I even had a little railroad track in the yard. I had the railroad track in the yard. Course they were wooden rails, they were wooden rails. And that track was pretty near four hundred feet long and these little cars I had to shove 'em, see. And I was carrying papers down there in Los Angeles and I got a place, it was the machine shop, and one of the kids in the neighborhood, he had some little wheels, they were only about two inches in diameter, flags and everything, oh yeah, regular little car wheels, so Axelson's was the name of this machine shop. So they were one of my customers, I had fifty-two customers. I was in business, I was in business when I was going to school. That's when I opened up a bank--my bank account.

B.P.: What was it you were doing?

H.B.: Huh?

B.P.: What was it you were doing?

H.B.: I had a paper route. Oh yeah, I had a bank account in 1903 and you know it's never been closed. Oh no, never been closed, I still got it. They've changed the number different times, but I still got that same account. Well, anyway, I took one of those wheels from this boy that lived in the neighborhood and I took it to these Axelson's when I delivered the paper to 'em. I had fifty-two customers to be exact. And that was the Los Angeles Record. And what I would do, it cost a penny, a penny for the paper. And for the month it cost 25 cents. And I had to do my own collecting.

B.P.: What year was this?

H.B.: About--between 1912 and 1913. So this fellow there at the desk when I delivered the paper, I asked him if they could make me a couple of wheels like that. And yeah, he said we can cast them. So they made me two wheels and they drilled a hold in them so I could put the axle in myself. And the gauge was about five, pretty near six inches, maybe seven. And those wheels cost me ten cents, that's what them little wheels cost me. And I had eight of 'em made because I wanted to make a truck. A four wheel truck--because that little railroad track I had in the back yard, this little track was four hundred feet long. I had curves made, I'd made curves and switches and everything like that.

B.P.: That's like your modern play trains they make now then?

H.B.: Yeah, oh yeah. On that order. Only I had wooden rails.

B.P.: You made this all yourself?

H.B.: Yeah. And oh yeah, I made it all myself. And course, that is a pretty big place and Pa, he had a lot of chickens. And he had these different kinds of chickens and different kinds of pens. Well, I had to feed them chickens, so when I built my track, well, I put a switch into each one of those pens, you see, put a switch in and had a little box-like car and I had the feed in there and I'd go and feed them. See, and course he raised the dickens with me because I was fooling around too much. Which I can understand. So, anyway, I finally made a couple little street cars. I even had a little trolley. And I took one of them little wheels off of these little-bitty motors, you know, and I made a little trolley wheel out of that. And I had little

copper wire, course there was no juice to it or nothing like that. And I could push them cars 'round there and you'd be surprised how they'd go around them curves, oh they'd never jump. I had the track elevated and everything like that. And I had a couple of crossings. Well, ya know, when these cars would go over the crossing they wouldn't make very much noise, see. So, I let the nails stick up just a little bit, just a little bit, so that when them four-wheeled trucks would go over they'd go clickety-click clickety-click. See, make it sound natural, you know. So, I even, before I put the little trolley up, I had a box and I made a seal in it and I put my dad in that--he wasn't a big man, I guess he weighed maybe 140 or 150 pounds, he was a small man.

B.P.: What'd he look like?

H.B.: Well, he didn't look like me, that's a cinch. No, he didn't look like me. No. So anyway, I fixed a seat in there and he could sit in this thing and I would shove him them four hundred feet. I'd shove him going around these curves and over the crossings, you know, even had a little hump. And I could go around the curves pretty fast, you know, because it was elevated. And I'd go around that curve and he always talked Dutch see, and so, I'd go around this curve and before he got there I was shoving him pretty fast and he says, "Nicht so schnell, nicht so schnell," you know that means not so fast.

B.P.: So how old were you when you were doing this?

H.B.: Oh, around 13 years old, oh yeah.

B.P.: How many years did you have this railroad train?

H.B.: Oh, I had it a couple of years. And all the kids in the neighborhood--oh shucks, the yard was full of kids. Oh yeah. Pa, he'd raise the dickens with me about it but he really didn't get awful mad. Naw, uh uh.

B.P.: How old were you when you first started liking trains, do you remember?

H.B.: Oh, when I was a little kid. Oh yes, yes, yes. I liked it fine. I wanted to do that anyway.

B.P.: What attracted you to the railroad? What was it you liked?

H.B.: Well, I don't know, it just intrigued me, you see, I just wanted a job. I can never forget when I got the job as a call boy. See, when I got the job as a call boy I was out of school then.

B.P.: Where were you?

H.B.: Los Angeles.

B.P.: Uh huh.

H.B.: And so, here was this switchman lived across the street from us. And he was a switchman for the S.P. down what they call the bull ring, down below Legion Park in Los Angeles. So he come over one day and he says to me says "Heinie," he says, "how would you like to have a job on the rail road?" See I was only sixteen years old then see-how would you like to have a job on the railroad? "Oh," I said, "fine, that'll be - I'll take that right now." So he says. "Alright," he says, "now tonight at 6:00 o'clock," he says - he says, "I'll - you come with me and" -- those days they worked 12 hours and not only that but, they worked every night. From 6 to 6. Wasn't no 3 shifts everything was 12 hours. And so, I went down to the yard office with him,

an old river station. In fact, that's all torn down now. There is nothing there no more.

B.P.: You know what is there?

H.B.: Huh?

B.P.: What's over it now, over the old river station?

H.B.: You know, I've got a hunch that the company sold that property. I'm not sure because I haven't been down in there for years and years and years. We used to go by there, we used to go by there, when the traits - before they rerouted the trains into the depot. Now we went around there when the trains went down to 5th and Central, which was what they call the Archaic depot. See, and just as South Pacific went in there, there is a great big shed, big iron shed, then the trains would go in there. Well, they used to - one coming out of Los Angeles, they would stop there at River Station. There was a boardwalk - there was a boardwalk over the tracks over to what they call Buena Vista Street. See, and they changed that now--it's called North Figueroa now. And the people that would get on the train--there was quite a settlement upon there so many people lived up there 'round Legion Park there. And they would - that little, that little walk, it was quite a ways over the cars ya know, and they walked down that walk from there clear down to River Station they had a ramp there where they walked down and so many people would get on the train at River Station. But, then when they changed it so we didn't go down Alameda Street anymore, why - and they build the L.A.U.P.T., that's that new depot that they built here around, oh in, the middle 30's or whatever it was.

And the U.P. and the Santa Fe and the S.P. all three roads go into that depot. Of course, now since they done away with the passenger service why very few trains go in there. Very, very few of 'em.

B.P.: What was the job that you first got with the railroad? What did you call that?

H.B.: Callboy.

B.P.: Callboy? What were your duties, what did you do?

H.B.: I'd call the - oh yeah, I'm getting ahead of my story here, wait a minute hold on to everything. You know, when they give me that job as a messenger and that was to take--the dispatcher used to be there at River Station, and take the message from the yard office up to a freight house. I meant to say, not the dispatcher, the operator. He was there at River Station. And so, I'd only have to make three or four trips up there. I had the bicycle that I peddled papers with. And I was all equipped. They gave me a brand new lamp and I kept that thing polished, oh yes, carried a railroad lamp, you know. so I had that job for two weeks why - one of the callboys that call crews around River Station. All right, he says to me, he says, "Heinie, why don't you go over there at the Round House and get a job over there as a callboy. It'll pay you twice as much money."

B.P.: What were you making then?

H.B.: I was making a dollar a night. See, dollar a night. And I don't know whether I ever got paid for it or not. But that didn't matter. So I went over there to the round house. He says, "You go over there to the Alhambra round house and you see

that master mechanic and you get that job because they need a callboy awful bad." Okay.

B.P.: Remember who the master mechanic was?

H.B.: D. P. Kellog. I'm pretty sure it was D. P. Kellog. And naw, wait a minute, no. By gosh, it was D. P. Kellog. I'm right about that because old Frank McDonald he relieved Kellog, that's the way it was. Been so long ago I kind of forget. So, I went over there and it had a big board fence all around it, you know. These railroads were on strike half of the time you know, and to keep these people from doing any damage they had this great big high board fence all around. In fact, they got one of them down here in Bakersfield right now. You see that big high board fence, that's what that was for.

B.P.: Where is it located, that high board fence you're talking about?

H.B.: It was on Kentucky Street down here. But, down there they had it all around the round house down there. And so anyway, there at the gate was a great big Irishman. Whoo, he was a big guy. I had to look up to him, you know. And he says to me "What do you want?" So, I says to him, I says, "Why - I understand that they want a callboy here - here to call crews." And I was going to see if I could get that job, I'd like to have it. Well, this big Irishman, you know, he just--"Okay," he says. Then he opened the gate and let me in and took me over a little ways and says "You walk up them stairs there and when you get up the stairs you turn to your left and you'll see a sign, one of them windows there it says master mechanic." So that's what I did and do you know, do you know that I knocked at the door, I

knocked at the door, see, and the door opened and they were having some kind of conference there, the master mechanic and the general foreman I suppose whoever some of the other officials were, there was about six or eight in there. See, am I talking too much?

B.P.: Oh, you're doing fine.

H.B.: Well, I haven't used up all my time.

B.P.: No. You're doing fine. We got forever. Keep talking.

H.B.: Oh, is that right. So, he - fellow come to the door and I says, "I'd like to see the master mechanic." He says, "I'm the master mechanic." And so he says, he says "What can I do for you?" So I says to him, I says, "You know," I says, "I understand you got a job vacant here for a callboy." And I says, "I'd like to have that job, I'd like to have that." And he says, "Well, are you familiar around here? "Oh yes, yes. I was born and raised here, I carried papers around here. I know all these streets. You want that job, all right, I'll tell you what you do. You come back here tonight and you see Mr. Jimmy Nolan, he's the night foreman and he'll be your boss." I said "Okay" and I thanked him. That night I went but, I says to the master mechanic, I says, "You know," I says, "I've got a job over there at the River Station, I'm supposed to deliver messages, deliver messages from the yard master up to the freight house. And I'll have to go over there and you tell them and then," he says, "you come over here tonight," he says, "we need a callboy." I went over there and there was this great big yard master. I told him, I says, "I got a job over there at the round house as a

call boy," and I says, "I went over to see 'em about it and the master mechanic and I could have it." "Well," he says, "You're gonna leave me in a lurch here," he says, "you're gonna tie up the whole railraod," he says. "What are you thinking about putting me on short notice like that"? And boy, I'm telling you right now I was ready to cry then, oh yes. He seen that he had me scared so bad, he seen that, and said "You go ahead and take the job." He says, "We'll get along." So that's how I got started.

B.P.: What year was that?

H.B.: That was in 1907.

B.P.: Okay. Now what attracted you to Kern County up here. You were in L.A. at this time, were you not, as the call boy?

H.B.: Yeah, in Los Angeles.

B.P.: What brought you up to Kern County?

H.B.: You know, that's an awful easy question to ask. I'm glad you asked me that. I was calling the crews from Los Angeles to Yuma, see, as well as calling the crews fom Los Angeles up here.

B.P.: What do you mean by calling? As a callboy what were you doing?

H.B.: Calling crews to work. You see, the hours were all irregular. They were all irregular, you'd get the call for anytime of the night, you know, or anytime of the day. I'll have the night shift. From 6 to 6, and the yard office would call up and they wanted the engines for the train to come up to Bakersfield, or they wanted the crew to go to Santa Barbara, or they wanted the crew to go to Indio. All right, and I would have to call them fellows because it was very few telephones. Those days the

telephone was a scarce article. See, and I had to go on my bicycle to call them fellows, the engineer and the fireman.

B.P.: Where would you go to get them?

H.B.: Huh?

