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Interviewee Robert L. Varner
Interviewer H. T. Holmes

Title An interview with Robert L. Varner, September 25 and
 26 1975 / interviewed by H. T. Holmes

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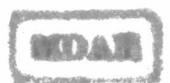
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NARRATOR: Mr. Robert L. Varner, Winona, Mississippi
INTERVIEWER: H. T. Holmes, Mississippi Department of Archives and History
DATE: September 25-26, 1975
PLACE: Mr. Varner's Home in Winona, Mississippi
SUBJECT: Columbus and Greenville Railway Company

Holmes: I want to talk to you about lots of things, primarily the Columbus and Greenville Railroad. For the purpose of the tape, let me identify myself. This is H. T. Holmes, and today is September 25, 1975; and I'm talking to Mr. R. L. Varner in his home in Winona, Mississippi.

Varner: I'm R. L. Varner of Winona, Mississippi, a retired railroad employee. I worked on the Columbus and Greenville Railroad forty-three years, retired December 17, 1958, and had a little vacation time, and quit drawing any pay at all the twenty-third of January, 1959. When I worked on the C&G Railroad it was just like one big family of people. They all took a great interest in their job. You had very few who looked for "sundown and payday." They always had an interest in their job.

Holmes: That's remarkable!

Varner: My opinion in this day and time is that what's hurt a lot of the railroads is the employess that were there not having the interest that they should have in the company, looking after the company's interest.

Holmes: Well, the railroads have certainly gone downhill.

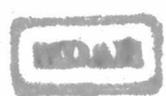
Varner: Oh, yes! Well, I say there's always a number of things that cause that, and one, I figure is indifference among the employees. Back when I first began railroading, why, it was a man's joy, his job! That's what he talked. He talked railroading to everybody! He believed in it.

Holmes: Yes. Well, before we get on the railroad itself, let's get a little biographical information, if you don't mind, telling me when you were born and where.

Varner: Well, I was born in Yalobusha County, April 24, 1890, eighty-five years ago last April.

Holmes: Well, you certainly look like you were born much later!

Varner: I've always had fairly good health, enjoyed good health, always wanted to be old, and always figured the only way to be old is not die young!



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Holmes: Well, you've made a success of that!

Varner: I've lived to get old and now I want to get older; and if I ever get older, I want to be the oldest!

Holmes: Well, that's wonderful! Where did your father come from, did he migrate to Mississippi?

Varner: No, his father did. His father came from South Carolina to Mississippi.

Holmes: In what year, do you know?

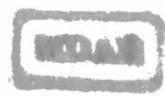
Varner: Daddy was born in August, 1858, and his father got killed by a tree falling on him when he was just a child, five or six years old, or something like that; so, my great-grandpa Varner must have come to Mississippi say in the years 1840 to 1850, somewhere around in there. My daddy's daddy, Grandpa Varner, he was born and raised in Mississippi. His daddy came to Mississippi a way back, in the early eighteen hundreds.

Holmes: Did you grow up in Yalobusha County?

Varner: No, left Yalobusha County when I was four years old and went to Lee County and left there when I was six and came back, and then I've been in Carroll and Montgomery Counties since then. I have been in Montgomery County since 1914, except when I was up and down the C&G Railroad. I stayed over in the Mississippi Delta on the C&G Railroad seventeen years. I was on the C&G Railroad when the levee broke, the Mississippi River levee broke in April, 1927. I was at Indianola, Mississippi.

Holmes: Could you tell me about that?

Varner: It practically covered the C&G Railroad and washed away a great deal of it, all the way from Greenville out to a little station west of Indianola known as Heathman. Over around Dunleith, a station on the Bogue River this side of Elizabeth, it washed some of that track a mile south of there, in the trees down there, which is south of 82 over there now; because, I know, I helped put the railroad back and hauled some of it from down there against the trees with mules and wagons that we got from those plantations down there...that the good ties and all of the rail and rail connections back up there. Now, it all wasn't that way. Some of it was just turned over the dump, but it was all practically washed away from Greenville out to this little station Heathman. Now, there was water all over the track in different places all the way from Indianola, or from Moorhead, I'll say, to Greenwood. There were places that it was over - well, it didn't wash, it was just backed up in those bayous, and the Sunflower River, instead of running its usual course south, when the high water came up it ran back north.



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And the Yazoo River at Greenwood backed back up. It backed up, and that water all through that part of the Delta on the railroad - it was backwater, it was called. I was the only foreman left on the railroad from Greenwood to Greenville during that time. The passenger train ran to the edge of the water, just west of Itta Bena, and I brought the mail out of Indianola over to the train - got the mail and brought the mail to them.; I ran my motor car as far as I could, then I took my men and put it on the pushcar that had higher wheels on it and we pushed it along through the water, took care of it. Part of the time we were wading through there about waist-deep, and to protect ourselves, to know that we wouldn't fall or get hurt, we walked right behind that pushcar with our hands - walked on top of the rail - steadying ourselves with our hands on the pushcar. When those - only two pushed at the time, and the other two or three that we had would get up on the car and ride. When they would get tired, then somebody else would get down and push. Most of the time when they pushed through there they just had on ordinary low-quarter shoes, sometimes these colored people would get barefooted!

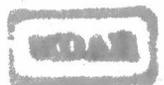
Holmes: My goodness! What did the C&G as a railroad do for the people who were flooded out, the people in the Delta? Did the C&G send in trains or food or....

Varner: Oh, yes, during that time they filled the long passenger track at Heathman full of boxcars. Refugees lived in those boxcars and they had - let's see, they had one, two, three, four, five long tracks full of boxcars at Indianola that the refugees lived in. They put up their cooking stove - cut a hole in the - they allowed them to cut holes in the side of the boxcar and they stuck their stovepipes out. Didn't have to have any heat because this was then summertime, you see. That water finally came up and ran them all in around - commenced to run them out the first of May. I went down to the edge of the water and hauled a many a family from the edge of the water on my pushcar and motorcars up there, a lot of them!

Holmes: Were you in charge of the freightyard in Indianola? Where these refugees were staying?

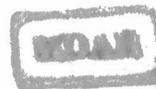
Varner: Yes, the agent and myself. They had an agent of the C&G Railroad there at that time, C. M. Kelly. Of course, he helped look after them, too. We had no trouble with those refugees there. They all got along pretty nicely, and we told them as we brought them in that we allowed no disturbances, we allowed no falling-out with them, we allowed no getting drunk. If they did, why they'd be put out and they'd have to go where they could, they wouldn't be allowed in those boxcars. We had no trouble with them.

Holmes: Were they white people?



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- Varner: No, the white people all in that part of the country that had to come out, some few of them stayed in those towns like Itta Bena and Greenwood and Indianola and so on, but they made their own arrangements. Some of them rented places, some of them lived with their people, and a great many of them - when they saw that they had to leave - left and came out to the hills, some of them. I don't know of any white refugees anywhere. Now, there were a few refugees that the government furnished them army camps that they put up at these different towns - army tents.
- Holmes: That was quite a catastrophe, the Flood of 1927.
- Varner: Oh, yes! It broke way up above Greenville, you know, up north of Greenville. You know, we had a whole freight train and two engines to get caught over there in it just east of Greenville. It would have made it all right, but one of the engines ran into a log that was under there and derailed it and that fixed it. I think it was just the engines that stayed out there all that time. Of course, when it left the water hadn't got in there so bad, the switch engine in Greenville was still working, and they came out there and got the rest of the train and carried it back.
- Holmes: I hear a train whistle outside. Is that the C&G? Have you heard it?
- Varner: Yes, yes. That makes me homesick a lot of times!
- Holmes: I remember hearing it - of course, it goes through behind our house out there - and I grew up hearing the C&G up there in the woods. It would make me homesick to hear it too, sometimes.
- Varner: You know, when I first ever knew anything about the C&G Railroad, I met your grandfather on land over there by the C&G Railroad.
- Holmes: Oh, really?
- Varner: You know where - your mother lives out there on the highway - this property ran down across - you know, the C&G Railroad ran through your grandfather's property.
- Holmes: Right. They had the old coal chute, or water tower back there.
- Varner: Well, it wasn't on it, that was west of you all.
- Holmes: It was back in there, yes.
- Varner: I remember your grandfather down there. He was a great truck farmer. He raised lots of produce, and he had an old Negro named Simon Shannon that delivered it for him all over town.
- Holmes: I've heard stories about Simon.



