

MP: Uh huh.

RIDGE: Yeah. They all were worked on out there. The interurbans pulled in there same as the streetcars did; and if they needed any work on them, we used to have an ol' guy that was a odometer winder out there. He finally ended up down here on Poplar Street. He had a radio shop down there. I can't think of his name now. He died down there on Poplar Street.

MP: The interurbans then and the streetcars were owned by the same company.

RIDGE: Oh, yeah, they was owned by the same company.

MP: So they shared the same facilities.

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: What about the crew on the interurbans?

RIDGE: What do you mean?

MP: You had a motorman and a conductor . . .

RIDGE: Conductor.

MP: Anybody else?

RIDGE: That was it.

MP: Just like the streetcars.

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: The interurbans were designated by number, were they not? In other words . . .

RIDGE: Number on the cars?

MP: Yeah, the number on the cars, is that how they were known?

RIDGE: Yeah, they had numbers on the cars.

MP: They had numbers on the cars, and is that how they became known?

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: What about the cars that were designated by name? In the book by Red Howell, Along the Line, he talks about the cars for a certain period there. I believe in the late 'twenties they had the name of Chauncey Rose Home and Wiley High School and Indiana State University, remember that?

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: Why were they called . . . why were they given names?

RIDGE: Well, they . . . that was a big name at that time. It was a big name at that time. Them guys that they named 'em for was pretty big men, and that's why they named them on that.

MP: And did the interurbans have the same problems as the streetcars so far as the operation -- problems with the snow, and weather?

RIDGE: Yeah. They had the same as we did. But, of course, them interurbans could get through that snow where the streetcars couldn't. They'd do a lot of breakin' it.

MP: What effect do you think the interurbans and the streetcars had on the development of Terre Haute?

RIDGE: I think they were good for the development of Terre Haute.

MP: In what way?

RIDGE: Well, there was a lot more business. At that time back in those days there wasn't everybody that had an automobile and lived out here . . . out of town, and they'd catch them interurbans and come to town to do their shopping. Then, they'd catch one going back home.

MP: Again, that led to a busy downtown, didn't it?

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: I was going to ask you, what is your recollection of what Terre Haute was like. I think you said you arrived in Terre Haute in 1917?

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: What was Terre Haute like during the interurban era, as you knew it, from 1917 to 1931 when the last interurban ran on the Clinton line?

RIDGE: Well, there was good business here. We had good business, and there was a lot of people. You couldn't go down on Main Street but what the street was full of people. You always would see a lot of people, and the stores were full of people.

I seen a guy killed there at 7th and Wabash one time. He used to ride with me on . . . I was working North 8th at that time, and he lived in that big white house right across the railroad track up there on North 6th Street. And he was a nice looking little guy and always dressed nice, and he'd get there of a morning and stand up and talk to me by the fare box in place of going back and sitting down, which I enjoyed his conversation. So, he rode down there one morning at 7th and Wabash. He said, "Bill, I'll see you in the morning." And got off. He started to cross down south on 7th Street, and an ol' machine gun started in blarin' and he fell there in the street. So ol' Rick, he run down there (he was a policeman that stood there on the corner with a semaphore) . . .

MP: What was his name?

RIDGE: Rickelman. Henry Rickelman. And ol' Henry, he run down there, and this guy wasn't dead yet; he was laying there in the street. And Rickelman said, "Who done it? Who done it?" He said to Rickelman, he said, "None of your business, you sonofabitch." He said, "the boys'll get him." And just laid there and died. (laughs)

MP: We talked a little about the stock interurbans, and we talked about the passenger interurbans, something about the freight. What kind of freight was hauled in those days? You had a freight interurban? An interurban to hold freight, too?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah, that was just a . . .

MP: Was that an interurban that took . . .

RIDGE: Well, it was a freight train, or a freight car that hauled all kinds of freight in from different places.

MP: And there was also a gravel car. Do you remember those?

RIDGE: Yeah. (laughs) I remember them. I was pullin' . . . or I wasn't a-pullin' it. I was on the back end of it. Me and Dewey Pflaging was takin' two up the hill there at Highland Lawn, was gonna take them up there for that interurban to pick 'em up and take 'em on out to Indianapolis or wherever they was gonna unload it. And we got stuck on that hill. It was frosty that morning, and the track was slick, and we got about halfway up the hill and got stuck and couldn't go any further. So ol' Dewey, he called the dispatcher; and there was an Indianapolis freight train just sittin' up there at the hill then just crawling out. So the dispatcher told the freight to come back down that hill (we was stuck with them two loads of gravel) and pull us up the hill. So, he come over that hill, and he didn't wanta come because he wanted to go on to Indianapolis. /He/ said he was going rabbit hunting that evening after he got to Indianapolis. And he come over that hill -- cut over the top of that hill-- and I told Dewey then, I said, "He's going to hit us sure as hell." We was down about the graveyard, along the graveyard there. He come over that hill, and he started to settin' brakes, and the smoke was just comin' outta that track like it was on fire. And he come down there and (clap of hands) smacked into us and broke the air pipes on our train. And I was scared to death. Of course, when this broke his air pipes, why it locked the brakes, which was good, the main thing that held us on the hill there. Because if we'd started back down that hill, hard tellin' what'd /have/ happened. They'd have killed everything behind us with them two heavy loads of gravel. And he broke . . . but he broke all the air pipes, so he didn't pull us up. They come out there and then with another car and fixed us up and fixed the brakes back on it.