B.P.: Where would you go to get them on your bicycle?

H.B.: We had their addresses. You see we-

B.P.: Oh, I see, around town then?

H.B.: Yeah, oh yeah. They had the addresses in a book, see, and I could get to Bakersfield and go firing. Well, this George Turner that lived across the street from us, see, and mama she went right over to Mrs. Turner and says, "Heinie is gonna go to Bakersfield and go firing." Mr. Turner says, "My oh my, don't let that boy go up there. No, no, no, no do't let that boy go up there." He says, "They gamble up there and got bad women up there, oh they've got bad women up there and you don't want that boy to go up there." Well, that night Pa come home and there was six of us kids there. Pa, he was at the head of the table. Mama, she says, Papa, she says, "Heinie's gonna go to Bakersfield and go firing. He wants to be a fireman. I don't want him to go. I was over and talked to Mr. Turner, and Mr. Turner says, why he says, "You don't want to let that boy go up there. Those bad women up there and those gamblers up there, oh no, no, no, no you don't want that." I can see Pa to this day, he stood up, kicked his chair back, he raised his hand and he said, "Let him go, let him go, let him go." They were tickled to death to get rid of me. You know, you know I got the job all right, oh yeah, I got the job. So, I says to the--after the--I'd made

some student trips here, you only had to work three trips, I think that's all. They didn't have rules those days.

B.P.: What did you do as a fireman?

H.B.: Keep water in the boiler and keep the steam up so the engineer could do his work, you know, and I had to look out on my side, oh yeah.

B.P.: So you were right there with the engineer then?

H.B.: Oh yes. It was--sitting right beside each other. sometimes you got along with the engineer, sometimes you didn't. Some of them were old grouches but, lot of the--most of 'em were all good guys. And sometimes I wondered and figured they didn't get along with their wives or something like that you never know what brings all that on. Then they'd take it out on the fireman, see. Well, anyway, I says to him--they qualified me--I says to--the fellows name was Thayer, George Thayers was--I never did see that master mechanic. Because from what I understood that he--he would leave. He would go to Fresno or he'd go other places, you know, and he wouldn't always be in his office. And in fact, I'll tell you, he was a single man and I think his social affairs kind of took him away from his work, that's what I think. Well, anyay, anyway, I said to this foreman, Joe Thayer, I says you know I says--he told me he said, 'Now," he says, "you have to go to Fresno. You have to." I said, "That's all right." I says, "you know," I says, "I wonder if I could go back home and get some clothes. Get some clothes." "Oh sure." He said, "I'll write you out a pass, I'll write you out a pass from Bakersfield to Los Angeles and from Los Angeles clear to

Fresno." Let me tell you something, when I got that pass, and I read it, Henry H. Bock, Fireman, boy, oh boy I was proud of that. Oh yeah. I got to Los Angeles you know, and got my clothes and Pa he says to me, "Now, I'm gonna tell you something Heinie, now that you got your job firing," he says, "whatever you do you nurse that job along, you nurse it along, because he said, "if the day ever comes that you have to stand up to make a living," he says, "right then is the time that you are gonna starve to death," he says. See, that was good advice too. So I went to Fresno--I was up in Fresno there for, oh I think two years, you see I lied a little bit on my age, oh yes, yes pretty near all of them did. They would lie to get on.

B.P.: How old were you at that time?

H.B.: I was 18. I had to be 21 to be on the road, see, oh yes. And I wasn't--I lied but, I didn't--I had to go up there on the switch engine because you had to be 21 years old to be on the main line. And they had about ten of us youngsters, you know. Most of us were in Fresno some of 'em were here in Bakersfield, but, we were all too young. We were on a separate seniority list from these older guys that was on the main line because they were 21 and us guys weren't. See, we were just kids. So, I was up there then until I think 1909, I think it was, then I come down here. And I worked down here for a while. Then, from there I went back to Los Angeles.

B.P.; Said you mentioned earlier that the group down in L.A. didn't seem to be so happy, they were griping all the time, and grouchy and everything. You know what they were grouchy about?

H.B.: I never did know. But, they were--I tell you they were different types of fellows. They were different type of fellows and what made 'em the way they were, I don't know. They say that the fireman and the engineer didn't go in the restaurant and eat together. The brakemen and the conductors didn't. They were, I don't know, were they--they were too distant. They were too distant. When I--now they weren't all that way, but the majority of the rank and file they--that's the way they were. But up here, up here, oh my goodness alive, it was altogether different. Yeah, you know, I'll tell you something, the way they were up here, a young fellow catches on mighty quick and you'd be going along and you'd get--be close--getting to a station, or you're at a station and there's an official around and there's another train there, and you know, the officials around, why you, you give the engineer or the conductor, give 'em a whisker sign, see.

B.P.: Yeah, warn 'em in advance.

H.B.: Give 'em a whisker sign. There'd be bastards around somewhere the addressor they'd tell me. See, and sometimes I'd have to call a half of a dozen crews. See.

B.P.: How far out would you go?

H.B.: Well, sometimes it would be three blocks sometimes four blocks, sometimes a little further than that. A lot of the fellows, they were single fellows. Oh, there was a lot of single guys there. And they just had room in some rooming house, that was easy. But, I had no trouble--oh yeah, here, here--you asked me what brought me up here. I can't think fast enough.

B.P.: That's all right.

H.B.: Uh, I'll tell you what. Those fellows that worked between Los Angeles and Yuma, Indio, down on that district, they wasn't like the fellows that worked up this way. The fellows that worked between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, that was all on the same division you see, and from Los Angeles to Bakersfield here, they were more or less of a happy-lucky-go bunch of guys, and I used to--in fact, while I was a call boy, I'd ask them if I could ride on the engine sometime with 'em. They--oh they always let me. Strictly against the rules, but, they let me go anyway. Those guys didn't pay much attention to rules anyway, because I'll tell you, the way I looked at it, those fellows that were working up here it was just like one great big family. But those fellows down there, I'm a-telling you, they were gripers and you'd think that they were living on sour pickles. For a fact, you think that's what they were living on.

B.P.: What did they gripe about?

H.B.: Oh, everything, everything, they griped about everything. So I stayed at that until 1908 and I got itchy feet. Oh yeah, I got itchy feet and I wanted to go firing. I wanted to go firing.

B.P.: What does go firing mean?

H.B.: Be a fireman on a locomotive, see.

B.P.: Oh I see, uh huh.

H.B.: And so the fellows down there they told me they says, "Well," they says, "If you want to get a job, if you want to get a job, as a fireman and you want to work up on this San Joaquin divison as they call it, why--there's an old engineer, his name is Jack

Mosier. John B. Mosier, they call him Garbage Jack. That's what they call him.

B.P.: Why did they call him that?

H.B.: Ooh, these guys all had nicknames. They all had nicknames. I could sit here for hours and tell you the nicknames of some of these guys that they carried, carried all their lives. So, I asked old man Mosier, I used to have to call him too but he had a telephone, see. He had a telephone and I used to--used to call him see, and one night he come in, one night he come in and I said to him I said, 'Mr. Mosier," I says, "you know," I says, "I'd like to go to Bakersfield and go firing."

B.P.: You said you were talking to Mr. Mosier?

H.B.: Yeah, and he says "No." "No," he says, "I'm not going to take you up there. No sir, I'm not going to take you up there." Well, when he turned me down, you know, that sure hurt me. But, he had a fireman. He had a firemna, his name was Fred Totes, I could never forget that guy, and I never in my life heard such a windjammer as that guy. He never did get through talking that guy, never. So, I didn't give up at that, oh no, no, no I didn't give up. So, my gosh, oh it was maybe a month and a half or so I said to him I said, "Mr. Mosier," I says, "you know," I says, "I'd sure like to go up there and go firing." I says, and I says "I understand that you got a little influence," I says, "and I'd appreciate it." "No, no, no." So lo and behold, coming down, his train number was old 108, and this Totes was still firing for this old guy, John Mosier. He said to him, they called him Jack, Garbage Jack, he says, "Jack," he says,

"why don't you get that kid on up there." He says, "You can get him on up there. Get him on." So lo and behold, the old fellow at the next trip when he went to Bakersfield, they had a day layover, see they had a long layover in Los Angeles. He went to old Shelaburger and asked him if he was putting on any firemen.

B.P.: Who was Shelaburger?

H.B.: The master mechanic.

B.P.: Okay, here in Bakersfield?

H.B.: Yeah, he was a great big bruiser and he was rough too. And I thought he was going to fire me every move I made. Oh, he had me scared all the time. Well, anyway Shelaburger says, "Yeah, bring him up. Bring him up."

B.P.: What year was this?

H.B.: That was the early part of 1908. And so he comes in to register in, you know, when he come in off his run and, of course, I was there. So he says to me he says, "Heinie," he says, "do you still want to go firing?" I says, "Sure, sure I do." "All right, when I go out there after tomorrow morning," he had a little bit of an envelope. You know, you know, these little envelopes they get, that you get if you send a floral piece or something. Those little envelopes, he had sealed that, he had something in there and it was sealed. He says, "You put this in your pocket," and he says, "day after tomorrow morning," he says, "you get on at River Station, cause we stop there every trip, that's a regular stop. You get on there." "All right." So, I told my mother, see, that I was going as a fireman, and so they drafted me, see, they drafted me, well, there in Los

Angeles I went to the doctor down there, where they--where you had to go to go in the army you know, and he had me take my shoes off. Well, you had to take everything off as far as that goes. And he had me stand on something to make a print and I was flat-footed. Oh he says, you're flat-footed, you're flat-footed awful bad. So they didn't take me then, but I wanted to go in the Navy, so, and they turned me down there. Then they put me in what they call class 2D. That's the way they classified me, see, being that I was working on the railroad. And I had that card for the longest time, but they never did call class 2D. The Armistice was signed before they ever called us fellows, see. So that's how come I didn't--I wasn't in the service.

B.P.: How did that affect the railroad? The first World War. Did it affect your job much, as far as what you were hauling and what you did on your routine duties?

H.B.: Oh, I'll tell you during those days, they really run a lot of trains, troop trains, troop trains and war material all kinds of war material, oh yes. They uh-you see, they had these training places all along the line and that's--there was an awful lot of traffic of course, especially on the hill here because the Santa Fe done--they operated just like the S.P. did.

B.P.: Where was the hill you're describing?

H.B.: Between Bakersfield and Mojave.

B.P.; Tehachapi route?

H.B.: Tehachapi, yeah, see and they were running, Santa Fe was running as many trains as the S.P.

B.P.: How many trains was that, do you remember?

H.B.: Well, I know they had four. They had--the Santa Fe and the S.P. each had four passenger trains each way a day over the hill. I know they had that. And then they run sections too, besides that. But, I'll tell you, to be exact as to how many trains that they would run over that--over the Tehachapi Mountain during the war, I really, I wouldn't even try to guess, I wouldn't even try to guess. But, I'll tell you something us fellows worked irregular hours and we met lots of trains. So, I know good and well that they must have had 30, 30 trains a day. It wouldn't surprise me one bit because we met so many of 'em. Anytime of the night or day.

B.P.: How long were these trains? How many engines did they have?

H.B.: Well, in those days, why we had on the freight trains, well, we had 72 cars. We'd very seldom go over that. We had the big Malleys, we had the big Malleys, we'd get a helper if they--and if they're empties, if they're empties why, we could struggle along maybe without a helper. But, you see, they had helpers at Mojave. That was a helper station. But, just to give you an idea, just to give you an idea, when I told you about how these fellows worry, you know, the engineman and the trainman, and this was during the war, and so, we didn't have no helper out of Mojave, we didn't have a helper. And they had a new trainmaster here, and if I recollect, been a long time ago, his name was Mays, M-a-y-s, I think was his name, and he was from San Jose and they made a traimaster out of him over there and you know the company, they moved, they moved these officials around. Oh

yes, yes, yes they're good at that, moving them around. So we had one road foreman of engines here and I think he acted as trainmaster too, I don't know--I know he worked 24 hours a day, I don't know when he ever got any sleep that guy. And he didn't get more--he didn't make anymore than any of the rest of 'em that got plenty of sleep. But, anyway, he was breaking this fellow in showing him the territory.

