

LARRY: ~~Yes~~, The railroad was only a few years old when you started on it, wasn't it?

BILL: The railroad was here in 1910!

LARRY: Ya, and you started on it in 1911?

BILL: 'Tis safe to say 1911. ~~Ya, I had the seniority list, I don't know where that went!~~

LARRY: Where did your area begin and end? How much territory did your section cover?

BILL: ~~Yes~~ Well, I'll tell ya, it averaged--when I started out ¹⁴ ~~a~~ mile west of Mott and went ^{miles} ~~fourteen~~ and a half east. Four and a half miles east of Bentley, that was the first, and then they would stretch these sections sometimes. Give us more! As a rule more, and then they'd shoot us so ^{many} miles further west. Sometimes they'd take me off the west end and they'd put me east--average. ~~They~~ ^I started out 15 and wound up with 57--57 mile. Ya, when I quit I had a pickup. I had a pickup, see, and I had 57 miles. I went ^{from} ~~to~~ New England to a mile west of Elgin; that was my territory.

LARRY: In those early days, Bill, what would a section crew do? ~~I mean~~ Just patrol your territory and see that the ties were all good and that the snow fences were up? ~~and stuff?~~

BILL: Well, that's part of it. You see, in the '40s, right around '42, they started to gravel and they cleaned out all the poor ties and they fixed this here branch up in ~~pretty~~ good shape. Put in thousands ~~and~~ carload after carload ^{of} black ties. ~~They cleaned 'em from one treated to treated.~~

LARRY: Yes.

~~BILL:~~ Then they got gravel and they put it in pretty good shape. That was in the '40s and the '50s. It run on up ^{into} ~~the~~ the '50s some. ^[In] '43 we had a flood set us back quite a lot and in '50 we had a bigger one. That set us back; we had a lot o' track forced out. But when I left down here, we was about 80 [%] ~~percent~~ black ties and gravel. I had a good railroad, ya. That is for a branch, mind ya! Like rails ^{of} ~~the~~ 65 pound steel.

LARRY: But now ~~I~~ In the early days ~~when you started in 1911~~ what would your

section crew do on a average day?

BILL: Pickin' up track. Pickin' up--it was all rough there. **J**ust layin'.
I guess Milwaukee ~~was~~ ^{the} ~~they~~ laid it right on the ground. They went through some of the hills some instead of fillin' up in their lower places. They just run--it was up one hill and down another ^{like} ~~like~~ that. And it was awful rough when I started there. Well, you can imagine how it would be, you know? They had untreated ties and they didn't last very long. We started tiein' then before '20. We started puttin' in new ties; they had untreated ties. It was a mess! More derailments, had a lot of gumbo track, soft track.

LARRY: ~~The~~ ^{the} grade wasn't too strong? ~~then, huh?~~

BILL: It was--well, they put it in. It was put in here; slopped in here, you might say. Now the NP ~~up here they~~ had a standard grade, see? Right straight but ours ^[went] ~~like this~~ up one hill and down another. And ^{where} ~~where~~ they want into a cut, as a rule, they run into the gumbo. And that gumbo ^[is] ~~that's~~ wet and when it gets dry you can't hardly do anything with it, either!

Bad stuff! And that's what you had to do ^{pick} ~~pick~~ up track mostly. I didn't put in any ties when the ties started to go. They started to go around in ^{thereabouts.} ~~1918, or somewhere~~

LARRY: Bill, I don't know that much about railroad talk. ~~When~~ ^{When} you say, ~~pick~~ "pick up ties," what do you mean?

BILL: Pick up track? ~~Pick up track.~~ Well, you raise the track up and poke dirt under it.

LARRY: Oh, I see.

BILL: See if there's a hole, well, you raise it up and you poke--you level it off. See that's sand; you try to keep it level to keep the trains up! You have a level board you put across!

LARRY: There were a lot of derailments in those early years, Bill?

BILL: Oh, jeez, a lot of 'em!

LARRY: What caused them?

BILL: Rough track.

~~LARRY: Oh?~~

[~~make~~ a rocking motion] you'd

~~BILL:~~ Them cars were goin' like this, you know. You get in them engines or in the caboose and just look up the train^{and} you'd see them cars goin' this way, one goin' that way, one ~~goin'~~ this way, you know? Sometimes they go over and when they come back they don't go back on the rail!

~~LARRY:~~ ~~Suppose~~ Oh, I see!

~~BILL:~~ They're off!

~~LARRY:~~ Dippety doin', huh?

~~BILL:~~ Oh, ya! Oh, we had a lot of 'em! We had a lot of derailments. I was out lots of times! I never had much trouble! My track--I worked! I don't know whether I done anymore work, but I worked different! I had a way of doin' and I watched her close. As a rule, them days they didn't pay much and it was hard to get men to take interest in their work and they'd overlook. Well, they didn't care, see, and that's why they had so many of these here spills! Course ~~they~~ ^[the section crews] wasn't all to blame 'cause the company never furnished us anything! We never got no gravel until up there in the '40s^{va} a few cinders! It was the company's fault. They was to blame for it 'cause they didn't furnish nothin'! They didn't help us, you know, to keep it up.