MP: Now, you were on the gravel car?

RIDGE: Yeah, I was working on . . .

MP: What . . . what kind of a car was a gravel car?

RIDGE: Well, it was just big like a freight train with them there coal cars. It was just built like a coal car, only it was gravel in the place of coal in it. It had side wall that come up like that.

MP: What did you do with the gravel?

RIDGE: Well, put it out there . . . use it on track. Like they was repairing the tracks someplace, why they'd use that gravel, punch it in under them ties, keeping them blocked up and solid up where they'd The switches, we used a lot on switches. These switches would get fouled up. Why they'd take and dig in under them and get gravel down there. /It/ would hold them solid.

MP: Was there a special crew that went ahead (also, this might apply to the streetcars) a special crew that went ahead once in a while on the tracks, as they did in the old railroad days, to see if the tracks were . . .

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. Yeah. There was a crew. Of course, there was a section crew. We had our own section then. We had a section crew here. There was an old colored fellow, I was trying to think of his name. Dick . . . hmmm, I can't think of his other name now. But anyhow, he was a foreman on this track, and he had all white men or colored men. He had both kinds workin' on that track. But these colored guys didn't give him no trouble either. He used to call 'em niggers. Boy, he used to cuss 'em and call 'em niggers.

MP: Now, their job was to go ahead on the track to see if any of the track . . .

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: . . . was loose or . . .

RIDGE: The track . . . like you come here and there was a loose joint there, well, you'd dig that up, pull them spikes out of them ties, build it all up beneath the ties, get it all where you wanted it. And /you'd/ block your ties, or staple your ties back to your rail, and you'd have it.

MP: Did you know . . . well, you do know that funeral trains were another part of special service provided by the interurbans.

RIDGE: Funeral trains?

MP: Funeral trains.

RIDGE: That done what?

MP: Funeral trains were a part of a special service provided by the interurban company. In the book, Along the Line by Red Howell, he said that there were . . . the interurbans were chartered, I suppose, by the funeral home or the family to take . . .

RIDGE: The corpse to the graveyard?

MP: . . . to take a body to Highland Lawn cemetery or the old Woodlawn cemetery up on North 3rd Street.

RIDGE: Oh, yes. They used to haul . . . they used . . .

MP: Following the service in the home, family and friends followed the casket to the special car waiting in front of the house. After all who wished to go to the cemetery had boarded the interurban, it . . .

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: Do you remember that?

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: Did the interurbans run all night?

RIDGE: Oh, no. They was just like us; they just run 'til midnight.

MP: Do you think the interurbans would help us today in our transportation . . .

RIDGE: I sure do!

MP: . . . due to the energy problem?

RIDGE: If we had 'em back like they was then, they'd do a whole lot for commercial.

MP: Were they energy efficient?

RIDGE: What?

MP: Were they energy efficient?

RIDGE: Why sure it was, a lot better than what I got today. You could figure on . . . like an interurban, say you were going to Indianapolis and you was out there along the road someplace, and that interurban . . . you knowed what time that interurban was due in there at that stop. You could figure on -- unless something awful happened -- you could figure on three or four minutes' difference in the time that they were gettin' there.

MP: It was powered by electricity?

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: What led to the downfall, or demise of the streetcars and the interurbans?

RIDGE: Well, I don't know. I think to tell you the truth I don't know what caused them. They fought . . . they thought somebody had a big idea that thought they could bring these here buses and streetcars in here and take their place and do it cheaper. Well, they found out they couldn't do it after they got 'em in here.

MP: You . . . did you work for the bus company?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I put in . . . I put in about 10 years with this bus company when they come in here after . . . 'fore I could retire.

MP: So, you're career with transportation in Terre Haute . . .

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: . . . spans the old streetcars and the interurbans and then the first buses.

RIDGE: First buses, yeah. I pulled one of the first buses that ever was operated here in Terre Haute on

RIDGE: this South 25th Street line. There was a guy that had a bus down here; and, oh, he'd run it every hour or every two hours -- whatever he took a notion. Run from down here and take the people uptown. And the bus company bought him out when they come in here. He sold out to them and they took over. And I pulled the first bus down 25th Street to Hulman Street of the city lines that ever run down there.

MP: The first bus to operate in the city of Terre Haute was June 4th, 1939.

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: Do you remember what kind of day that was when the buses started running and there were no longer any more streetcars on the streets?

RIDGE: I sure do!

MP: What is your recollection of that day?