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Varner: He got to selling peanuts for your grandfather. He raised all kinds of produce, you know, and then when your grandfather passed on, Simon went to Greenwood and sold peanuts. He made a living selling peanuts.

Holmes: My goodness!

Varner: I met your father and uncles when they were just children out there.

Holmes: When you were working on the railroad?

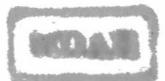
Varner: I was working on the railroad.

Holmes: How did you come to work for the railroad?

Varner: My father-in-law, my wife's father, was a track employee, and I lived over east of Vaiden in Carroll County on his farm, farming some there myself and looking after some farming for him. I took a notion to come to the railroad, and he was with the IC. I worked on the IC awhile, and decided I didn't much like it, and I went back to the country.

Holmes: Why didn't you like it?

Varner: Well, I hadn't decided, but I decided that maybe I didn't like it! I went back to the country and got to studying about it again. My wife's mother, we were living down in the country, became ill with bloodpoisoning, and we hitched old Darby to the buggy and drove up here to Winona for my wife to stay with her, and old Dr. Ward that was here looking after her, and he told Mrs. Parker, he said, "It'll be some time now before you're able to be up and about, and I want you to take care of yourself, and you've got to." So one morning - we'd been up here about a week - and I told Mr. Parker, I said - my wife's daddy - I said, "No use of me sitting around here doing nothing. I'm going on out with you and work on track. So you can just hand me a shovel." So I went on down there and went to work with him on the railroad. The morning that my wife and I decided to go back home to the country, I was out there hitching up old Darby to go back and my wife's mother called me to the telephone and said Mr. Parker wanted to talk to me. I went there and he said, "Robert, the supervisor wants you to go to Malmaison to relieve the foreman down there. He's sick. You don't have to go back to the country right now. Mr. Greer is down there looking after everything, been looking after everything, and you've been wanting to railroad, so now you can make up your mind." So I went down to relieve Mr. Greer on the railroad, and I stayed down there two weeks. When I came back, the supervisor who was Mr. Ed Allen's father, Mr. W. O. Allen, came out there when I came up on the train, and said, "Robert if you want to railroad now, why, you can go to work with Mr. Parker as assistant foreman, we'll give you assistant's wages, assistant foreman's wages; and just as soon as an opening comes open, I will give you a job." I said, "All right."



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So the next morning I went down there, went down to go to work for my father-in-law, and Mr. Allen came out there and said, "Hey, Robert don't go off. I want you to go to Stewart to relieve the foreman up there. Press Jones is sick and I want you to go up there to relieve him." So I went back to the house and got ready and caught the train and went up to Stewart. I stayed up there three weeks. I came back on the evening train down here to Winona; of course, I went on to the house. After awhile the telephone rang, and Mr. Allen said, "Robert, I want you to go to Carrollton in the morning on the early train." The train left out of here at six-fifteen going to Carrollton. That was on the seventh day of February, 1915. I went down to Carrollton to relieve Mr. Alexander, who was a brother of the widow-woman whose husband had killed himself down here on the railroad - that owns this house by me now. She's still living. She's in Jackson with her daughter. I went down there to relieve the man, and while I was relieving him, he got fired and laid off. So I fell heir to the Carrollton job. I stayed there until April, and then three or four of us got a swap, and I moved back to Winona, was on what is known as the west Winona job, and that's where I began my railroading; and I was in various, different departments. I was timber inspector - took up and treated timber at the tie plant in Columbus; and I was supervisor and I was extra gang foreman and laid a lot of rail, and so on. I even did some clerk work at the depot...but that's when my railroading started out, and I did very little railroading with a shovel, like most foremen do; that's the way mine started out. There were two or three times that I just liked to not stayed with them. I had some construction foremen offer me a job at nearly twice as much money as I was making, but I thought about that retirement home and I stayed with them; and I'm glad I did. That's what I'm eating off of now.

Holmes: Were you ever an engineer?

Varner: Oh, no, I wasn't in that department. However, I ran an engine. I was a flagman and a brakeman for two years during that time, and a time or two I fired the engine, one time from Malmaison, down here this side of Greenwood to Columbus. The fireman burned out. He just burned out, he just went back to the caboose, and I fired the engine. They were double-heading on those freight trains that time and I fired one of the engines. One time one of the engineers took sick and I ran the engine from here at Winona to Columbus and the brakeman did the firing!

Holmes: You just had to pinch-hit there, didn't you!

Varner: I had various experiences, like I'm telling you, on the railroad.

Holmes: Was it forty-four years that you were with them?

Varner: Yes.



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Holmes: What years do you remember as being the best years for the railroad? The busiest years?

Varner: I would say the best years for the railroad were from '40 to '50.

Holmes: Why so?

Varner: '40 to '50. That period in there was wonderful, I figure.

Holmes: Why do you say that?

Varner: Well, just because it looked like the business was good and everybody was happy, and they had a good passenger business, running six passenger trains - three east and three west - and they made connections with four here on the IC. Business was just good, and it seemed like all railroad employees were happy. They'd have their different meetings, meet together, and enjoy being - it was just like one big family! It looked like everybody took an interest in being with the railroad company. They felt a pride in it!

Holmes: Can you tell me something about the passenger service and the trains?

Varner: Oh, it was real good! The first passenger train that they had everybody called it the doodle-bug.

Holmes: When was that started?

Varner: It ran from Columbus to Greenville; and two or three times one of them ran out of here to Greenville and one of them ran out of here to Columbus. Then they had passenger trains that were well-equipped, and they were air-conditioned when that time came around, and they were kept nice, and they made their train crew - the flagmen, and conductors and all - go nice and neat, and they did go nice and neat and they were nice and polite to the public, you know, and they became acquainted and knew a lot of people. A lot of people rode the passenger train from here to the Delta - I can remember when they said "over the swamp." Of course, it became known as the Delta, and a lot of people around Winona and throughout the community and through here had business, had plantations over in the Delta. They had bought land over there and were clearing it up and putting it in. A man that lived next door to where I'm living here bought a place over north of Moorhead. Well, they'd ride these trains, and they became so acquainted with these train crews - "Good morning, Jim. Good morning, Bill. How are you this morning? How's the family?" and so on. They became just that well-acquainted with the people - the Elliots and the Namans and the Gardners and those names of the conductors over there, you know. And there were two of our native men that were conductors over there - Wes and Scott Thompson. Scott Thompson ran on a passenger train over there a long



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time, and he was raised here and he knew everybody all through this community and they knew him. It was almost the same way with the people on the IC. People over there rode the train to Grenada, to Memphis, to New Orleans, to Jackson, and they became acquainted with those people over there on the train with one another just like they did the C&G. This day and time, Mr. Holmes, if you were to see the crowd that used to be at the C&G depot and the IC depot when these passenger trains ran in that exchange and interchange of the business, if somebody was to drive up and see all that - "What on earth's going on? Where did all those people come from?" You know, I've often asked what happened, what went wrong with people that used to ride those trains and you used to see them here. Why, sometimes there would be at least three or four hundred that would come here from the north and south on the IC and catch the train going east, when they'd go up there to the commencement exercises at the college in Columbus, the old IIC - finally was made MSCW. You didn't know anything about it being IIC, did you?

Holmes: I vaguely remember reading something about it, yes, sir.