LARRY: How many men were there on your section crew?

BILL: Well, I started out there with a handcart, ~~and~~ And I used to have, oh, about eight in the summer; cut us down in the winter to one^{va}, one or two. I used to have seven, six, eight. ^[the railroad company] They used to ship 'em up every spring. They'd have on the passenger ^[trains] they'd have a coach start on down the draw and each section would get so many men. They'd have a coach full of men!

~~LARRY:~~ I see.

~~BILL:~~ And they'd come up through--now like Mott! They'd come up here and they'd unload some of them men and their baggage and all that stuff. Throw it off on the sidewalk! There was Bulgarians, Greeks, Italians~~!~~

~~LARRY:~~ Oh?

~~BILL:~~ Ya, All kinds of foreigners! All foreigners and then they'd furnish

them a bunkhouse and a stove, coal to cook with and that. And so the average--they'd come out and stay all summer! I used to get some darn good men.

~~LARRY: Oh?~~

BILL: ~~Oh, ya!~~ They'd come out here and stay all summer--work! And some of 'em would get sick and die or they'd go back--quit! They'd sign a contract to come out here the 1st of April as a rule and they were supposed to work until the 1st of October. Then they'd pass 'em back free to Chicago and all over, see?

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

~~BILL: Ya.~~

LARRY: When you'd get bumped ~~off~~ ^{from} being section leader or section ~~chief~~ ^{chief....}

BILL: Section foreman.

LARRY: Section foreman! I'm sorry!

BILL: You wanna get that "foreman!"

LARRY: Right! ~~Ya!~~ When you'd get bumped ~~off~~ ^{from} being ^a section foreman, then you'd be section crew member, right?

BILL: Section laborer!

~~LARRY: I mean when you'd get bumped, you wouldn't get layed off? You'd just get moved.~~

~~BILL: No, I'd go back as a laborer, see, ~~tw~~ Ya, \$.15 an hour!~~

LARRY: Is that what you started at?

BILL: Six days a week, ten hours a day, \$1.50 a day!

LARRY: So you'd be making about ~~tw~~ \$36 a month, ~~tw~~

BILL: About that, ya.

LARRY: Was it hard work?

BILL: Oh, boy! I worked hard! A lot of 'em didn't ~~cause a lot of 'em didn't~~--they worked accordin' to pay. See they--I'll tell ya a little thing happened one time. I had some Bulgarians and this one fella's name was Pete and he was cuttin' off his shovel. Now this happened--I've heard this told so many times since! I said, "What the hell you doin', Pete?" He

says, "Railroad cut me, cut pay! I cut shovel!" See, they cut his salary!

P Maybe, you see, they'd start to pay them laborers sometimes--oh, they'd give 'em maybe \$.17, \$.18 in the summer, see? Section foreman got \$55 a month, no, \$57.50 a month! That's what the fella got that run the section. The section laborers would get \$.15 in the winter and in the summer they'd pay 'em ^{\$.17}, sometimes \$.18. They'd raise 'em a little and sometimes they'd cut 'em off to \$.15. ~~Ah, they was some.~~ So this Bulgarian was cuttin'

off this shovel and I asked him what he was doin' and he says, "Railroad

cut me!" They'd cut him see? **W** Well, anyway, ~~it~~ it was no good! It was

nothin'! Course, them times was hard, man! I tell ya you could buy things

so much cheaper. ~~it~~ A ^{dollar} ~~on~~ in them days was quite a lot, you know, and

work was hard to get! You couldn't get no work anyplace! Out on a farm

~~out here ya!~~ ^{You'd} You go out there and work for your board; that's about all

that you'd get out of it! So them Bulgarians, they'd ship 'em up here and

they'd give 'em a car and a stove and bunks and they would cook their own

meals, see. And some of 'em lived pretty good and some of 'em didn't:

They'd come out on a section, you know, and they'd have a hunk of flat

pork and a piece o' bread, a onion, a piece o' garlic or somethin' like

that put in there. ~~that's right~~ ^[were] That's right! They tickled to death to get

it, too! Hungry, boy, I'm tellin' ya! So that's the way it was. Pretty

rough! Boy, I'm tellin' you when I ~~started~~ started in, it was rough! And

we had a bunch of roadmasters, ^{Irish,} ~~from the old Irishman rougher~~ ^{rougher}

than rough. Oh gee, they was tough! I tell ya they was a tough bunch to

work for, too. And they wasn't only in track; they was in train service!

They was in everything! Everything that you wanted to get into; but, of

course, the track ^{was} ~~that's~~ where you lost wages! It didn't pay anything!