B.P.; Uh huh.

H.B.: Now this Hoffman and this Mays got on the caboose out of Mojave. It was one afternoon. And this Mays was sitting up in the caboose up in the cupola. Well, there at--that place called Eric there is a 'y' there see, and it's a long right hand curve, oh a long, 50 mile an hour curve. And I come around that curve, I could see that signal was red, well, point at the double tracks. All right, all you had to do for that signal--those days it was a semaphore signal. Use a semaphore signal. Wasn't a light signal--semaphore. And that symbol for signal was up. And so, I eased down on this old Malley that we had and this trainmaster was sitting up in the caboose and he was watching that, see, well I knew if I had come to a complete stop, I'd have a dickens of a time trying to get started there because it was quite a grade. Oh yes, yes steep.

B.P.: What side of the route was this on?

H.B.: Huh?

B.P.: The steep grade you were going up?

H.B.: That was the other side on Monolith up here, right on the other side of that place called Cameron. Eric, Eric was the place

where the 'y' was but, the signal was right at Eric. So, I eased this old Malley down and I didn't let it come to a complete stop, see, naw, I didn't want to do that because, by gosh, I knew I'd have to take the slack and fool around there trying to get it started again and I didn't want to lose any momentum at all. So, just before she come to a stop, I widened this on her again no jerking no nothing, they couldn't feel a doggone thing back there. And this trainmaster he was looking on the ground see, he knew I was just about stopped, this trainmaster he says to the conductor and the brakeman, says, says "That fellow didn't stop for that signal up there. He didn't stop for it." You know what, you know what that fellow said to him, "Oh yes he did, sure he stopped for it." Oh yeah. So poor old Mays you know, he had two strikes against him, there was no use in--so you see, the railroad business is something entirely different than anything else. And no two trips are alike, no two trips alike.

B.P.: When did you start the run to Mojave and Bakersfield?

H.B.: Well, in the earlier days we only come from Los Angeles to Mojave and I believe, if I'm not mistaken now, been so long ago, but I think it was 1926, and these fellows up here they worked to Mojave and back again. We worked from Los Angeles to Mojave and back, see. But in 1926, they changed this thing all around, and they figured that the crews could make it from Los Angeles up here within the 16 hour law, which is--was the law those days. They couldn't work you over that, see. But it was a long, long hard trip you bet it was because we were so used

to--when we got to Mojave you know, we were so used to going to bed when we got there, we were used to going to bed, and then had to make that 73 mile or whatever it is from Mojave over here, 69 or whatever it is. And when you got here, when you got here you were ready to go to bed. You sure was tired. And those engines didn't ride any too easy either.

B.P.: When you were making your run between Mojave and Bakersfield, describe the trip to me--one of the trips you had. When you go through the Tehachapi Loop or anything coming back down.

H.B.: Well, in those days, everything was train orders. Everything was train orders and when we would start out of Mojave, when we would start out of Mojave and coming to Bakersfield, we'd have an awful big stack of train orders. And they'd be the number of these trains and then the sections of the trains. Some trains would have three sections, four sections, see, and you had to keep track of all of that. You know it's very strange that the fellows didn't overlook some of them. I know I did. Yes sir, I overlooked one. I overlooked a first class train. A Santa Fe passenger train. I'll tell you how that happened. We come--coming down the hill there there's a place called Allard, it's the first siding above Caliente. We ducked out of that tunnel it was about 9:00 o'clock in the morning and the fireman he says to me, he says, "Heinie, there's a passenger train down there." Soon as he said that I knew good and well what I had done. I knew I overlooked that train it was a Santa Fe passenger train, they used to leave here around 8:00 o'clock or 8:30 in the morning. This was around 9:00 o'clock or something like that.

So, see, we held the block on them down there. I'ts just luck that we were just far enough ahead to throw that signal against that fellow, or he would've left there and we would've met them in between Caliente and Allard. But, we got far enough down to throw that signal on him. So, anyway, I seen the fireman, on the--the Santa Fe fireman, I saw him get off and go up and throw the switch so we could head in there, see. There is a great big horse shoe turn there, you know. And the fireman he says, put his finger up to his mouth, you know, not to say anything, to shut up. The engineer the same way--Santa Fe. And even the old operator Old Malkowitz, he didn't say nothing. Do you know, whether they knew anything about it, they must have known something about that would happen because the dispatcher knew when we left Bealville and he knew how much time we would have going down to Caliente and he figured that we going to head into Allard or Bealville for this Santa Fe passenger train. Dispatcher never said nothing, just like I was saying, just like a big family. It's just like a big family, I enjoyed every minute of it from the time I went to work until I made my last trip.

B.P.: The Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe got along pretty well then?

H. B.: Oh yeah. But, them Santa Fe boys are fast. Oh I'll tell you right now they're fast; you had quite a time keeping out of their way. They said all the delays they ever had was us fellows delayed 'em all the time. They said we were always in their way.

B.P.: Wasn't going fast enough?

H.B.: I guess so; I don't know.

B.P.; How long did you work on the Mojave grade, between Bakersfield and Mojave?

H.B.: Well, I worked continuous from--continuous from 1936, from 1936 until October of 1957. I never worked anywhere else but on that territory.

B.P.: Do you remember them mentioning the flash flood that wiped out the Santa Fe engine at the junction of Caliente and Tehachapi creeks in 1932?

H.B.: Yeah, that was a 38-34. And that fellow's name was Nieman was on that but, he was in the depot. I think him and the fireman went in the depot when that flood undermined the side tract there, see, and buried that engine. And they buried her deep because the dirt come over, went down as far as it could, got down to the big boulders, I guess, and covered her up, and they didn't know just exactly where that engine was. But it's been my understanding that when Los Angeles built the aqueduct, you know the Los Angeles aqueduct, when they built that, they had some kind of instruments. They had some kind of instruments and the railroads borrowed that instrument, the way it was told to me. Now if there is any truth to that or not I don't know. But, you can't believe everything these railroad guys tell you, you know that no, no, no you can't believe all they tell you. But, that's the way it was told to me. Now, there's one of the one--one of the engineers on the--where the engine went down, right there at Caliente too, I mean at Woodford the 50-42 on the S.P. It was a three cylinder, great big mountain type engine, he

was down there in that little hollow. There was some people down there, and by gosh, this here water come down and washed him clear down to Illiman and they found him, I forget how many days after that, and he was tangled up in the barbed wire fence there, where the water had backed up, you know, company fence there, they found him there in the--I forget how long he was there.

B.P.: Was that the same year as the flood?

H.B.: I believe it was, yes.

B.P.: They lose any passengers or anything in that flood?

H.B.: Uh uh, no.

B.P.: Just the engineer got killed?

H.B.: They were freight trains, they were both freight trains.

B.P.: Well, thank you. We'll see you a little bit later on.

"Pioneer Memory Days"
Pioneer Village
Transcript 1978
by Bureau of Land Management

INTERVIEWEE: HENRY BOCK

INTERVIEWER: BILL PICKING

SUBJECT: RAILROADS IN BAKERSFIELD

DATE: OCTOBER 30, 1977

B. P.: This is an interview with Henry Bock for the Oral History of the Southern San Joaquin Valley by Bill Picking at Pioneer Village on October 30, 1977 at 2:00 P.M. in the afternoon. This is tape number two. Okay, Heinie, why do they call Mojave Mojarve?

H.B.: Well, you know, in my early days, in my early days, it was Mojarve. Everybody called it Mojarve. And once in a while you'd hear somebody call it Mojave, and then someone called it Mojave. You know it's an Indian name. It is an Indian name. Where they got the idea of pronouncing it with an 'r', that I don't know because they done that long before I was around. There's so many of these places, you see, in the Spanish, in the Spanish language the 'j' is pronouned like an 'h'. That's where that comes in there. and they, I don't know, maybe the people weren't paying any attention to what they were hearing and the just slipped that 'r' in there.

B. P.: How did they pronounce that again?

H. B.: Some of em' called it Mojave with a 'j', some of 'em called it Mojave, which is the proper name, and others called Mojarve, see. It was three ways of pronouncing that.

B. P.: Okay. Could you describe the Tehachapi Loop to me?

H. B.: Well, there was a fellow, I think the man's name when they built that back in 1876, I believe the man's name was--civil engineer, the resident engineer, whatever you want to call him, the one that had charge of the construction of it, I think his name was Hood, if I'm not mistaken. Well, in order to make that a uniform grade, they done alright until they got to where the Loop is. Now, I don't know, I wouldn't want to be quoted, but it's been told to me like this that this Hood had a little boy. And when they got up to that Loop, they didn't know just exactly how they were gonna make that a uniform grade. So, this little boy, this little boy had a string and he was the one, from what I was told, was the one that proposed going around that knoll there. And that Loop there, when they had the shorter cars, I can remember, I can remember when I was on those freight runs, that if was coming west, that is coming down the hill, why when the engine would duck into the tunnel, we could look right up and see the conductor sitting up in the cupola of the caboose.

B. P.: You said when the cars were shorter?

H. B.: Yeah.

B. P.: What type of train was that, what was those called?

H. B.: Oh those, the cars those days were much smaller, they were much smaller than they are today. You know when they are moving the box car nowadays, they are moving a warehouse, they're not moving boxcars. Not only that, they are not wood anymore anyway, and it's all--they are all made of steel. There's no wood to 'em, it's all steel. And they've even taken the running

board from the top, they used to have running boards up there where the brakemen would ride upon top and the brake staff was up on top. They've changed all that around. Now the brake staff is down, is down where the brakeman could sit the brake of the car right on the ground, right on the ground he'd sit the brake. So there's no ladder that goes up to the top anymore except I believe one place somebody had to do some work up there. But the brakeman wasn't they--oh no, no, no they wouldn't--they don't ride up there no more.

B. P.: Why was it important for the uniform--the grade to be uniform?

H. B.: Well, the railroad tries to do that. The railroad companies will build fills, they'll go through cuts and--in order to make the grade more uniform. Now they had--if they run over every hill and everything like that it just wouldn't work, it just wouldn't work. If they didn't have a uniform grade they had to go up grades there--they might have to use more power. By--but, by making these fills and making these cuts that's the reason you notice, you notice especially--say for instance, course here, here in California, they don't have what they call these, how shall I put it...snow fences. When they go though these cuts they built a fence on top. Well, that fence, there lot of people don't know what that's for, but that's to catch the snow so it don't get down in the gully because if it gets, if it gets too thick down there, snow was too heavy, they'd have to have a snow plough, you know, to clear the track. But, these snow fences, and of course sometimes the snow, general rule all I know about it--where I saw all this was going over the Rockies over the Union Pacific.

B. P.: When was that?

H. B.: Ohh, let me see, oh that--ten years ago. Just about ten years ago. And I wondered, I wondered what those things were for cause I never saw 'em out here in California. And--the people told me on the train, they said, that's what that's for. And I could understand then.

B. P.: I been-I've heard that the railroad used part of the Tehachapi Loop, the reason they looped it was so they could be paid more money because of the mountains, in the mountains the government paid 'em more if they laid tracks in the mountains than on flat land. You know anything about that?