Varner: Industrial Institute and College. Then they made it MSCW, like Mississippi State - it used to be the A&M, agricultural college. Just like that, and they were nice to the people, not only on the C&G, on the IC - anywhere! When I was supervisor over there, I had passes on these other railroads, and I rode those passes, and they were just as nice to me as they were to paying passengers. Railroad people that day and time were just nice to each other.

Holmes: Why did they call the train the "doodle-bug?"

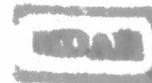
Varner: It was just so much smaller than the other trains, you know, and....

Holmes: How many cars did it have?

Varner: It had the - the front end there was where the engineer was. Of course, it carried no fireman. It carried a flagman and conductor, but it carried no fireman. Didn't need any fireman. Well, it was a pretty good compartment there; then it had the rest of that coach and then a full coach behind it. Right behind the engineer was the baggage and mail, and the rest of that coach was for passengers and the entire coach behind was for passengers; and that's why, for short, they called it the "doodlebug."

Holmes: It was two cars?

Varner: Two cars, yes.



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Holmes: And it was diesel?

Varner: Two cars including the motors and everything.

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Holmes: I've heard the trains called the "Coming and Going Railroad."

Varner: That was C&G - Columbus and Greenville! "Come and Go."

Holmes: And "Cinder and Grits."

Varner: Yes, and "Crawl and Grunt," and "Contrary and Grouchy," which was wrong!

Holmes: Yes! Were there express trains and local trains, passenger trains?

Varner: Yes, it was express and mail and passenger all combined.

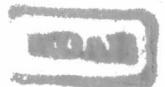
Holmes: Well, did they have a local that would stop anywhere along the track? I was reading a newspaper article, and they said that there was one train that would stop that mostly colored people would ride.

Varner: No, no, white and colored all rode the same train; of course, there were four of those trains, two each way, that didn't stop at every pig trail - we used to call them over there - they had numerous little flag stops on the railroad. For instance, like long time ago up here at the top of the hill where the old poorhouse was there was a flagstop there, and with these local trains you could flag them and get on or off there, and the same way over on various places on the railroad, all up and down there. But now, these other trains, what they call the main passenger trains - nine and ten and eleven and twelve were their numbers - they didn't stop at every one of those little flagstops. But those others did.

Holmes: How long would it take nine, ten, eleven or twelve to go from Columbus to Greenville?

Varner: With the usual stops that they made - just a minute, I want to get as near correct as possible - Number Eleven left Columbus at one o'clock. He made connection with Three and Four here on the IC and he usually arrived in here about four o'clock, and most of the time it was around four-thirty when he left out making those connections. Then he got to Greenville at eight. He left Columbus at one, arrived in Greenville at eight.

Holmes: He would put the passengers out at the C&G depot? How would they get to the IC depot?



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- Varner: Yes. Some of them walked. I'd say seventy-five percent of them walked, and they used to have what they called a bus pulled by a pair of horses that hauled about thirty or forty people.
- Holmes: Did the railroad own that?
- Varner: Oh, no. It was owned - when I first knew it, it was owned by the Ely Livery Stable Company. Then it became owned by Aldridge. No, the railroad didn't own it. But I'll say that seventy-five percent of them walked. That's why you had this number of minutes of this interchange, was for the passengers to get off of one train and go to the other.
- Holmes: What about freight service during that time?
- Varner: It was just real good. People went to the depot for years and got their own freight, and then the companies finally had a freight delivery.
- Holmes: How many freight trains a day?
- Varner: Well, they had two out of here, and two - that was four, and then one east and one west, that was six; and during that period of years I was telling you about we had what we called a fast freight. It only left out of Greenville and picked up and set out at these main interchange places: Elizabeth, and if it was what they called hot freight, he'd stop and set out at Indianola, and at the interchange at Greenwood and the interchange - I mean the interchange at Moorhead, the interchange at Greenwood and the interchange here, and the interchange at Mathiston and the interchange at West Point. That was the places he stopped. Now, Fifty-one and Fifty-two, east and west, why he stopped and set out at all these main towns, beginning with West Point, Mathiston, Eupora, Kilmichael, Winona, and all the main points, picked up and set out. Now, these local freight trains, one left out of here going east and one left out of here going west; one left out of Greenwood going east and one left out of Columbus coming west, those four freight trains stopped almost at every pig trail and picked up and set out local freight, set off local freight, and stopped and set out boxcar loads of freight everywhere there was an unloading track. Oh, the freight service was wonderful over there.
- Holmes: How were the trains numbered? Why was a train called Number Nine, or Number Fifty-one or....
- Varner: All right. If you were going to give a train an order - a train order, which they ran on, train orders - you'd want something to go by wouldn't you, Brother Holmes?



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Holmes: That's right.

Varner: All right, and I can tell you something else. On all railroads, all odd numbers went west, all even numbers went east. All odd numbers went south, all even numbers went north. You take on the IC, one, three, five, twenty-five, and seven, all those numbers went south. Two and four and eight and all those numbers went north. Over on the C&G, eleven and nine and five and all those, they went west. Six and ten and twelve, all those numbers of passenger trains went east. The freight trains - thirty-two, fifty-two, eight, and all of those - they went east; fifty-one and all of those odd numbers that was numbered went west. That's the same way on all the railroads in the United States. All odd numbers go south and west, all even numbers go east and north.

Holmes: Well, I'm glad to find that out!

Varner: Yes, sir. If you hear somebody say something about Number Four train, you'll know that it's running either north or east. If you hear them say something about Number One or Number Three, you'll know it's running west or south, on all railroads and the numbers, odd or even, affect the freight trains same as the passenger trains. In other words, you put out a train order: Number One will meet Number Four, you know, and so on. Do you see?

Holmes: Yes. In your forty-four years of service, I'm sure that lots of things happened that made good stories on the railroad line. What are some of the most outstanding and exciting things that you remember happening?

Varner: Well, I'll tell you, I couldn't have anything that was more outstanding than all of that experience through that Mississippi flood in the Delta that washed away all those tracks, and all those different experiences in dealing with the public - different people, dealing with them. I don't know of anything that I had a greater experience of than that. Now, I had a great experience in, I'm sorry to say, different, pretty bad freight train wrecks we had. The different experience of picking up and uppping those cars back on the railroad track, repairing the tracks. And some of the next best thrilling experiences I had was taking up old rails and having the joy and privilege of putting down and laying "new steel"! And I laid a good deal of it! I laid all of the present rail that's there now from West Point to Mathiston, and laid all of the present big rail there is from Winona here to west of Carrollton.

Holmes: When you were laying the rail, you had a crew.

Varner: Had a good big crew, and, of course, I had campfires. We moved along the different places there. Now, when I began, the first rail I laid, I laid it - what you'd call laying it by hand.

Holmes: How was that?



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Vарner: You'd have so many men with the rail tongs that caught around the top of the rail, and when you picked up on it it tightened, and a man on the other side; and you had enough men to pick up the rail, set it up here and place it on the ties, and connect it up. That was what you called "laying it by hand." Now a lot of it that I laid we had a dragline that ran along on the right-of-way on the outside, that picked up this rail and placed it up there, and two men placed it into the coupling - one man down there and the other was up here - caught it when it was just right and eased it down there, moved down and picked up the next rail. That was when I had the most pleasure of laying rail, when the dragline handled the steel.

Holmes: When you had the crew working, did they sing as they put the rail down? Did your crew sing as they worked?

Vарner: Yes, oh yes, a lot of them!

Holmes: Did they sing in rhythm to putting the rails?

Vарner: Yes. Now, after the beginning of laying with draglines, we didn't have as much of that telling them what to do. You always had one what you called a lead Negro there, I'll say - I believe this day and time we call them black men - but that day and time he wanted you to call him a Negro. In other words, he'd turn around to one of his own and say, "Come on, you black nigger, you!" All right. He'd get down there with his rail tongs and he'd holler, "All right! Catch a-hold! Raise up! Walk! Steady yourself! Ease down! Couple up! Back easy! Lightly! Okay, march! Next rail! And he always had a man chorusing. Now, Mr. Holmes, they'd laugh in a whole lot in there that I've forgotten all of it; and, of course, I couldn't make a rhyme of it like they did; and in the meantime, while they were moving about, some of them would be singing those different songs like they did. They'd sing

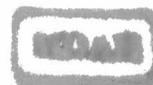
"See the smoke from Babylon, I know it's burning down."