RIDGE: Well, they put a schedule on there when we first started these buses, a fast schedule that nobody in the world could ever make. And I told Dale Dubie (he was superintendent then), I told Dale Dubie, I said, "Dale, that schedule will never be run." I said, "I've done too much running the schedule and I know that it's too fast a schedule for them buses to ever make." So it didn't last but three or four days. They tore that up and made another schedule out for 'em to operate on.

MP: The buses The bus routes were the same as the streetcar routes, were they not?

RIDGE: No. They was . . . some of them was, but they was different routed, the buses was.

MP: Could the buses go where the streetcars didn't?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. Now, I had a . . . there used to be a run down South 9th. The bus come down Main Street and turned down South 9th. Went South 9th to 9th and Crawford. Then it turned there and went back over west . . . or over north . . . east I mean, and went down through there, down in Baghdad and in through there.

MP: What were those old first buses like here?

RIDGE: Aagh. We had some that was awful. I know we had one . . . I forget now. It had a name on it, but it was just built straight just like that wall on the sides, and it looked awful, and it was awful.

MP: How did the people accept the buses after all of those years with the streetcars and interurbans?

RIDGE: Well, they seemed to take 'em all right. Oh, once in a while you'd get a bellyacher squawking, but not very often. They got on there and paid their fare and . . .

MP: Was the first bus fare a nickel?

RIDGE: Yes, it started out as a nickel.

MP: And where was the first bus garage?

RIDGE: First bus garage -- let's see now. The first one we had with them was back there on . . . I believe that 9th Street route or barn was the first one we had. It was down there on 9th just before you get to Oak. Well, they finally made some kind of a factory in there after we went out of there, and I don't know what it was that they . . .

MP: Buses, to somebody who drove the old streetcars and you drove a bus, I take it . . . or I would ask you, driving the bus, was it as glamorous as running those streetcars and interurbans?

RIDGE: Oh, I never did like nothin' like I did the interurbans. I'd rather work on an interurban than anything and . . .

MP: Why?

RIDGE: Well, I don't know. It was just kinda fit right in. You'd get on there and you took out. If you was workin' the back end, you went through there and collected your fares up. And asked the passengers where they wanted off, let 'em off where they wanted off at . . .

MP: What happened to the old streetcar tracks?

RIDGE: There was a lot of it tore up. They tore a lot of it up, and there's a lot of it in that ground yet. Now, that Sullivan route down there, there's a lot of that track never has been tore up.

MP: Still visible today?

RIDGE: Some of it is, yeah. Now, down at Stop 13 on the Sullivan line here a couple years ago, I know a place down there that I used to go rabbit huntin' lots; and it was just . . . had growed up in bushes and weeds, but the track was just standing there same as it always was.

MP: Of course, in the city of Terre Haute most of the track has either been dug up or paved over.

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. There's a lot of it paved over, too. They paved over a lot of 'em. There's a lot of it dug up, too.

MP: Even today we still refer to the old interurban stops.

RIDGE: That's right. That's right.

MP: For a location -- Stop 13 or Stop 14. That's a carryover from the old interurban days when the stops were made. What . . . would the conductor . . . was it his job on the interurban to call out the stop? Was that it?

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: How'd that work?

RIDGE: Well, he'd just go along up through there and call out stops . . . when he was coming to a stop like Stop 10, why he'd just call out on the interurban, "Stop 10, Stop 10." And if there was anybody that wanted off there, why they'd get up and get off.

MP: One thing I think I neglected to ask you about the streetcars when they were running in Terre Haute, how did the people board the streetcars? From the middle of the street?

RIDGE: No. The streetcar . . . oh, yeah, they walked

- RIDGE: out from the sidewalk to the street where the track was going down there and get on it.
- MP: Mr. Ridge, what other stories or anecdotes do you remember about the streetcars and the interurbans?
- RIDGE: About what?
- MP: What are . . . (laughs) are there any other memories you have about them -- little incidents that happened involving the streetcars and the interurbans? We talked about some accidents. Were there any other things that happened that you can remember? Any things humorous, any funny incidents?
- RIDGE: (laughs) No. There's . . . it was always a pretty jolly life.
- MP: You didn't have any shootings on the interurban like you had on the streetcar, did you?
- RIDGE: No, never did. No.
- MP: Was that the most exciting thing that ever happened to you, the shooting on the streetcar?
- RIDGE: Well, it was pretty exciting right then at the time.
- MP: Is there anything that we have missed? Not talked about that you recall? Something I've overlooked?
- RIDGE: No, I don't think there is. I think we made . . . or covered about all of it.
- MP: You think then the streetcars and the interurbans were an important part of the history of Terre Haute?
- RIDGE: I sure do. Sure do. I believe they'd be yet today if they was here and operating like they used to operate. I think they'd have better service and people'd like to ride 'em better.
- MP: Mr. Ridge, thank you very much for allowing me to come into your home, and I've enjoyed your recollections of the streetcar and interurban era.
- RIDGE: Well, I've just enjoyed it, too. I'm glad you come down.

END OF TAPE