H. B.: Well, when it comes to the cost, the cost, I'll tell you this much, now well, this fellow, the one when we worked on the railroad, now us guys that worked over the mountain, we got a little more money than the fellows that wre working on flat territory. Like from here to Fresno. We got more money for that.

B. P.: You know--do you know what the difference was in wages?

H. B.: Well, now let's see, I can tell you, I--if my memory serves me right, I think we got $2.97 a hundred miles on the valley and we got three dollars and a quarter going over the mountains for the hundred mile. It wasn't very much, only $.35, but, you know $.35 was a lot of money those days. Oh my goodness, you could get a New York cut for that. Oh yeah, sure.

B. P.: Do you know how many tunnels there were between Bakersfield and--say Mojave?

H. B.: I believe there was, let me see, they done away with some of 'em. I believe there was eighteen and that tunnel "half" was, tunnel "half". I'll tell you, the reason they called that tunnel "half" when they built the railroad, they built it around, around this, around this side of the mountain there and it was right close to the Tehachapi Creek see. Well, in the winter time, the rainy season, that water get pretty high, and it washed that thing out a lot of times. Course they had the line already built you see, they had that already built, but they had the tunnels all numbered. They were operating trains. So when this, kept washing this out and so this knoll there that they built around whey--they went to work and cut a tunnel through there, they cut a tunnel through there. And they had to call that tunnel "half" and it's still there today. And not only that, no doubt, there is a lot a fellows working here right today that don't even know that there is a roadbed. But you can see, you can see where the old roadbed was. And the, from there to Caliente, oh they had about four bridges, and they were washing out. So here, it was before I retired, before I retired, they went to work and they changed the course of that to Tehachapi Creek. And they done away with those bridges and run the Tehachapi Creek on one side and the railroad on the other side. But don't you know even that short distance, that's what I'm trying to tell you about, these here fills and these cuts and things like that. When we, when we...going east, that is going toward Los Angeles when we get to that piece of track, that they built on the side of the mountain there, when they

done away with these bridges, you could see, you could feel it, how much slower you would go, you see. Just that little bit. That's the reason the company tried to keep it as, keep the grade as near uniform as they could.

B. P.: Do you know how many tunnels there are actually in the Tehachapi Loop itself?

H. B.: Oh, the Loop, oh just the one. Now, I believe-

B. P.: Do you know the number?

H. B.: Yeah, I believe that's No. 9. I believe that's the number of it. You see, they've done away with several of 'em there. When they had the earthquake in 1952, why what they did they--why they call that the--sunlighting them. They made a little, little line chain there, they made a little line chain not enough to amount to anything just east of Bealville. And the one the other side the tunnel, tunnel five, when, they daylighted that, because it was a lot easier because it was no--it wasn't so many rocks. That is--they didn't have to do any blasting; it was all just dirt. And by the way, those things, those tunnels, everyone of 'em, everyone of those tunnels were wooden arches. Oh yes, yes they were all wood. I guess cement was too expensive. So they went to work and they concreted them all and--now you take No. 3 and 4, you go up there, you can see the wall of the tunnel there. You can see the wooden arches yet, you can see the concrete in between there. See all of that.

B. P.: It's been said, that a college student was paid about $10,000 for drawing up the plans for the tunnels. Do you know anything about that?

H. B.: Sneeze again there, I didn't get that.

B. P.: The tunnels on the Loop itself. That the student was paid about $10,000 to draw those plans up, do you know anything about that?

H. B.: Oh no. I wouldn't know a thing about that, no, I wouldn't know a thing about that.

B. P.: Okay. You mentioned the earthquake of 1952, could you go into detail on that? Where you were and how it affected the railroad and what happened?

H. B.: Well, I'll tell you, I was on the aisle at the time.

B. P.: What's the aisle?

H. B.: That's my passenger run they used to have. And I was in Los Angeles when that earthquake happened. They had a train called the--well, we called it the Old Milk Train, oh, they had all kinds of names for the thing and it stopped everywhere, it stopped everywhere. And, so, that train from the way it was told to me, it was coming west and they just got out of the tunnel there at Bealville when the shock came.

B. P.: Do you remember who told you about it?

H. B.: No, I forgot. I have forgotten that.

B. P.: You said they were coming out of the tunnel, what happened?

H. B.: This is when they had the shake and those are the tunnels you know what they daylighted. Oh yeah. They made a different kind of a line...

B. P.: Okay. Now you say that they daylighted them. What exactly does that term mean?

H. B.: That--just done away with the tunnel.

B. P.: they just cleared it out?

H. B.: Oh yeah, oh yeah. In other words, there is no tunnel there no more.

B. P.: Was anybody hurt in that?

H. B.: Oh no. As far as I know there was nobody hurt in that quake at all. It just, it happened, there was no trains in any tunnel when--in none of them tunnels up there when this happened.

B. P.: Did it take any bridges down or anything like that?

H. B.: Well, we had, if I remember right now, we had some slow orders--you see them--you take the resident engineer, I forget who it was now, well they checked the railroads mighty, mighty close and we had several different slow orders, you know.

B. P.: What does "slow orders" mean?

H. B.: That means to reduce speed to ten miles an hour or fifteen miles an hour. You get a train order to that effect.

B. P.: You were mentioning before, on the other tape, about the different things, could you go into that a little bit and describe the difference--changes in the engines you've seen?

H. B.: Well, course the Malleys are these big ones. In other words a Malley is two engines built in one. Now there's so many different types--here they--you take way back in the early years, all they had was these little eight wheelers, eight wheelers. And when I say eight wheelers, that means there was two drivers on each side, and a four wheeled engine truck. Then they built them a little bigger. They built what they call a Mogul. Now a Mogul, that's got three drivers and one set of wheels in the front,--engine truck or pony truck. I forget now whether a four-wheeled one--the four-wheeled truck was called

the engine truck or whether the two-wheeled one was called the--

B. P.: can you give me a time frame on these, when the changes were?

H. B.: Huh?

B. P.: Can you give me a time frame on these, when the changes were, what year?

H. B.: Well, I'll tell ya, they even had, they even had, the Mogul even before my time here. When I was a call boy, they had them. You see, what they do, what they did, they had the bigger type engines where they handle little heavier grades when they put bigger engines on that territory.

B. P.: What was that called, that type of engine?

H. B.: Well, there's the Mikado for one and there's the mountain type. Well, I think that just about--then the Malleys, of course.

B. P.: About what speed did you travel?

H. B.: Well, with the Malley,s with the Malleys, sixty miles an hour. Because I'll tell you, if you went with an engine, with drivers that size, sixty-nine inch, if you went any faster than that it was just too fast. It was just--they'd get to riding pretty hard if it go any faster. They rode hard enoungh anyway as far as that go. But then they, then they had these mountain type passenger engines--they had a higher wheel even there last time--I've forgotten just how big those forty three hundreds were and then the forty-four hundreds.

B. P.: What was the name of those engines you're mentioning? Forty-three and forty-four?

H. B.: I sat on them things so long I never even knew what they call 'em. But there were, they wre awful good engines. Oh, they

rode good. They rode awful good and you could really go with them.

B. P.: What was the speed limit they usually had on flat land, say for the railroad--and in hilly country?

H. B.: Well, now I'll tell you. On account of the curve territory on the mountain there, why, at one time, it was thirty miles an hour for passenger trains. But, one night, they had one of the officials from San Francisco and he had his private car on the rear end of this train. Well, this engineer that was on there--and he was one of the top notchers. He was what you call a natural.

B. P.: Remember his name?

H. B.: Maurice Sheehan. Maurice A. Sheehan was that fellow's name. He was on this passenger run regular, well, he was making a thirty mile an hour coming down the mountain. Well, he fell out of bed, see, he fell out of bed, and he laid it to high speed. Well, he checked this engineer, they checked and they found out that he made exactly what the speed he was supposed to make. So then from then on, the speed was 25 miles an hour, and you better see that you don't exceed it. Because they had me in the office doing twenty-seven miles an hour, just two miles over. Yeah, the old superintendent had me in there.

B. P.: How fast did they go on the flat land, the valley floor?

H. B.: Well, now here on this--on the valley here they did not have what they call automatic train control. So, I never worked anywhere where they had it. But seventy-nine miles an hour was the limit. They didn't want you to go over that. They didn't

want you to do that...and you'd better not do it. Oh, they are very strict about speed.

B. P.: Do you remember anything about the different gauges or the size track?

H. B.: Well, let's see what is the standard gauge of--oh gosh, I don't know. I don't remember what it--I think it's five feet or is it four feet. No. Five feet four inches or something like that. I don't know, Ive forgot what the standard gauge is. I've forgot.

B. P.: You mentioned in your last tape about the San Joaquin Valley railroad--

H. B.: Yeah.

B. P.: Do you remember anything about that?

H. B.: Well, yeah. That run between here and Richmond, the way I understand it, and so with the Santa Fe, you see, back in 1901, the Santa Fe got that piece of track from Barstow to Mojave. They made that trade with some line that they had in Texas or somewhere. They made an even trade on that deal, the way it was told to me and then the company, the Santa Fe, they wanted to run their trains over the Tehachapi Mountains. Well, of course, to build an entirely new railroad over a mountain, you know, that's mighty costly. So, they'd been dickering for this San Joaquin Valley Railroad. They wanted that and they bought it. Well, then they went to work and made with the S.P. to run joint tracks. To run their trains over the mountains from Mojave to Kern Junction here.

B. P.: Those joint tracks, does that mean two railroads on the same track?

H. B.: That's right. That's what they mean by joint tracks. They got the same orders--the S.P. operator, they had charge of that part of it. When the Santa Fe men, when they violated some rule, why they'd have to come here, you know, and face the superintendent here in Bakersfield, and he'd gnaw on them for awhile. Well, if it got too bad, well then he made 'em go back to Needles or wherever--so they couldn't work over this territory.

B. P.: Do you remember who told you about it?

H. B.: Huh.

B. P.: Do you remember who told you about the San Joaquin Railroad--what the man's name was?

H. B.: What he what?

B. P.: What the man's name was that told you about the San Joaquin Railroad?

H. B.: Oh, no. It--that's been so long ago, but I knew there was a San Joaquin Valley railroad. Oh yes. The Santa Fe, the, they even run their passenger trains. They even run passenger trains east from Los Angeles. They had two trains here, one each way a night, one of 'em was called "The Saint" and the other was called "The Angel". "The Angel" going one way, "The Saint" going the other. They were fast, because they had to go from Los Angeles to Barstow and from Barstow over to Mojave. That was a whole lot longer than what we fellows had to go over from Los Angeles to Mojave, by the way of Newhall; oh, and San Fernando. But they had--the only--where they, where they could make better time than we, than we did, they had a lot of flat territory and they--no restrict curves like they had--like we

had from San Bernardino up to Cajon Pass. See, and they could, they could make good time those guys. Oh yeah, they could make good time. That was a crack train.

B. P.: Can you describe to me how the automatic train control worked?

H. B.: The automatic train control?

B. P.: Uh huh.

H. B.: Well, it's a magnetic gadget, it's a magnetic gadget--now let's see how shall I put it--I know there was a little, there was a little lever thing in the cab, us fellows here, we never had a chance to use that, we didn't--cause we didn't have that here. When they come to a certain spot where they didn't want that brake to set, see, they'd press this little button, the way it was told to me. But, to be honest with you, I don't know just exactly how the automatic train control, really how that worked, cause I--on the territory I was in we never had anything like that at all. No. But, when that--when I say magnetic, well that would cause the brakes to set, see, it would cause the brakes to set. But we never, we never come in contact with anything like that.