And they'd say

"Today has been a long old lonesome day. I feel going to be the same old way."

They'd sing all such as that. Some little of it I can remember. But most of the time, a man that had all of that in him, he was your best worker. He was always the one that was ready to lead and go ahead and, "Come on, you black nigger, you. Come on and let's go!"

Holmes: What was the size of the crew?



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Varner: Well, let me tell you. I'll tell you this much now. I worked all sizes over there from a section crew of two men up to putting the track back down on the Mississippi flood, I had as high as forty-two down there at one time; but I had a white man with me at that time, and I appointed him, myself, as assistant foreman to help me. And then I had - when I was laying this steel by hand, I had as much as twenty-four. When I laid it by machinery, by dragline, I worked sixteen practically all the time. Of course, if I had one or two sick that would drop out it didn't make any difference, I went right on. I have laid a few rails out there with as small as ten.

Holmes: Would you be the only white man?

Varner: Oh, yes. I'd be the only white man except that dragline operator.

Holmes: When did the dragline come in? About what year?

Varner: He came in in '56.

Holmes: So up unti '56 you laid it by hand?

Varner: What I laid along was by hand. And we laid all that rail back by hand in the Mississippi Delta, brought it back up there and laid it by hand during the overflow. Up until '56 we laid it all by hand.

Holmes: Well, I am just about out of tape on this particular reel, and I was wondering if I could come back in the morning - let you rest awhile from today and talk a little bit.

Varner: All right. I'll tell you something else that wasn't a great thrill to me.

Holmes: What was that?

Varner: I had a motorcar wreck in 1916, the second year I was railroading I had a motorcar wreck and broke my right arm. That wasn't any thrill!

Holmes: I guess not!

Varner: I was off about two months. That wasn't any thrill.

Holmes: Do you have any pictures or papers about the railroad?

Varner: No, I can't tell you, Holmes, whether I've got a picture at all. I don't know that I have a one. I had a few different ones that were taken down in the Mississippi Delta overflow, and those different officials came along and picked them up; and I imagine



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that there are a few of those same ones up there in that coach in Columbus. I don't know that there are any - I don't know what's in that coach, because I've never been in it.

Holmes: What coach is that?

Varner: They call it the museum. I don't know what...they've got an engine and a caboose.

Holmes: In the park in Columbus?

Varner: In the Probst Park out there, and I don't know just what all they have of the C&G's out there in there, but they have a great deal. I have wanted to go so bad, but every time I've planned to go something would come up and I didn't get to go. When they had the farewell party of the employees, when the ICG was going to take it over, I was to go and I've forgotten what happened now that I didn't get to go. Every time I've planned to go there was always something that happened.

Holmes: Is there anything in the old depot here now?

Varner: I don't think that there'd be a thing that you would be interested in. I don't believe there is. Have you seen the condition of the thing?

Holmes: Just from across the street there. I haven't been close to it in years.

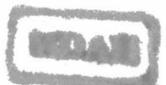
Varner: Across the street...I'll look. You are going to come back, you say?

Holmes: I'd like to come back in the morning for another hour if I could.

Varner: That will be all right. During that meantime, now, I'm going to search and look and see if I've got a picture at all left. If I have, I don't think it will amount to a thing on earth. I had several, but, you know, at that time I was busy down there and I didn't have a camera; and listen, you take the photographer for the railroad and other people, they were making those pictures and I didn't get them, you see. I wasn't making them. I didn't have any equipment to make any, and I was busy, and unfortunately, I just didn't get any, hardly. But there were a lot of pictures that I saw, and some few that I had, some of the officials, some of the employees up there, and there may be some up there. They've got some pictures up there.

Holmes: If it's not too cold in the morning, maybe we can go down to the depot.

Varner: It won't be too cold!



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Holmes: Well, I hope it will be cool!

Varner: Well, I know, but you know....

Holmes: I'd like to go down there with you and let you show me around.

Varner: You know, when you railroad forty-four years, it never did get too cold and it never did get too hot!

Holmes: That's true, I'm sure!

Varner: There was one word that didn't apply to the railroad.

Holmes: What's that?

Varner: Can't. If you can't, then you moved aside and somebody else tried! My wife's father - when I began railroading, he said, "Robert, there's no such thing as can't." He said, "Did you know he started to Kosciusko several years ago and fell in a ditch and broke his neck? Ain't no can't." He said, "The instruction you get, you try to do it, and if you do it and it's not right, it won't be your fault. They'll come along and see they're wrong and they'll tell you something else. You do, you carry out instructions. That's the main thing on the railroad - carry out instructions if you possibly can."

Holmes: I'd like to ask you one last question today and that's about the trains - the locomotives. Do you have any fond memories of a special locomotive?

Varner: Yes. The first locomotive of the C&G Railroad that I ever really looked at, that was back in 1913. The old Number 3792, and it was run by George Carson on the passenger train that left here early in the morning and came back at night. That was the first one that I took a good look at, the old 3792. And then, the ones that I kind of began to love were the 216 that had a real whistle on it, and it had a man that could toot it, too! That was Mr. Wade Lynch. Unfortunately, he got killed in a collision with another train out here at Hendricks. Another one was Charlie Brown, a passenger engineer, ran over there that had such a pretty whistle on it, and Charlie loved it, too. It was 3861.

Holmes: Each engine had its own special whistle?

Varner: They assigned a certain engine to a certain engineer. That was his engine.

Holmes: But you could identify the engine by its whistle?

Varner: Oh, yes. Not only me, but people in the community began to say, "Well, I hear Bob Speed on the 181. I hear Charlie Brown on the 3861. I hear Wade Lynch on the 216."



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Holmes: Were there ever any bad passenger train wrecks?

Varner: Yes, but not too bad through this country. Now, they had some derailments that were pretty bad derailments, but they didn't kill up any people. A lot of times they'd have to run another train there to transfer the passengers, and so on, until these trains were re-railed; but they had no bad passenger train wrecks that day and time.

Holmes: That's good! Well....

Varner: Do you know when the first passenger train was ever run in the United States? You don't know that?

Holmes: No, sir.

Varner: Why, you should know that!

Holmes: I know I should but I don't. When was it?

Varner: May, 1830.

Holmes: Well, you know that. Where was it?

Varner: Why, it had a great long run. It was from Baltimore, Maryland, to Elliott Mills.

Holmes: How far was that?

Varner: Thirteen miles!

Holmes: Well, they had to start somewhere, I guess.

Varner: That was where the first passenger train ran - a woodburning engine, on improvised flatcars. More or less, you'd call it a toy train now!

Holmes: Yes, we just about would! Well, let me come back in the morning, and I'll think of some more questions. I'm going to listen to this tape again and will ask you to fill in some more details. What time can I come back?

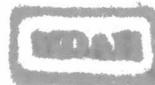
Varner: Suit yourself. Anywhere from nine o'clock to eleven.

Holmes: What about nine?

Varner: That will be fine. Nine o'clock will be just fine.

(End of Side Two)

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[At this point, Mr. Varner is identifying some snapshots which he has shown to Mr. Holmes. This interview takes place on September 26, 1975, and they are again in Mr. Varner's home in Winona.]

Varner: ...Picture, and, of course, he wore wooden legs from the knees down and his foot - you see it sticking out there straight like they will when you sit down - he was sitting on the end of a cross-tie on the IC Railroad to take my picture in that flower yard there at that crossing, and that's how come his foot in the picture. That's the first year I entered the railroad service, when that picture was made.

Holmes: My goodness! Yes.

Varner: Now, this was taken when I first moved to this house in 1942. I was supervisor at that time. Now, I had several little pictures taken when I was at Indianola during the flood, but I guess that different ones got them. That's the only stretch of track that I have - and I took - that was taken east of Morehead to show the section that was out of the water up there.

Holmes: Yes. This was in 1927?

Varner: Yes, 1972. That showed the section. Now this one, this one shows me and my motorcar. I was track supervisor in 1942.

Holmes: Now, where was this taken?

Varner: Let me look at it.

Holmes: Is that the depot down there?

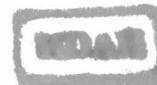
Varner: That was taken at Eupora, Mississippi. And that was taken there the same day. The watch inspector and myself were on the watch-inspection trip and that's the watch inspector with me on a watch-inspection trip.

Holmes: What was his name?

Varner: Rollings - R-O-L-L-I-N-G-S - Rollings.

Holmes: What is a watch inspector?

Varner: Each railroad employee who was in a responsible position, like track foremen, engineers, firemen, and all those, were required to carry a standard railroad watch, which was an Elgin or a Waltham 21-jewel; and it was required that they be inspected by a watch inspector every so often, and that's the same man.



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Holmes: Oh, yes.

Varner: Now, this was my wife's daddy when he was track supervisor in 1916, standing right below Itta Bena, right below all the residences so they wouldn't be in the building, and it was taken in the wintertime, he had on his overcoat and he was standing in the middle of the C&G track just west of Itta Bena - Z. L. Parker.

Holmes: Yes. Z. L.

Varner: Now, that was myself and one of my little gangs when I first started out to railroading. That was taken at Greenwood, Mississippi, in 1917. I believe that's all I have of the pictures pertaining to any of the railroads. I had a good deal of them but different ones got some and different relatives and so on; and then railroad men picked up some of them, they picked up all of them - I had little pictures taken down yonder in the overflow except that section of track which didn't show any water on it, the section of track east of Morehead that didn't have any water. I had that picture taken so it wouldn't show any water around it. That's up there on the ridge east of Morehead.

Holmes: May I borrow these to make a copy of them?

Varner: You can use them as long as you want to.

Holmes: Okay. I'll take them back to Jackson and make the copies, and the next time I come home I'll bring them back.

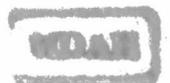
Varner: Okay, fine. Now, that other little old picture with the gang, I have two of them. You see, this white part around there, somebody's had it and cut it off, you see. This one has gotten a little dimmer than that one. Someone took that and they cut that white off all around there. Yes, you may have them and use them as long as you want to if they'd be any service to anybody.

Holmes: Well, they will, thank you!

Varner: Okay. We'll run down yonder, now, and....

[At this point, Mr. Varner and Mr. Holmes went to the C&G depot in Winona. The rest of the interview takes place in the depot.]

Varner: ...Have a lot of pride in all this, and you look out here now and it just breaks your heart, you know. It used to be all in good condition, and see how the ground is? They've broken a lot of rail and piled up there or something. That's bigger rail than is laying there, too. I guess they're going to do a lot of work, or something.



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Holmes: I understand...aren't they going to use seventy-pound?

Varner: I don't know what they're going to use.

Holmes: Is this seventy?

Varner: That's second-hand rail, I believe that's second-hand eighty. Yes, that's what that is.

Holmes: How many tracks were originally here? Three or four?

Varner: Three.

Holmes: But it was a single track only?

Varner: East of...way down yonder...the east switch is way down yonder, a quarter of a mile, nearly - I expect it is a quarter of a mile!

Holmes: How far that way?

Varner: To the IC.

Holmes: Yes, and this is the track that the passenger....

Varner: This was the main line, here, you know, because here was your station and your passenger landing, and that was the passing track and that was the old scale track over there. The old scales were right over there to weigh the cars.

Holmes: I see. Why did they build two depots? Why did they not use just one?

Varner: Well, there were two different companies, you know, and they couldn't use the same depot hardly, the inconvenience it would put them to.

Holmes: It would be more inconvenient than to try to consolidate.

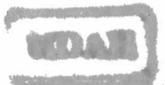
Varner: Oh, yes!

Holmes: Now, when was this depot built, do you know?

Varner: No, I couldn't tell you for certain to save my life! Now, this railroad was finished and connected up right at some spot here.

Holmes: Between east and west?

Varner: And old President Harrison, of the Southern Railroad, now this was told to me, you see, drove the golden spike - they had a little golden spike that they took a little hammer and drove it



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down - of course, pull it out - and she drove the golden spike finishing up the railroad. Now, you see, this railroad began down at Greenville and operated kind of a log road outfit way out there to the Sunflower River, and there it turned down and went east down there, a piece. And, of course, it built over yonder from Columbus over to West Point for connection over there. It built gradually along at the time and was completed if I'm not - got the thing wrong, now - here June, 1867.

Holmes: '67? You know, the Illinois Central drove the golden spike here at Winona, too. It kind of makes this a little crossroads.

Varner: Yes. You know, railroading used to be a great thing for the public. If a child got ten years old back there, and it hadn't ridden the train somewhere, it was just outdated - it just wasn't anything!

Holmes: He was just staying at home, wasn't he!

Varner: Yes. One thing, the IC Railroad would run what they called excursion trains. That was about a little less than half-fare, and they'd begin, say, Jackson or Durant and go to Memphis, spend so many hours and return. Lots of people looked forward to those excursions.

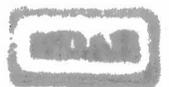
Holmes: And spent the day in Memphis.

Varner: Oh, yes, and then, grandpa - you know, it's always been the grandpa and grandma and the grandchildren - they were the ones, it wasn't their own children, the grandchildren! Now, grandpa, he looked forward to when the grandchildren got up big enough to put them on the train and carry them somewhere! Carry them to Greenville and show them the Mississippi River, the Mississippi levee and all, or carry them to Memphis, go out to the zoo and show them their kinfolks! Or go to Jackson and show them the Capitol.

Holmes: It made a nice trip for a day.

Varner: Oh, yes! Riding the train was something in that day and time, sure was! When my daughter came up, why she rode the train a great deal, you know. We went all out in West Texas on it. I had a sister that lived out there, and we went out in West Texas on the trains. Yes, sir, the railroad industry was the main thing back in that day and time, and they were the main tax-paying people, too. Sometimes these states and municipalities ran right down to nothing, and they looked forward to getting that tax from the railroads.

Holmes: From the railroads.



Varner: I don't know whether they even go in and out here or not. Here's one of those old pushcars I was talking about.

Holmes: What's left of it!

Varner: It's in pretty good shape, just rusting bad, you know. You see how they've torn it up? Now, some of them could have been here doing something that was necessary. I guess they were. They were here...now that could have been somebody coming in here getting them a few bricks; whatever was being done, they were doing it to get them some bricks, you can see that. They laid the other stuff down here. They were getting some bricks. Now, that could have been the company, the employees doing that.

Holmes: Well, the building itself doesn't look to be in too bad a shape.

Varner: Well, that was the freight depot, you know, the freight part; and in here was the office, and over here on the east side was the passenger...I believe some of them have set a post under this right here, haven't they?

Holmes: No, I think it's just leaning up there, without supporting....

Varner: Just leaning up here?

Holmes: Yes, sir. Don't lean against it!

Varner: No! All right, this is not locked anymore. Now, there's your track spike. Oh, you've seen them, you used to go down yonder on the railroad.

Holmes: Yes, I've picked them up lying along the track. Do you want me to see if I can get it?

Varner: They may have it fastened inside. I believe they have, don't you?

Holmes: I believe they must have.

Varner: May have it nailed up. I wouldn't know for why.

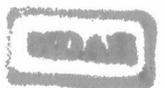
Holmes: Must be.

Varner: Well, let's go down there and come in the old part.

Holmes: Okay.

Varner: Yes, they used to take great pride in keeping it all cleaned up in here.

Holmes: Is that Queen Anne's lace?