B. P.: When you were a fireman and working with the trains you mentioned earlier that they had the type of trains that were provided energy by coal and there was oil, and so forth. Can you go into that a little bit about the different trains you've worked with and how they were--

H. B.: Well, when I come, when I went to work here, they had two coal burner ones and two coal burner firemen, if I remember right, that was--thewhemy got these engines from Mexico. And they

had--it was either one or two firemen, I don't--I know one fellow's name was Miller and he done nothing but fired that coal burner.

B. P.: Okay, we were talking about coal burner and Mr. Miller.

H. B.: Yeah.

B. P.: Would you care to comment on that some more?

H. B.: Well, when it comes to coal burner locomotives, all I know is what I hear these fellows say. They say they shovel with coal--with the--use the shovel see, they had the coal pretty well broken up and they would shovel--well, the coal. When these engines got bigger, the way they tell me, some of the engines even had two firemen--when they--and then they'd--somebody got the idea of grinding this goal up so they could run it through what they call the stoker, see it was a screw thing and it seems that they, no doubt, they could regulate that, they could regulate that as to how much coal they wanted to go in there. I'm just sorry that I never--never got to see one of those things in operation.

B. P.: When did the oil burner come in? That's what you worked on?

H. B.: Yeah, the oil. When I was a call boy back in 1907, I was sixteen years old then like I say, everything was in oil except these one or two engines. Now then, I'm sure, because I lived right along the railroad track, and when I was a little kid, I'll say when I was ten years old, why I'm sure it was oil then. Just when..I've got a book at home on, and just when they converted 'em all in the--from coal to oil--you see, that's how they happen to change 'em from coal to oil because they

discovered all this oil here, here in Kern County. And it was--the first one was out here in Oildale, and they--incidentally that used to be called Oil City. Oh yes, yes, yes.

B. P.: Do you remember when it changed?

H. B.: Huh? Well, you--to be honest with you I don't know when they changed it from Oil City to Oildale. Oh, it was very little, it was very little out there. You know something I--that's where I made my main line date as a fireman on the Oil City Branch out there. That's right where I made my--I'd have to look on the--in the seniority list to find out just exactly what date that was. You see, when I went to work, why we were just kids, a bunch of us, and we just had, we had two seniority lists and you had to be like--I believe I told you before--you had to be twenty one years old to go on the main line. But, a number of us kids we lied, we lied about our age, and we were on one seniority list so when we were twenty-one course I was on the mainline before I was twenty-one. Like I say because I lied and that's when they give us a mainline date on the mainline seniority list.

B. P.: There was a flu epidemic that passed through Bakersfield about 1918, 19--

H. B.: How well I remember it. You betcha. Do you know when the--I went to several funerals here and when these people, different ones on the railroad, different ones on the railroad, they buried them right away. Oh, that was bad, yeah that was bad. That flu epidemic was a...a number of the fellows here on the road died.

B. P.: Can you describe it?

H. B.: You'd be surprised. Everybody wore something over their nose. A kind of mask or a thing you could--so you could breathe but you didn't--so that you wouldn't breathe in any germs. And it was anything but comfortable to have that doggone thing on your face, but oh I can remember that up here.

B. P.: You didn't catch it then?

H. B.: No, no and I went to the funerals too. But I--

B. P.: Do you know what kind of flu it was? do the remember the name--what it was called?

H. B.: When my, I'm not too sure now what they had a--whether it had a particular name or not but, I here 'em talking about Asian flu now, you know. I hear 'em talking--now whether that was Asian flu, I wouldn't know if there was any different kinds of flu, I wouldn't know. But I know that that was bad. Oooh--

B. P.: How did it affect the railroad at the time?

H. B.: Well, I don't know, they--there wasn't too many of 'em--if I--when I think back, because so many of 'em was sick. You'd be surprised at the number of 'em that were sick--aah, it was so much. Some of them, some of 'em really didn't get over it. That flu epidemic done something to 'em.

B. P.: Did it affect the runs between L.A. and--

H. B.: Oh no. It didn't do that. The trains all run just the same.

B. P.: Do you know how it affected Kern County of Bakersfield in general?

H. B.: Well, you ask me that now, I believe that it was worse here in Bakersfield than it was down around Los Angeles territory. Yeah, I believe it was worse up here.

B. P.: Did they have any--you remember any figures of how many people actually died from that?

H. B.: No, no I don't. YOu see, in 1918 and 1919, I was working between Los Angeles and Mojave but, I'd catch trips up here too.

B. P.: Uh huh.

H. B.: See, I'd catch trips up here and that's how I know so much about it up here. But, down there, it wasn't too bad.

B. P.: Do you remember anything mentioned about Valley Fever? From the '30's.

H. B.: Oh, yeah. Yeah, some people, they get that even now. What causes that, I don't know. I've never had anything like that myself so I don't know what it is. Because Valley Fever is--some people just have to get out of here. I know different fellows that worked on the road here that--a certain time of the year--in the summer time when they would have to leave here and go over the Coast. They just couldn't. And I know we had--whether he had Valley Fever or not but, they had to get that poor fellow, I'm just trying to think of that superintendent's name. He was a, he was a superintendent here and they had to rush him up to Tehachapi to get him up in a higher climate and then they--now you know, you know good and well when you have to get a fellow to a higher climate, now he got something that's not very good. So they had him up there, I don't know just how long but, not very long and then they sent him to San Francisco to the San Joaquin Hospital. And so, he was a very fine superintendent, it's funny I can't call his name right now.

B. P.: Do you know what year this was?

H. B.: It must be around twenty-five years ago. Must be around that. He had--this fellow he had a brother that was a, he was a Congressman or a Senator down there in one of the southern states--funny, I can't call his name. But they give him another job so he wouldn't have to work in this valley on account of this here fever, or whatever it was that he--that he had and they sent him down to Los Angeles and he seemed to do pretty good down there. A lot of people can't stand this valley.

B. P.: Do you think it's hotter now than it was then?

H. B.: Oh, say listen, why, don't you know it was so hot here, in those days, why, even the horn toads, even the horn toads, they were carrying a leaf to get to the shade. And that ain't all, these jack rabbits carried canteens. Oh, it was hot here, let me tell you, it was hot. But now with all this vegetation, with all this vegetation it gets hot yet. But, with all this vegetation it changed the climatic condition here, oh yeah, very much so.

B. P.: It's cooler now than it was back then?

H. B.: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Do you know, do you know we didn't have no air conditioning? They didn't know what air conditioning was. All they had around here to keep things a little cool was a fan like you got in the little building here. Yeah, they had them fans, that's all they used. No--

B. P.: These large overhead fans that--

H. B.: Huh?

B. P.: These large overhead fans that circle in the air, is that what you're referring to?

H. B.: Yeah, here in the building. In this little depot here, well, the fan is in there yet, see. And that's the only cool air that you got. Oh yeah.

B. P.: You were telling last time about a fireman that rode with you, or you rode with him, by the name of Jumbo Louis I believe--

H. B.: Oh yeah.

B. P.: He told you about the Sontag and Evans holdup, do you remember that?

H. B.: Well, I don't know much about it, but I'll tell you. Now that happened over in a place called Kerman. When the railroad was built they, if I remember right it was Collis, C-o-l-l-i-s, Collis and they changed it to Kerman and that's where these two fellows, they had an awful time, they had an awful time finding out who done that. You know something, the railroad didn't have it easy around here. They--and they thought the railroad was gobbling up everything. You know, it's the railroads that really made the country what it is. It's just exactly like the streetcar system in Los Angeles, see. After the streetcar system built everything up, why then, they tore the streetcars up. Now, here with the railroad, the railroad go to work and they pioneer. It's just like down there, just like down there in Los Angeles cause that's where I was raised. That's the reason I talk the way I do. Cause, shucks, they had streetcars all over everywhere. And the railroads, they built tracks, they built tracks in order to make business. Now, you take with the Santa Fe, for instance, why, shucks, wherever there's a packing house show up, why the Santa Fe would build a spur to it. The

S.P. would do the same thing, see. All right, then they complained about the railroads, the railroads is really what makes a country. And then, by gosh, they--everybody would criticize the railroads. I'll tell you right now, the railroads made--it sure made a mighty good living for me, and I appreciate it too. The reason I liked them was because all I had to sell was my service, that's all I had to sell was just--cause I didn't know nothing, see. I'd go ahead like a jackass, you know, don't know nothing, so by gosh, they let me go to work for 'em and I appreciated it, see because they made a good living and I sold 'em my service and I tried to give them the best I had. That's the reason they kept me.

B. P.: Do you remember what groups were against the railroad?

H. B.: Huh?

B. P.: Do you remember what groups were against the railroad?

H. B.: That I don't know. But, I'll tell you, oh maybe different groups, but they had so many holdups, my goodness alive, they had a lot of holdups. Well they, I know down here in Langs, down here at Langs, they had a holdup there and they held this train up and this fireman--these two robbers, you know, they wanted to get in that baggage car or the mail car, whatever it was, and they had this here--fellow's name was Tom Harvey, was this fireman's name. The old engineer's name was, if I remember right, was Frank Wires, course they're all dead and gone by now. These robbers wanted him to hammer on the door, you see, they wanted that baggage car, or mail car, or the express car, the express I guess it was. They wanted him to open. He said, he

was a southern guy, he said, "Don't shoot, don't shoot," he says, "I'm Harvey, I'm Tom Harvey. I'm Tom Harvey, don't shoot, don't shoot." Now whether they ever got anything out of that holdup, I don't know.

B. P.: Was this the same two outlaws?

H. B.: Oh no, no, no. Oh these were different--oh shucks, they, in those days, they had a quite a few of them out here. Oh yeah, they had 'em--they had one up here at Siskiyou, it was a bad one. Oh, they even killed the engineer and the fireman.

B. P.: Do you remember any description of that?

H. B.: No, no. I don't know, but I remember when that happened up there, that was right at the mouth of the tunnel.

B. P.: When was that anyway? Do you remember the date?

H. B.: Let's see, oh that must have been thirty years ago, maybe long in there. But I remember about that very well. Oh yeah, I think they called it, they called it--there were two brothers--the Armanent, the Armanent or something like that, there were two brothers.

B. P.: Do you remember how the Depression affected the railroad or your living standard at the time?

H. B.: Oh my, I'll tell you, when that Depression was here in 1925 or 1929, that's when the crash come, you see, I'd been working on the railroad then, I'd been promoted for ten years already. At that time, nine years.

B. P.: You were an engineer then at that time?

H. B.: Oh yeah, but--but when that depression come, it was so bad that I couldn't even hold a job as a fireman on the extra board. But

I had what they call-when I told you before, switch engines some so I had to go clear back were I started in.

B. P.: As a call boy?

H. B.: No, no, no. Not quite that bad, no, no. As a fireman on a switch engine. Yes sir, those are the facts.

B. P.: What--how did that drop you in your wages?

H. B.: Oh well, it cut 'em in half. Oh yeah.

B. P.: What were you making at that time, what did it reduce them to?

H. B.: Well, now let's see, how much was that? It wasn't very much. I think it was about $80.00 a month. I think the engineer around $125.00 or $130.00 is what he made. But, if I remember right, I think it was around--we didn't make very much in those days. Naw, we didn't make it. Because I know as an engineer, as an engineer all I was making was $7.33.

B. P.: A day, or how much was that?

H. B.: A day. I had to work every--work eight hours. Then if we got a little dinky engine that did't weight quite as much these larger ones did, well we got $7.16. Now, just imagine now, the weight on the drivers and make a difference of a few cents like that, see. From $7.26 to $7.33 that was the two rates we got.