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Varner: That's "Queen Annie's Lace," that's what they used to call that! Now, this was for the white people, and the toilet was in there for one, and there was one in around there at the end around there.

Holmes: Yes. And they had benches in here, I guess.

Varner: Yes, oh, yes. Well, I guess...they've done away with them now, but there was one time some of them were up yonder in that pool hall.

Holmes: Oh, really!

Varner: Well, yes, they bought them from the company, you know, and....

Holmes: Oh? I wonder what happened to them?

Varner: Well, I don't know. They were in there till these people went in there and bought out the pool hall and put in the novelty store up there.

Holmes: That looks rotten there....

Varner: I see it is, here, all through here. Last time I was down here, Holmes, this had all good lumber here on top of it. This was the cabinet that they kept all the records in, and, of course, the tickets...was up there.

Holmes: I'm going to get over there and see what's in that room we couldn't get into. I'll step very carefully here.

Varner: I'll take my time, now.

Holmes: You just...I'll be back, you'd better not try.

Varner: Okay...I wanted to look a little bit more, myself!

Holmes: You got it? I just don't want the board to fall through! This seems pretty steady.

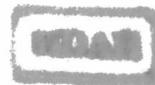
Varner: Now, that one in that other part, it's still fastened up, isn't it? Or they've got it nailed up.

Holmes: They've got it nailed up.

Varner: Well, they go in it somewhere, because...can you see that phone in there?

Holmes: Phone?

Varner: Is there a can or some kind of a vessel sitting over something up there?



Holmes: There's a telephone over there.

Varner: Yes, there's a telephone in there, and they go in there somewhere. .

Holmes: Well, now, there's a door over there.

Varner: Oh, yes, well then they may come in there that way. I don't know. All of this other was meanness, vandalism, and so on. You see, that's open through there, and you've got those little platforms over there. You see, that's where the express trucks - the trucks...platform...you can see.

Holmes: To the baggage...that's something!

Varner: That came off of these cabinets over there; and that was the colored waiting room on that side. Be particular, don't stick a nail in your foot.

Holmes: I've had that happen before!

Varner: Well, you don't want it to happen again, do you! The other time suited you? Well, that's fine!

Holmes: No! I learned from that time! Just a bunch of junk...ceiling's falling in...how many people were employed here?

Varner: Now, let's see. You know, back when I first began railroading, they had three operators, you see. They needed them because they ran night trains and needed three operators - eight-hour shifts. All right, you had your agent, you had your cashiers, and you had your freight agents, and you had two clerks...kept up with them.

Holmes: You had a nice-sized payroll.

Varner: I'll tell you, there's a lady that's still living here, has lived here practically as long as she's lived - I think she's up in the hospital now - Miss Fanny Huntley. You may know her, or know of her. Her husband, Claude Huntley, worked down here; and when Claude's daddy died, he took over the Standard Oil business. Do you remember Miss Corrie Ann Aldridge, or not?

Holmes: I don't believe so.

Varner: She lived in that brick house just south of me.

Holmes: Oh, yes. Right.

Varner: Miss Corrie Ann - Howard Aldridge died Christmas '45, and in about eight or nine years, she married a fellow, Harvey. Then Mrs. Aldridge died in '66, I believe, but her brother, Dabney Peebles,



worked down here, too, and his daughter and her husband run a furniture store over at Starkville now.

Holmes: Peebles Furniture? No.

Varner: No, I believe she married a Brown, I don't know. My wife would know. I don't think of her given name right now. That was Dabney's daughter. Miss Corrie Ann Aldridge's niece, and they run a furniture store at Starkville, she and her husband.

Holmes: I see. Now, why was there a window here, this bow window?

Varner: Well, you know, that operator sat here, and he could look down that way and see the trains, or so on, and look this way and see out, and then he had straight out there. You see, they ran a switch engine here at night for years, and if that man was sitting in here, and the night foreman or conductor or whatever you want to call him was out there somewhere, why, he'd peck on the window and motion to him to come to him, that there was something he wanted to tell him. That was why it was built that way, for the view.

Holmes: I figured it was.

Varner: You see, straight up and down, you'd just look straight out there.

Holmes: Has there always been a cotton field out there?

Varner: No, it's been a corn field a time or two!

Holmes: Well!

Varner: This is owned right now by that Mr. Allen that lost his mind and is up yonder in the nursing home. His wife, of course, is still running that home most of the time, lives right there back of me on the other street, there. My garden is at her back door.

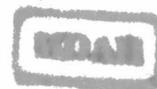
Holmes: I see.

Varner: But when I first began railroading that was owned by the oil mill company.

Holmes: Yes. Mr. Allen owned that, didn't he?

Varner: Yes, he finally bought that. Well, he bought the gin and the property and this land. Now, the oil-pumping business had gone out of business before he ever got it. He worked for them. He began working for that oil mill company over there when he was about eighteen years old.

Holmes: I see. What was through this door?



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Varner: I believe this concrete....

Holmes: This is concrete here?

Varner: Yes, this is concrete. I remember when this was concreted.

Holmes: When was that?

Varner: About 1918, I believe it was. There were toilets right here.

Holmes: Yes. Is this the colored waiting room right here? This wasn't, was it?

Varner: No, the colored waiting room was over there.

Holmes: What was this used as?

Varner: This was kind of an overflow for people. There was a seat right there, and there's one here, and when they overflowed in yonder they could come in here. That was when they'd have those gatherings like the homecoming or exercises at those colleges over yonder, and that's why there was a toilet here, because they were around here.

Holmes: They'd just stick them in here when they'd....

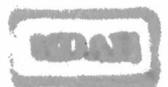
Varner: Yes, there was a seat there, and one here, and over there, yes.

Holmes: I want to ask you something about what you said yesterday. You mentioned Dr. Ward. What do you remember about him?

Varner: Well, not too much, because Dr. Ward passed on pretty quick after I came to Winona. How come me to first ever know anything about him, in 1913 he treated my mother-in-law, you know, with the bloodpoisoning. But he had been, before that, oh, twenty or twenty-five years, a very famous doctor here. Dr. Ward and Dr. Scott, well, I can't remember right now, but a little bit later than that we had Dr. Barksdale, who put up this hospital up here, you know, was a surgeon; and then Doctor - I've forgotten his name now - was here with him a long time and went to Greenwood. Names get by me mighty bad.

Holmes: The reason I asked about Dr. Ward, when James K. Vardaman lived here they were supposed to be big buddies. Vardaman lived here in the 1880s, I believe.

Varner: Well, he was here before I was. What I remember most about James K. Vardaman was when he was running for governor and speaking, that's the most that I remember about him. Now, he had a brother, Will Vardaman, that I remember, that lived in Greenwood. I know right where he lived.



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Holmes: Do you remember anything about the secret caucus in 1910?

Varner: No, just talk of it. I never did delve into it. I never did know too much about it. In fact, I never did try to get very deep into government.

Holmes: Well, I just wondered if, at the time, there was much talk about it.

Varner: Oh, sure, there was a lot of talk, a tremendous lot of talk; and they would be...for instance, there would be some of the meetings of that stuff here just like we have these farm meetings and other meetings here, you know.

Holmes: Oh, really?

Varner: Yes, they'd have meetings at times of it. But the majority of this, I understand, of the secret caucus meetings was carried on down at Jackson at the Capitol.

Holmes: Or at the Edwards Hotel.

Varner: Somewhere down there.

Holmes: Did there use to be a portico here, or something? It looks like there was a column.

Varner: Yes, oh, yes.

Holmes: How far out did it come?

Varner: Well, it came out, I remember, far enough that the old bus that hauled the passengers from one train to another if it was raining could drive under here and the passengers could get in there, you know, without getting out in the rain. It reached out pretty far.

Holmes: Were there columns out here that supported it?

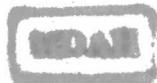
Varner: Oh, yes. They've been dug up and moved.

Holmes: Here are some more tracks. What were these, sidings?