B. P.: Did that--the Depression, it cut down quite a bit on what you hauled and what you did?

H. B.: Well, I'll tell you, there wasn't very much hauling. No there wasn't very much. I, if I remember right, I think they just had one freight train a day, that's all. And this one freight train, if I remember right, why if it was any local work to do, they done it but, the otherwise, oh shucks, when the Mojarve

yard...Did I say "Mojarve" or did I say Mojave? "Mojarve, yeah, that's what they all called it anyway. So, well the weeds, the weeds were a couple feet high through the entire railroad there. Oh yes, yes, yes.

B. P.: How long did that last? The effect of...

H. B.: A couple years.

B. P.: About '32 or '33?

H. B.: Yeah, yeah.

B. P.: What were you actually running? On the runs you did before the Depression, how many runs did you have a day as to when you dropped to one?

H. B.: Oh well, of course, now you take, course we had, we had a busy season here which would be in the summer time during the harvest, when they're harvesting all those potatoes, when they're harvesting the grapes like that you know, and naturally there was more work to be done. So they would put on more crews. Well, us firemen--us fellows, the way we--in the winter time when the slack season was, well us fellows would be, would have these choice jobs as firemen, see. We'd been here for a while, we get the choice job as a fireman because we was on the top of the fireman's list, see. But when they went to--promoted us, if you want to call it promotion, we'd have to go clear down to the bottom of the seniority list and go to work at midnight juggling these midnight goats, like we call 'em, switch engines around.

B. P.: How did the Depression affect you personally, as far as your living standards, your home and stuff?

H. B.: Oh, I was eating all the time, I was just one of the lucky ones. But, these poor fellows that had families, see, it hit 'em pretty hard because I know some of these fellows, some of these poor fellows, they were, I forget what it was, the government started something, where they'd have 'em rake leaves or something like that.

B. P.: WPA or something like that?

H. B.: Huh, it wasn't, I don't know what they call it, maybe that's--guess that's what it was WPA, maybe that's what it was. I think that--it was something like that anyway. But they created some jobs and they just rake leaves or whatever little job there was to do, you know, and they didn't get but doggone little money for that, too. And they had to keep a family on that, oh yeah.

B. P.: When did you actually get married, Heinie?

H. B.: October 31, 1946. On my 56th birthday, that's when I boarded the matrimonial ship.

B. P.: Was there any reason why you waited so long?

H. B.: Well, different reasons. See, I lived with--I was the oldest one of seven and I stayed home and lived with my mother and father and well, one reason you see, I wasn't there all the time either. They'd just move me around like they did all the rest of the fellows. Wasn't home any too much but, after I got to where I could hold a regular job, well, I was home longer. See, I was home longer. So, what I did, I got married on my birthday, and I even retired on my birthday, and incidentally, I'm eighty-seven today.

B. P.: Yes, I know.

H. B.: Yes, today is the day.

B. P.: How did you celebrate your birthday when you were younger. I mean it was Halloween and everything, did you ever combine the two or what?

H. B.: Oh, when I was a kid, we, of course we lived out in the country, we lived out in the country when I was a kid but, we didn't do too much.

B. P.: When did the railroad actually start climbing out of the Depression here in Kern County, do you remember?

H. B.: Yes, it was about, oh, I think around 1933, '32. I guess about '32. It began to get a little better, I'll tell you when it began to get a little better when Franklin Delano Roosevelt got in. He had an altogether different kind of a program than Herbert Hoover had. I don't know, Herbert Hoover was a wonderful man, and you know a lot of 'em, a lot of 'em, they thought that Herbert Hoover was responsible for--he wasn't no more responsible for this Depression than you or I, no, no, no. The big money men, they wouldn't play ball with Herbert Hoover, there's where the whole trouble is. And, you see, they, the Federal Reserve Board, they have a lot to do with conditions, oh yes, yes, yes, they have a lot to do with it because, you see, when that durn Woodrow Wilson regime in 1913, well that's when the Federal Reserve Board was created and that's when they started these Federal Reserve Banks. They started out with three of 'em. Now just where the first three was, I don't know. I've forgotten that. But, I know where--on your bills, on your bills, why I know where the Federal Reserve Bank of 'A' is. You

see, they numbered these--lettered these in alphabetical form, from 'A' to and including 'L', that's twelve, there's twelve of them banks now. So, the first one I think was in Boston, that is'A', and that shows right on your bills. and the next one was 'B', it was New York. Oh yes, yes, I know that. Now, with 'C', I'm not too sure, I've got the list at home and I'm not too sure just where the--but those are the first three and...There's so much that the people don't know about our monetary system. You never hear one word about it in any bank, or any university, or any educational institution, never hear about it. But those people, the president, the president, he appoints the director of the Federal Reserve Board and, incidentally, I think that fellow's name is, oh what is it now, is it Martin?

B. P.: I'm not sure who it is right now.

H. B.: No, I don't--I've forgotten, well I--anyway he's in there for sixteen years. But the president that appoints him, he can never be in those meetings. That is a closed corporation and they, you see, you read about the prime interest rate, well he can't--the President has nothing to do with that. The Federal Reserve Board, they're the ones that regulate the flow of money; they're the ones that regulate that. They can cause a depression, they can cause good times and--in other words, they got all the power. Where the money is, there's where the power is, don't want to ever forget it. And I'll tell you another thing, well, these taxes these days, they're not coming down; they're going up, up, up. And every dollar that they take away from you through taxes, it's that much freedom taken away from you and

day by day there's more freedom taken away from every human here in this country. On account of the high taxes. When this thing's gonna blow up, I don't know, but, I'll tell you right now, there's--it can only go so far, only go so far. Your money, it, it isn't--

"Pioneer Memory Days"
Pioneer Village
Transcript 1978
by Bureau of Land Management Personnel

INTERVIEWEE: HENRY BOCK

INTERVIEWE: BILL PICKING

SUBJECT: RAILROADS IN BAKERSFIELD

DATE: OCTOBER 30, 1977

B. P: This is an interview with Henry Bock for the Oral Histroy of the Southern San Joaguin Valley by Bill Bicking at Pioneer Village October 30, 1977 at 3:30 P.M. This is tape number three. Okay, Heinie, we were mentioning about taxes and how it was increasing and I asked you the question of how Kern County began to grow out of the depression? Do you remember that, how it started to overcome the Depression? Do you remember that, how it started to overcome the Depression and go back to normal time?

H. B: Well, money commenced to loosen up a little bit and these farmers, they--seems that they could grow, grow more vegetables and they could plant more vineyards and things like that and it just, it just gradually got better right along. They developed more land, more--they got more water, they got more water, things like that--you don't have water you know, you ain't gonna, you ain't gonna raise nothing. so, it just keeps, kept getting better all the time. But, I'll tell you, if they if they go to work and put restrictions on these farmers, if they don't let the farmers farm his land the way he wants to, I'm a telling you right now, those--cause those people know how to farm, they know how to do it, leave 'em alone. Any man that's successful

in what he's doing, give him a free fling, that's what freedom is, that's what they mean by freedom. You know you're getting so far away from your Constitution that it is pitiful. It is absolutely pitiful. The government tells a man how to run his farm. All that kind of stuff and I--it's no good. I believe in the free enterprise system, that's what I believe in and that's what our Constitution calls for and that's the foundation that our country, that our whole governmental system is based on. And any old time that you deviate from that, that's no good. That's what made this country great. Look at other countries, how long they been in existence, where are they at. There's no country in the world that's advanced like we have, no, country regardless of what it is.

B. P: You mentioned that F.D.R. made things better for the country and Kern County do you remember some of the things he impacted here upon Kern County at that time?

H. B: Well, you know, you know the big boys with this Federal Reserve, when I was telling you about the Federal Reserve--and say by the way, now I want to make a little correction. The chairman of the board the Directors of the Federal Reserve Banks, that fellow's name is Arthur Burns. I made a miscue here while ago, when I called it Martin. Yes, yes I want to correct that. Now what was it you was asking me?

B. P: What program FDR implemented here in Kern County?

H. B: Oh well, I really don't, I really don't know, I can't answer that one because in those years, I was down in Los Angeles see, I was down there and I wasn't up here at that time.

B. P: When did you leave Kern County and go down to L.A.?

H. B: I left here to go back down there about 19--if my memory serves me right, I think it was around 1932. Along in there, just exactly when it was, I don't know. But things, like I say, commenced to pick up a little bit and then from 1930--I'd come, I'd come up here off and on cause I was just on extra board then, it hadn't picked up that much to give me a regular job but in 1936, 1936 was when I got a regular run in freight service from Los Angeles to Bakersfield. And I stayed on there for seven years and that was during World War II, and so...

B. P: Okay, go ahead.

H. B: That--World War II that was, you see and well, of course I believe I told you before in 1943, in 1943, then is when I took a regular passenger run from here to Los Angeles. So what it was like up here, I wasn't really--when the--of course, when the Depression was really on, I was on a switch engine here but, I wasn't here too long. I went over Mojave too, I was on a switch engine there and--as a firemen of course, but, like I say, the weeds growing up in railroad yards there two to three feet high and then from there I went back to Los Angeles when things commence to pick up a little. But, the reason it got better when Roosevelt was in, was the boys back there, they kind of played ball with FDR. But, they didn't play ball with Herbert Hoover. In my way of looking at it, now I know good and well, that a lot of people wouldn't agree with me on it, they won't agree-they won't, it wouldn't do very much to agree on anything

anyway. It got to be somebody that don't agree cause if we all agreed on everything why, everything would be at a standstill. There'd be no progress.

B. P: How did the second World War affect you and your job on the railroad?

H. B: Now, how you say, how-what did you mean by how it affected me?

B. P: How did it increase the productivity of the railroad, their hauling items or anything as far as transportation of troops, or equipment of supplies?

H. B: Oh my goodness, I'll tell you, we had troop trains and we had trains with all kinds of war material on 'em. Tanks, tractors and trucks, and oh my goodness alive, all kinds of war material. And, oh yeah, we had train after train of that, yeah. And troop trains, my goodness alive, lots of 'em.

B. P: Do you remember what you were doing the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor?

H. B: What I was doing?

B. P: Uh huh.

H. B: And where I was at?

B. P: Uh huh.

H. B: Now, to be honest with you, I don't know just exactly where I was at. But, of course, I was on the freight run somewhere along the line between here and Los Angeles, I know that. But, just where I was when we heard the report, I think, I think I was in Los Angeles when the report come out. I think I was down there. I'm pretty sure. And, of course, from then on, why, everything commenced to boom. It's too bad that it takes a war

to have posperous times. That's the reason I can't understand why in the world they can--there's so much money into destroying something and killing somebody. Why can't that same money be used for a constructive purpose instead of a destructive purpose, that's the part that I can't understand. I don't understand that. but, I guess that's the way it is. It's been that way all the time.