Varner: Yes. This was the house track. You see, the platform to the old depot was out there and they'd shove cars in here to load and unload, and that was the interchange track, you see, the track that you carried cars to the IC and received cars from the IC.

Holmes: How far do these extend?

Varner: Let's see. There's a track comes in over there at that hardwood mill. It goes out yonder - down there at the edge of those timbers yonder.



Holmes: Within sight, then.

Varner: Yes. Now, when I first began railroading they had a - this house track here was in front of the station over here. I helped take up that house track around there and move it around here, and we didn't have that interchange track over there with the IC then. We built that over there. We did our interchange through up yonder...I helped build all those. I'll tell you where there's another track that I helped build. I was off the railroad here a little while in 1922, and Mr. Peacock, the supervisor over at the IC - I had a brother-in-law that worked over there on the IC as a foreman - Mr. Peacock asked him, said, "What's your brother-in-law doing?" He said, "He's up at the house - or was a while ago. He's not working specially anywhere now." He says, "I wonder if he'd work a little while for me." Mr. Holland said, "I can't tell you, you ask him." So Mr. Holland went in to the phone there and called up at the house and he said....

(End of Side Three)

"On the motorcar. He's going north and he'll meet you out there at the toolhouse. He wants to talk to you." He wanted to know if Mr. Holland, that ran the north section on the IC and Mr. - I forget the foreman's name on the south end at that time - if they'd give you two men a piece, could you pick up about four more and take up the track in front of the depot in front of the IC, pick it up and move it on the west side, lay it around on the west side of the depot. I told him yes, I'd do it for him, so that house track that's at the IC depot up there, I supervised, or built, that around there.

Holmes: On the west side?

Varner: Yes. And took up the old house track in front of the depot, 1922.

Holmes: Now, was that a railroad building over there?

Varner: Yes, that's their property. That was the ice house out yonder. That is their property, these people own that.

Holmes: Which one was the ice house?

Varner: See that old door over yonder, see that heavy-built....

Holmes: Oh, yes, that little building.

Varner: This on this side was the colored waiting room there. That's where....

Holmes: On the west side.



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Varner: Now, here's where the door went in, but they haven't been coming in and out of it.

Holmes: Here's the door, right here.

Varner: Well, that's the...but this door here goes through this alley. You know, we tried to get in one over...no, here, that's right. Yes.

Holmes: That's a window there. Here's the door.

Varner: Here's the door. I didn't get quite...here's the door, right here, see here? This goes in where we tried to get in over yonder; but they haven't been going in and out here.

Holmes: In a long time.

Varner: I'll tell you, they're not going in and out in there at all, now, I don't believe. The freight platform was right here...the ice house....

Holmes: What was the ice house used for?

Varner: To put the ice on the trains, and the foremen and all went there to get ice.

Holmes: Did they have a dining car on the passenger trains?

Varner: Not here, they did not.

Holmes: How many acres were in the railroad property here? Do you remember?

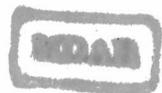
Varner: No.

Holmes: Those are nice sized trees there.

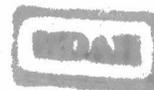
Varner: They're pretty good little sprouts, pretty good little saplings, aren't they? And you see, there was the car inspector's house right there, then his material building was just east of his office, then just east of that the railroad company had a supply building that they kept supplies here, such things as spikes and bolts and angle iron and all such stuff as that in the building and right on the end of it was the track supervisor's office buildings over there.

Holmes: And this is southwest of the depot?

Varner: Yes. On your railroad everything was considered - on this railroad - was considered east or south or north of it. See, those buildings were south of this railroad, and over there was north of it.



- Holmes: Yes. Along the C&G Railroad, in all the towns, how would this depot compare in size and activities with the others?
- Varner: The Greenville depot was some little bit larger than this. I'd say five hundred square feet inside, and the next depot out there, Elizabeth, was just an ordinary sized building. Indianola depot was something about the same size in comparison as this one, about the same size. The Indianola station and that community around there did a great business. They had one of those, they had a freight yard on their tracks down there and they had the cotton compress building on there, and they had an oil mill on their tracks - at Indianola - and Indianola station was a real good station, very great deal of activity went on over there. Now, over at Moorhead - well, the little station in between Indianola and Moorhead, Baird, had a pretty good size depot there and did a good deal of business. It was farming industry around there, and then there were four or five stores there and a post office, and three or four real big plantations. That little station did very good freight business and both passenger business, lot of people came from the south down toward Inverness and Isola and down in there and caught the passenger train east or west there. Then the next station was Moorhead, had a fair-sized station up there. Moorhead did a very good business, too. They had an interchange track where the Y&MV Railroad owned it at that time - of course, it belonged to the IC system - and they interchanged freight cars with them there, and it also had an oil mill on their tracks there. They at one time had a big furniture factory on their tracks there. Of course, this furniture factory track also was both on the IC and the C&G tracks.
- Holmes: Is that the only other building, the ice house, that's left standing?
- Varner: Yes.
- Holmes: Here, just those two, there are no others left that the railroad built?
- Varner: No, there are not any others, just this depot and that little ice house. There's an old tool house way down yonder just past those trees that's still standing down there. I was down there a few days ago and it had an old pushcar there and it might still have an old motor car in it. It was - oh, I don't know just how long it's been since I was down there, three months or so - and that building is still standing down there. The last time I was there before this last time it had the standard Yale lock on it of which I have a standard key, but I couldn't go in there, someone had changed the lock and had a different lock on it, and I couldn't go in the toolhouse and look. But it still had an old pushcar out there - lot of old angle bars and tie plates and old scrap and old spikes piled down there at that depot, a great deal of it.



Holmes: My goodness! Did they have a telegraph office here? Was there a telegraph office at this depot?

Varner: Oh, yes, yes.

Holmes: And at the IC, too?

Varner: Yes, yes.

Holmes: You mentioned Mr. Hutchinson yesterday.

Holmes: Was he president of the railroad?

Varner: No, no, he was traffic manager, what is known as traffic manager. They maintained offices here, about the center of the railroad, for several years - traffic manager's office. Then they moved it to Columbus. That's where it was when Mr. N. B. Hutchinson retired. Of course, he's passed on now, but N. B., Jr., is still connected some way or another with the Southern Railroad, I think he is, if he hasn't retired - his son - and Mrs. N. B. Hutchinson is still living, and she's in the Methodist home in Tupelo, that was just built the last three or four years ago.

Holmes: Yes. This has all been very interesting. I'm glad you came down here with me and "recollected."

Varner: I came down here so I could shed a few more tears, looking at it!

Holmes: Well, I'll shed a few with you!

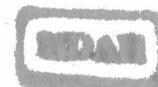
Varner: When one time something like that was - that you went to and worked around and went in and out of it and was the pride and joy of your heart, why, it just breaks your heart to see it go down; and then it makes me think about myself, it's gone down with me!

Holmes: Well, I don't think you're in the same shape as this depot!

Varner: No, they haven't gotten hold of me yet and torn me up like they have this!

Holmes: You haven't gone to pot like this place has! I daresay you could still lay track!

Varner: Yes, I'd have to be particular and more careful than I used to be. I couldn't hop and jump around, but I could still supervise it and know whether it was right or wrong, you know, and would enjoy it. I still enjoy up there at the house hearing those trains that I've become used to, those diesel locomotives, but when I first began railroading, when those steam whistles passed on, that was another saddening part of my life. I hated to see them have to be discarded and retired like I have.



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Holmes: Did you ever - do they ever run trains through here on this part of track now?

Varner: Yes, from Columbus to Greenville.

Holmes: It looks so grown up I just wondered.

Varner: What's today, Friday? If there's nothing wrong, the way they've been doing, they'll go down from Columbus to Greenwood today and return tomorrow.

Holmes: What time?

Varner: Well, there's no definite schedule like we used to have on the railroad.

Holmes: Just when they get some cars?

Varner: Well, and whatever time they come out of the east going west, most of the time I hear the trains returning about ten or eleven a.m., and the most of the time I hear the trains going west is anywhere from about two to three-thirty p.m.

Holmes: I see.

Varner: Mr. Holmes, here's the two tracks that they use. This one and that one over there. They're never over there on that one over yonder at all, any more. They use this track and that one over there. Down yonder at the corner of these green trees is where these two tracks go on, and down there is where that old tool house is that I was talking about.

Holmes: I can vaguely see it now.

Varner: Well, that's where it's at.

Holmes: You said yesterday you were going to give me the names of some other people.

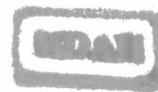
Varner: In what department?

Holmes: That worked with the railroad and that were retired. I don't remember.

Varner: Well....

Holmes: That might have some pictures, we were talking about, some papers.

Varner: Well, when I first began railroading, why, Mr. F. E. Patton out of Mobile was the superintendent. You see, when I began railroad-ing, this was known as the Southern and Mississippi, operated by



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the M&O, and the headquarters were in Mobile. We received our paychecks that was mailed out of Mobile. Mr. F. E. Patton was the superintendent, and, of course, they maintained offices up in Columbus just like they did until they sold out. Back when I began railroading, Mr. H. A. Moody was trainmaster, and Mr. R. C. Crocker was roadmaster, and Mr. W. O. Allen was supervisor here, and Mr. John Williams was supervisor on the west end, what was known as the west end. They were divided, as well as I remember, into 120 mile points, or somewhere in the neighborhood of that. From there west was known as the west end, and it consisted of four different tracks leading off from it that ran north and south; one of them was known as the Belzoni branch. It spurred off at Itta Bena and went to Belzoni, extended to Belzoni. One of them branched off there at Itta Bena and went to Webb, Mississippi, and one of them branched off down about Stoneville somewhere, it was known as the Ritchey branch, ran down south to Ritchey, Mississippi. Then they had a little track that ran out of Greenville north, mostly a logging outfit that went up there - I disremember the name.

Holmes: Was one of those where "the Southern crosses the Dog?"

Varner: Yes. You know, the Y&MV crossed the C&G at Moorhead and was known as the Black Dog, and that part of the Y&MV out of Leland and down in there toward Ritchey and down in there was known as the Yellow Dog.

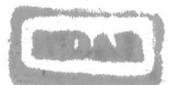
Holmes: How did they get those names?

Varner: I wouldn't know how they came about them. I couldn't tell you. I wouldn't know because, you know, they named them before I got here!

Holmes: Ah, mercy!

Varner: After those officers, Mr. J. H. Rigby came along as superintendent. Mr. Crocker served as roadmaster for some bit after that, and then Mr. E. T. "Tom" Lea, he came on as engineer - civil engineer, I'm talking about - and roadmaster after Mr. Crocker; there were different ones that were supervisors through the years after that. Well, following Mr. Stovall, R. C. Stovall came on as president of the railroad, and Mr. W. E. Roberts was connected with them in an official capacity for years, and then Mr. C. A. Arnett, he came on as manager, and there were different ones that were track supervisors in the period that followed.

Holmes: I see. Sounds like you remembered them all.



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Varner: Well, like I told you yesterday in our conversation, it was just like one big family. Why, the officers would come along the railroad - when I first came here they had a big motorcar and it was numbered 100. It was operated over the railroad a lot of times under train orders, and the order was number 100. Years after that, when Mr. J. H. Rigby came along, why, he bought a Ford car and fixed it up for the officials to ride in over the tracks. Like I say, those officers passed over the tracks, they knew everyone that was out here by name; and several of the Negroes or the black people that had been here, why, one of them would turn around and say, "How are you, Jim, how are you getting along now?" They knew a lot of them by name. It wasn't like a big system like the IC Railroad. I worked over there off and on two or three times, and there was no one over there that knew you. If they did, they didn't let on like they did. However, I had some good friends on the Illinois Central Railroad, I called them real good friends. There were some of the old station employees that were here at Winona that I considered to be real good friends of mine - the Tolberts and the Hayeses and the Caldwells and the Steeles and many others - I considered them real good friends of mine, and they were.

Holmes: Well, I think that the sense of family feeling is one of the things that made the C&G unique.

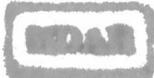
Varner: That's one thing that made it operate. You know, the majority of the railroad employees are kind of like I was anyhow, Mr. Holmes.

Holmes: How was that?

Varner: Well, I was born and raised, grew up, way back over yonder, way back over yonder! I was so far back over there we didn't have any front - we were just back over there!

Holmes: That was back!

Varner: I know a great many of the railroad employees during my time, some of them were already here that came from over in there, and several of them came after I did. My brother went to railroading for the IC Railroad Company. He was first assistant extra-gang foreman and then he came here and ran the IC section on the south end for about a year, and he went back to the extra-gang as assistant foreman, quit the track and went to the Y&MV Railroad at Tchula, Mississippi; and they had yards over there known as the Gwin yards, and some of them over there got after him to go to switching box-cars as a switcher over there in those yards, and he switched there until they did away with that yard; and he was transferred to Jackson and he stayed there until he retired, and, unfortunately he took cancer, and he died about four years ago. Now, there were



a great many of us that came from over there. I had some cousins that came from over there; and there were three or four Herrings that came from over there; and some of the Gibsons came from over there; some of the Rhodes that came from over there. I believe that one of the Rhodes is still employed here now. I don't know that to be true, but I believe he is. Oh, just a great many of them that I know - the Herrings and different ones of them - they came from over there where I did, so far back we didn't have any front! There's a man that fired and became an engineer on the IC Railroad. He worked principally on the Y&MV, retired, and he lives up on the same street here in Winona as I live on now, up north of here, Mr. Eugene Evans. He's a retired engineer. Now, the track foremen that came along when I did, why, the majority of them have all passed away. Let me think just a minute. I don't believe that there's a one living that was a foreman when I became foreman...Wingate, Pitts, Mitchell...Davis, another Davis...there's not a track foreman living that was a foreman when I took a job here. There are very few that are living that came on after I went to work. There's a Mr. Turner that's living and a Mr. Ray that's living, they're both retired.

Holmes: Here in Winona?

Varner: No, Mr. Ray is in Elizabeth and Mr. - I can't say whether Mr. Turner is living over at Columbus, but he retired there - I couldn't say where he is.

Holmes: What's Mr. Ray's first name.

Varner: Sam, Sam Ray. Mr. Turner's first name is Marshall Turner. Now, there's a Mr. Bates who has worked as a track inspector, and has worked, I think, as a track supervisor, and he's still in the employment some way or another with IC&G. I don't know what capacity. He came on as a foreman several years after I did. He's still living.

Holmes: Well, I'm just amazed at the way the C&G was, how close everybody was. . It's remarkable.

Varner: The president of the railroad, when I first knew any of them, Mr. A. T. Stovall, came on...it wasn't Mr. R. C. Stovall that was president at first, it was his daddy, Mr. A. T. Stovall, one of the finest men I ever knew. Presidents of railroads, they came along and threw up their hand at you - most railroads - but these people came along and they shook hands with you, wanted to know how you were getting along; and if they knew you real well, they asked about your family. After Mr. A. T. passed on, why, his son, Mr. R. C. Stovall, became president of it, and then when Mr. R. C. passed on I had retired, and I don't know just exactly how they



handled it then. I don't know whether one of his sons became president or whether Mr. C. A. Arnett, the manager, whether he took charge. I don't know exactly how they handled all of that after that passed on, after Mr. R. C. passed on. But they were all fine people, they were good people. They were what I call my kind of people.

Holmes: They were the kind that could make a railroad run!

Varner: Or any kind of industry.

Holmes: Yes. Well, I've certainly enjoyed it. We're just about out of tape so I don't want you to say anything I can't get on tape!

(End of Side Four
Transcribed by Mary H. Mingee)