B. P: When you were married...when were you married?

H. B: October 31, 1946.

B. P: And who did you marry?

H. B: Burdie Cromplee.

B. P: Uh huh.

H. B: Birdie M. Cromplee.

B. P: Where did you meet her at?

H. B: Well, sir I'll tell you, I was here in Bakersfield, and there was some people by the name of Keithley. Now this Keithley was an engineer on the railroad, we all worked together and it was his birthday, so his wife cooked a turkey dinner, his wife cooked a turkey, and the people that was supposed to be there, they couldn't make if for some reason or other, I don't know what--why, so she says to her husband Clarence, says, "Clarence you go down, down around the depot and see if you can get some of your friends to come up and help eat this turkey. It's only gonna be three of us here". And Birdie M. Cromplee was the lady that was there. So Clarence, he come down to the depot there, and there were four or five--three or four of us fellows standing there talking on the corner and Clarence drove up in his car

and says--he asked us to come up and have turkey dinner on his birthday. So we, yeah, we'll do that. So, we goes up there. Oh, I had a wonderful dinner. Oh my goodness, you never saw such a dinner in your life. She was really a kitchen mechanic, I'd call her a kitchen engineer cause she was good. so, and Birdie M. Cromplee was there, and if I ever saw one girl, who was the acme of grace and beauty, she was it. Oh, I'm telling you. So we had this dinner and so I says to Birdie, I says "Birdie, supposing you and I do the dishes? What do you say?" Well, Mrs. Keithley, it was Haviland China. Oh yes, yes. We had dinner on the best. So she didn't much go on that at all cause she knew good and well that I might break some of 'em see. So, I says, "Molly, No--" I says, "I'll do the dishes, and I won't break one". "I'm afraid you will". "No, no rest assured." So, Birdie and I done the dishes and Birdie was scared I was going go break 'em too. And, I'll have to fess up, maybe I was doing a little too much talking. And I don't talk too much. But, anyway, I was talking and washing the dishes, but, at the same time, I was watching these dishes so that I didn't break any. Oh yes, we got 'em all washed. The dishes all washed and never chipped one, never cracked one, never broke one. And so it wasn't long after that we got in here one afternoon on one of those long, old freight runs and I called her up, I called her up and I says "Birdie". "Yes?" "How would you like to go out and have dinner tonight?" She says, "I'd enjoy that". All right, see I don't even drive a car, I never even knew enough to drive an automobile as far as that goes, I met her down near the--she says, "I'll pick you up down by the depot".

B. P: Okay, you said you were by the depot?

H. B: Yeah, she asked me where I was at, and I says I'm down here by the depot. So, she says all right, I'll be down there in about fifteen or twenty minutes and so I was out there by the depot to watch for her, she had a little old Dodge, and old, old timer, and she stopped and picked me up and I says, "Now, Birdie, where would you like to go eat?" "Well", I says, "you know", I says, "I've kinda got hunger pains. Supposing", I says, "that we have a steak, what do you say?" "Good, that's fine. That sounds good". So we went to that K.C. Steak House and I believe that it's still there, down there on--it's on Union Avenue?

B. P: I'm not sure where it's located at.

H. B: I think it's on Union Avenue, Kan--K.C. Steak House. And so we went in there, it wasn't a very big place and so we went in there we ordered a steak and you know something, when they brought that steak out, it was on a board, on a round board and it had a groove all the way around it. I suppose that was to catch the grease or what have you. And we,--the first time I ate a steak off of a board. What do they call that?

B. P: I'm not sure what you'd call that.

H. B: Is that what they call a plank steak?

B. P: I'm not sure.

H. B: I'm not either, but, anyway it was on a board. There was no slivers in it. But was that good. Well then, from then on why I got to see her oftener and you know I guess I, course you know the women--the ladies never did pay no attention to what I'd say, they never did take me serious for some reason or other I

don't know why. But, they never, they never took me serious. But I said to her one day--I'm gonna tell you how I proposed to her. I'm gonna tell you. I took her in my arms and I says to her, I says, "I want no stars to guide me, no gold or gilded wealth about me as I gaze in your dear eyes". That's the words that I told her. And that's how I happened to changed her name. I was surprised, you know, that she stood still long enough for me to change her name, but, by gosh, it took place all right.

B. P: When were you married?

H. B: When?

B. P: Uh huh.

H. B: October 31, nineteen hundred and forth six in Fresno. Yeah, we left here on morning, went to Fresno and got married up there.

B. P: How old were you and she at the time?

H. P: Huh?

B. P: How old were you and her at that time?

H. B: Well, I was fifty six and she was--I'm a year and six months older than her. Her birthday is April 3, 1892 and mine is October 31, 1890. So, it's a year and a half difference.

B. P: What did she do for a living before she met you?

H. B: Well, she worked at Brocks, she worked at Brocks, as a sales-lady. She sold yardage and she worked there and then she worked at the Federal, too. She worked at the Federal. But, she didn't work anymore after we got married. Oh, no, no, I wouldn't stand for that, no.

B. P: Did she have any children?

H. B: Did she?

B. P: Uh huh.

H. B: One boy, Jack.

B. P: I see. When you were working for the railroad, do you remember any exciting things that happened, such as a near train wreck with you or anything like that.

H. B: Well, I'll tell you. Whether you'd call it being excited or not but, I had something happen that never did happen before. You know the Southern Pacific fired me one day.

B. P: They did.

H. B: Oh yes, yes, yes. They fired me one day. I'll tell you how that happened. I'll tell you how that happened. It was March 23, 1943, and so we'd left here in the evening around 5:00 o'clock and, it was during the war of course, and like I say, they were running lots of trains both ways, lots of trains. Well, we didn't have what they call CTC at that time. That's Centralized Train Control. We didn't have that but, they did have it as far as Rowan and your--you didn't need any train orders all you got out of here is a clearance card, that's all you got out of here or slow orders or something like that. But, anything pertaining to the movement of the trains, why the dispatcher controlled that by a machine here in Bakersfield, and he would press buttons and throw a switch and clear the signal and everything like that and he'd run you in to the side track and you didn't even know what you was in therefor. You'd hold the main line and he, he'd hold the signal at the other end, he wouldn't--you wouldn't know what he'd stopped you for. The only time you could go is when you had a green signal. These signals

were--they were red, yellow and green. So, and they are what they call absolute signals. And you--you didn't dare get by a red one, because I'll tell you, when you got by a red one of those absolute signals, you were washed up. You was fired. No alibi would go. And this was as far as Rowan, so we got to Woodfords and...that was what they call, that was what they called remote control. Now, that remote control is where, regardless of what kind of orders you had, the operator, he was the one that regulated that by pressing a button there in his office at the station, at the depot. So, the orders that I had, and I was--we was running third 814 that was the number of the train. And of course, when we left Bakersfield, you had to know where the second 814 was going because you had to look out for that. But, when the conductor come up with the orders--if it's clearance, and the register check, as they call it, second 814 has already left, so I knew as soon as the carmen got through, you know, and we had a rail test and everything like, well we could go. Well, I never saw second 814 at no time, at no time did I see that train, but, I knew it was gone. I knew it was ahead of us somewhere. And it left there quite a while ahead of us--an hour or something like that, because that's what it showed on the register check. Well, when we gets up to Woodfords, we got a signal there, it was a short arm that indicated that we was to take the side track. the operator, his name was Frank Negaly, if I can remember it so well as if it just happened. Well anyway, he had this switch lined up to take the side track, so we headed in there, well,--before we got there I

had an order that there was three trains that had right of way. I know one of 'em was a 4105, which had to be a light engine. And the other one was, I think was the 3860, or something like that, was a Santa Fe. I knew that was a Santa Fe. And then there was an S.P. car, well anyway, and I--we were carrying signals for another section behind us. Well, when we come around there well, this place--all the railroad fellows knew where Old Mother Martin's house was because that was half way down and there's a little corral track there. And this side track was long enough to hold two trains. Oh yeah. Long, long side the side track. But, there was still an indication there that there was another train in the siding. So when--there coming in the side track, side track on the other side of the main line too, what they call a house track, but they used it for a siding. And here was a--this one engine there 4105, and I had to whistle signals at that and I identified that and I knew that was one guy that had right over to Woodfords. Behind him was another, was an S.P. train and I identified them and I had to whistle signals at them and I was watching them too, and the fireman had, we had a conventional type engine 4327 was the number, I remember it so well. And this happened at 7:15 in the evening, March 23, 7:15 in the evening just dusk you know, so you can't--the sun was,--course up in the mountians there you couldn't see the sun anymore. But nevertheless, you could--it was just dusk, it wasn't dark so, you didn't--in other words you didn't need the headlights yet. Well, when we come around the left hand turn there, right near the end of this here house

track where these--this light engine and this here train was, why, the turn to the left, and right there by Old Mother Martin's House there is a little, there's a 's' curve there, and right ther is a light, there's a signal. And you know, during the war, whether you remember it or not, or whether you knew about it, but all of these here signals, they had a long hood over them, over the lens so airplanes couldn't see it. And of course, this boy, he couldn't,--he couldn't tell whether that signal was red or not. However, do you know he says to me, he says, "easy". So I eased this 4300 that I had, I eased her on. Directly the kid he hollered, "hold her." Well, I big been holded her. I put in emergency and, lo and behold, if we didn't creep up, and this second 814 I was telling you about, a little bit ago, that was standing there and I just touched that caboose. Didn't crack no window, nothing like that. Well, I'd big been holded her,--I mean by that putting her in emergency. Well, that boy, he couldn't tell whether that caboose, that Santa Fe caboose was on the main line or whether it was in the side track. So they, when I big holded her, the conductor was standing right there by the caboose and pretty soon this here other train that had right overs, you know all right, they come and sailed by, they sailed by and the Santa Fe train, I guess they, they thought they had stood there long enough, they didn't want to get smacked again I guess, so they took off. Well, the superintendent come up there, how in the world he got up there that quick--he must have had a shot of turpentine because by God it was only thirty, it was only thirty minutes after it happened

and he was there in his automobile. Well sir, you know, he says to me, he says, "As much as I try and tell you fellows to live up to these rules you don't seem to pay any attention at all". And he says to me there, he says, "much as I try and tell you fellows the rules", he says, "you guys, you just ignore 'em, you don't pay no attention to 'em and look what you did to 'em." And you know, I says, "that doesn't make me feel very good". so I says to him, his name was Mitchell and he was a tiger, and he was that too, and I says to him, I says, "Mr. Mitchell," I says, "you must think that I deliberately coupled on this caboose on purpose. I didn't do that, I didn't do that". I says, "I didn't know that train was in there, I did know that. And it just happened", I says, "I didn't do it intentionally, I didn't do it intentionally". Well it went on for pretty near two weeks. They, let me work. Two weeks, I thought to myself, one of the officials told me, he says--I told him, I says, "you know, I think they're gonna fire me". "Oh no, no they ain't gonna fire you". I says, "I wouldn't be too sure about that". but two weeks after that they fired me. But I'll tell you what--trying to get ahead of my story a little bit. When I put the brake valves in emergency to stop it, about eighteen cars back, two light weight olive cars that were insulated they were insulated and they just buckled up. So, I said I thought it was kind of funny when I tried and released the brakes I couldn't get the air back. Well, I put the brake valves back on, it dropped right down to the needle again. I knew there was something the matter. Pretty soon the brakeman, he says to me, he

says, "Heinie," he says, "we're in the ditch". I says "what/' "yes, we're in the ditch." I says, "what happened back there". Oh, he says two light weight olive cars they telescoped. Well, what caused that, we had two of these big Malleys back on the hind end, in the middle of the train and one pretty close to the caboose. And I just had a 4300, which was a high-wheeled passenger engine, the reason I couldn't see around that corner. And you know, when you got two Malleys leaning up against you, by gosh there is a lot of power there. When I big holded her and she went in emergency, that's what telescoped the cars, it was on a curve, you see, that's what done it. It's poor business to put the brakes in emergency if you don't have to. But that's what that's for. Your brake valve is fixed so that in case you have to, and I had to do it. But they fired me, they fired me. They had me off for, oh, they had me off for a month and a half, month and a half. So, the superintendent that fired me, he called up to Kunz's, I was living in Los Angeles with my mother and father. And incidentally, Pa he says to me, he says, "if you had been tending to your business instead of having your head full of so much nonsense, why you wouldn't have got fired". He didn't sympathize--oh no, no, no he didn't sympathize with me at all. But my mother did. Oh, yes, yes, yes she sure did. Well, anyway, I was doing something out in the yard for my mother and the telephone rang. So mama she says, "Heinie, somebody on the telephone". And it was a crew dispatcher there in Los Angeles and he told me he says, he had the superintendent of the private--you see, the company has a private line of its own. And he had the superintendent on the, the two phones were

right together on the desk. He says, "I got Mr. Mitchell on the telephone and he wanted me to contact you and see what you was doing". "You tell him I ain't doing nothing". "He wants you to come up", and I could hear him tell him, I could hear what he was saying when he talked to the superintendent. "He wants you to come up. Wanted to know if you can be up there 9:00 o'clock in the morning." "You tell him that I turned all my material back to the company that they give me when I went back to work", I says, I've got no transportation." I heard him tell the superintenent that, he said fix him up with a pass. So the call boy, he brought a pass over to the house and I went back to Bakersfield that night. So the next morning, next morning, why I went to his office 9:00 o'clock like he told me. And you know he was an altogether different man than what he was when he fired me. And, like I say, they always called him "the tiger" but, he was anything but a tiger when I went in there this last-when they put me back to work. so he told me, he says, "Now it wasn't me that fired you." He says "I tried to keep them from firing you. But," he says, "you know, I have to do what the big boss says up in San Francisco." "Oh", I says, "I can understand that". "Now I'm gonna put you back to work". So, I says, "all right", and I thanked him. And so I says to him, I says, "do you care what job I take?" "No", he says, "there's no restrictions whatsoever, whatever run your seniority permits you to hold". He says, "no restrictions whatever". So I says okay. I says, "by the way, the instruction car I know is in Los Angeles", and I says "if we don't go to that instruction

car, why", I says, "we have to follow it, follow it at our own expense". "Oh", he says, "allright go ahead". I'll have little Elvin"...poor little fellow he is dead and gone now. He says, "I'll have Elvin fix you up with your book of rules, airbook, and your switch key, you know, whatever it is that you turned in". So he did. So, I says "okay" and "I appreciated it" and I thanked him. And I went in to get my book of rules and stuff like that and Elvin Smith he says to me, he says, "Heinie," he says, "you'll never know how many of these fellows come in here to get you back to work". And he says, "engineers, firemen, brakemen, conductors an awful lot of 'em come in here and interceded for you to get you back to work". You know that makes you feel--makes a fellow feel kind of good, that kind of touches a warm spot you know. You know that. Well anyway, I went to the--to this--to the car and we had to go to the instruction car and who was there--it was around there near L.A.U.P.T. in that there passenger parking place there where they park the private cars. And the little trainmaster, name was Kellogg and he was getting after me all the time too for doing something that wasn't just exactly right, take chances doing things, you know. We knew it was wrong, but the fellows do it anyway. They don't, they don't operate right exactly according to the rules but, if you don't they catch up with you. And he says to me, he says, "Heinie, where in the world have you been, I haven't seen you for quite a while". "Oh." I says, "I got fired". He says what?" "Yeah, I got fired." "Well, well," he says, "they finally caught up with you, didn't they?" I says, "Yeah I'll

agree to that. But, I'm going back to work". "Well, I'm glad to hear that, too". So like I say, I went back, I went on the passenger train from then on and I done that until I retired.

B. P: When did you retire?

H. B: October 31, 1957.

B. P: How many years were you with the railroad?

H. B: Fifty years and seven months.

B. P: Do you see a big difference in pay since you started and when you retired?

H. B: The pay? Oh my goodness alive, these fellows, these fellows nowadays they make more in a round trip than I made a whole month. Oh yeah, sure.

B. P: How is your pension that they gave you?

H. B: Well, I'm not complaining. You know, I have two. One was a--what you call the Railroad, the Federal Railroad pension that we pay into, we pay into. And then I have what they call a Harriman Pension. And they wrote me a letter from San Francisco, the general office, that I could work until I was sixty seven years old, but not to work beyond that because if I did, I would forfeit my Harriman Pension. Oh yeah. You see it was around 1954, I think it was around in there, the president of the railroad, it seems that this--the federal pension was building up and it was getting bigger than what the railroad pension was, what the railroad pension was. And so they--this president what he did, he says, if you, if all these, they're only gonna let 'em allow--in other words, they wouldn't allow them anymore than anything on what they earned over $600.00. That was tops.

If you worked more than that, you weren't gonna get credit for it on this Harriman Pension. So--and that was just about all of what we was making anyway. But, he knew that the wages was going up, this old president, his name was D.J. Russell, he was the one that done that. So, being that I worked so many years, you know that's a long time to work for one outfit--fifty years and seven months. So what they did, they--the railroad paid you whatever the Federal Government allowed you, see, whatever they allowed you, why the Harriman pension would make up the difference of what the pension would have been if there wasn't no railroad retirement. You follow me? So, I knew good and well--the way they figured it was 1% of your earnings for the last ten years and you multiplied that by the number of years of service. Well, you or I couldn't figure that out but, the company figured it out. I knew good and well with the number of years that I had, that I might do pretty good. It would be enough to keep my belly away from my backbone anyway. So, I wasn't gonna walk away from that. Oh no, I wasn't gonna--October 31, I says, I told them, I says I'm done, this is it. So I had the two pensions of course, with the Federal why , I don't have to pay no tax on that but, with this Harriman that I got I have to pay tax on that because I didn't pay into it. That was free, gratis from the company.

B. P: So, how much were you making when you retired? If you don't mind my asking.

H. B: Well, it's a--I'd just got a $18.00 a month raise and it amounts to $509--and a couple of cents or something like that. So you see, that's enough to live on. Course you can't have T-bone steaks everynight and you don't go to Los Angeles every weekend or anything--I mean to Las Vegas every weekend, you can't do that. But...

B. P: Heinie, you mentioned that this was one of the highlights of your life, being fired from the railroad, do you remember any other thing that had an impact like that in your life?

H. B: Uh, well, not that I recall right now. I'll tell you, I was pretty fortunate, I was pretty fortunate. I, that's the only accident I was in, that's the only one. but what, what...you know, you know when you get in trouble like that, when you get in trouble like that, these officials, these officials, they sit around at a round table and you're sitting in another chair there. They've got their book of rules in front of 'em, they've got the time table in front of 'em, they've got the time table in front of 'em, they've got the airbook in front of 'em, they got all this stuff in front of 'em and you know, one of 'em will ask you a lot of questions and you answer 'em the best you can. Well, if that fellows gets through asking questions why he'll ask--now he says if you got anymore questions you ask, and what, I'll tell you there's three or four working on you, they're working on you and what one can't think of the other does. So you really got two shots against you before you go in there. I know one time, I don't know whether I ever told you this or not but, I had an awful close call, an awful close call. Down there

at a place called Sepulveda it's between Burbank and Glendale and we had to give up the passenger train on account of a hot journal, it was hot. We had a Malley and the thing would, the brass had cracked until it was dangerous to operate the thing. Because when the brass is cracked, I'm telling you, that's dangerous because you can burn one of 'em up, bust off. So we had to give up the train in Burbank when they come out and packed it from the round house there in Los Angeles, they packed that up, put plenty oil in it, and they, the round house force and they says she'll go in. So went and started for Los Angeles. There was a train come off of the coast, this was Burbank, a train come in off of the coast there coming down into Burbank there on their way to Los Angeles ahead of us. But when we got down to Sepulveda we had a red signal and so, of course, when you had this red signal why you, you stop for it. Double tracks, you'd run at reduced speed, cause you know there is something ahead of you. Sure enough when we got down there to Sepulveda here I see the hind end of the freight train, a caboose there. Now whether that train had broke in two or what happened I don't know but, anyway we was--this was in the evening that didn't know how long it was going there so I told the fireman, I says "Earl", I says, "you'd better go back and flag", I says, "because we don't know how long we're gonna be here and that Daylight comes down through here fast". so he went back, it was a long curve and he right clear out of sight and, lo and behold, this Daylight--freight train was still there and I wasn't more than about four or five cars from him--and I was on

the ground and I happen to look back and here this Daylight was coming and it was coming fast. Now whether this engineer on the Daylight, whether he didn't see that red signal or whether he stopped for it and started out again I don't know. But anyway, he come barreling down there and when I saw him making sixty miles an hour, there's no question about that, but, whether he saw us in time, I was told the conductor he had his head out of the vestibule door and he was--because he was right there, just the baggage car and then the head coach. And from what I understand, he was looking out, see it was Daylight and he looking--and he was the one that pulled the air--that's what I was told afterward. I don't know whether--but anyway I never can forget, they had me, they had me on, they had me there first, because what they was--they wanted to lay it on me, you know, for...

B. P: Being there, huh.

H. B: Being where I was and not having the proper flag protection out. So they, they commence to ask me all kinds of questions, you got no idea the questions those birds can ask you. When they got all through with me, that fellow--they called this engineer on the Daylight, name was Bill Moore, when I got off, out of that seat he sat in that seat. I says to him, with all these guys around, it didn't make no differences to me, I says, "Bill, that seat's hot. That's a hot seat? But they--he never worked anymore after that, no.

B. P: Do you remember any accidents or, not accidents, natural disasters that happened? You know we mentioned the flood and so forth. Do you remember any fires or anything like that?

H. B: No, no, uh uh.

B. P: Do you remember, you said that you got married and all, what did your wife and you do for church and social activities?

H. B: Well, oh she, she belongs to the Eastern Star, in fact, she got her fifty year membership in the Eastern Star three years ago.

B. P: What is the Eastern Star?

H. B: It's a ladies part in the Masonic order. And I belonged to the Masonic order a good many years.

B. P: What church do you belong to?

H. B: Well, we-we're not what you call church people. No, we're not what you call church people. I'll tell you, we, we try our best to do right with everybody and she does things for people, lots of things and I belong to these different organizations and I put a lot of time in that you know, and not only that, not only that I make it a point to do a good deed everyday. If I can do two good deeds so much the better. But there's not a day goes by, but what I manage to do a good deed. And that's the way we live. We're not society folks nothing like that. No, no we're just common ordinary people

B. P: What political party do you belong to?

H. B: What, what?

B. P: What political party do you belong to?

H. B: I'm Republican. Now, don't misunderstand me, don't misunderstand, I belong to the Republican Party because that's the foundation that this country is built on. That's the reason I'm Republican. And if we ever lose that...Now I'll tell you, I'm not condemning the Democrat. Yes, I do. I've got a very, very

high regard for that man, oh yeah. I don't believe in this, I don't believe in this giveaway program. Now, I'll tell you, it's just like Abe Lincoln, just like Abe Lincoln, I'll tell you what he said, now he was a Republican you know that. He says, this is what he says in one of his, I guess a phrase that he coined. He said, "Let him not who is houseless tear down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one of his own". Now I'll tell you those, now that's philosophy. I don't want you to think now that I am a philosopher or anything like that and I didn't make that up, I read that. But, I just happen to remember it, and I'll tell you, it's people like that, when you've got people like that at the head of a government, a head of a government why, you've got a real government but, whenever you have to go to work and take from one to give to another because he's too lazy to work and I'll say, troubled with sit-itis cause I've got other terms that I can use too besides sit-itis that's for sure, but we'll just let it go that far. But there's too many people that want to live without doing anything for it. It's just like this you take an animal, any animal I don't care which it is, they've got to struggle for an existence and that's what makes them strong. But the way the American people are today, I think--I believe the last quotation I read there was one out of six working for the government right now, and they are pencil pushers, they are pencil pushers and we're supporting them. They produce absolutely nothing and I don't care what anybody says. If you don't produce there is

something wrong, you're a freeloader. That's my way of looking at it. I've worked all my life--tickled to death do do it--I was tickled to death when I had a chance to make a few dollars and I didn't throw it away either.

B. P: I want to thank you for the time we've had together.

H. B: Thank you. It was a pleasure, it was a pleasure to talk to you.

B. P: Okay, thank you very much.