^{Where} ~~now~~ now, if you was a conductor, maybe you'd get, well, \$150 a month. ²⁰⁰

would be big wages! ^{And} our roadmaster ~~got~~ got \$75 a month. ~~was~~ got \$57.50

and he got 75. Well, they paid his expenses, though, ~~when~~ when he was gone.

LARRY: How much responsibility did a roadmaster have?

BILL: Well, he had so much track, see? Now like ours ^{the} he had 134 mile and

he was responsible for that track. He used to run up and down or watch his track, watch the bad spots and all that stuff, see?

LARRY: Would he raise hell, Bill, if you had missed a spot?

BILL: He used to watch pretty close, ya! Ya, he used to get rough! Well, we had different roadmasters, too, you know. We had several of 'em. Well, they didn't wanna see ~~me~~ ^[the trains] go in the ditch, see? If they got off too often, it didn't look good, ~~and~~ And, of course, they tried to keep 'em on ~~the~~ ~~road~~ and they'd ride over on the train, back and forth. They'd maybe hit a pretty rough spot and they'd wire ya, send ya a message or write ya or maybe they'd come out on a motorcar. After awhile they got a motorcar, see?

~~LARRY: Yes.~~

~~BILL:~~ And they used to run up and down. And us fellas we had to buy our own motorcar ~~and~~ ^[and] our own engine!

LARRY: Is that right?

BILL: That's right! I paid \$130 and some for a ^{Fairmount} ~~Fairmont~~ ~~engine~~ engine and, of course, they furnished the pushcar. And I had to pay the freight from Fairmont, Minnesota! ~~But they paid that afterwards, they give me that freight afterwards. But that motor I paid \$130 and some over \$130.~~ I had to buy it myself and all of 'em did it that had motorcars! That's what they done.

LARRY: What year was ~~that~~ ^{it} that you got a motorcar for your crew?

BILL: Well, that must ~~ve~~ ^{I've} been ~~around~~ ^{about} '15, '16, ~~some~~ ~~where~~ in there somewhere.

LARRY: Oh? You used a handcar 'til then?

BILL: Started in on a handcar, ya. We used to go along the track 15 miles, that is, 14½ miles east, with a handcar. Pump a handcar up ~~the~~ ^{them} hills and down like that. And if we had a wind sometimes--but the wind here, as a rule, comes from the northwest. But comin' in at night, ^{by)} we'd come in abuckin' that wind, see? And sometimes we could just make it up ^{them} hills and, shoot, it was hard work! As a rule, if the wind's ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ your back, it ain't too bad, see?

~~LARRY: Yes.~~

~~BILL:~~ That's what we done; we had t' do it! 'We had to get on the track, stop now and then, and pick up a hole and so forth.

LARRY: Was that the kind of handcar that went....

~~BILL:~~ That's right!

~~LARRY:~~ Ya.

BILL: That's right. ~~Handcar that's right.~~ If they'd^[the crew men] all work and if they'd all pump, it'd make it easier; but some of ^{'em} ~~men~~, you know, would pretend they was pumpin' and they wasn't! ↑

~~LARRY:~~ Ya, ya.

~~BILL:~~ Oh, we used to have some great times! That damn handcar! Ya, then after awhile they got a.... They come up with the inspection car one day and the superintendent was on. They used to come up with their own car with some backup handlers, you see. So the roadmaster got off ^[and] he says, "Bill, ~~is that~~ "is that your engine?" I says, "Ya!" He says, "We're gonna send you a motorcar, a ~~Waukesha~~ ^{Waukesha}, a big one." I was doin' a lot o' runnin' back and forth ^{on} these other sections. Well, anyway, they did! And then they took it away from me afterwards. Some other guy wanted it. Some bridge foreman, I guess, ~~it was that~~ wanted it, had to have it 'cause ^{he} had more men, you know? And ~~they did~~ ^{they did} furnish me a smaller one! Well, they furnished us all motorcars then, smaller motorcars, and from then on they furnished gasoline and cars.

~~LARRY:~~ But you had to buy the engine?

~~BILL:~~ 130, over \$130 I paid and never got a nickel! A lot of 'em owned; a lot of the foremans bought 'em! A lot of 'em did ya.

LARRY: Did it ever reach the point, Bill, where the railroad bought the engines for the sections? ~~I mean in the future~~ Did they finally reach the point where they would buy the engines if yours wore out? ~~or ins...~~

BILL: No, no, they wouldn't! ↑

~~LARRY:~~ Is that right?

~~BILL:~~ No, no, ^{you} had to keep orderin' parts! I used to order parts from the ^{Fairmount} ~~Fairmount~~ people and the company paid it. That's all the parts

that I kept.... A lot of stuff I ordered for mine 'cause I was runnin' it a lot and the railroad paid it. I put that on my report; I'd make out a monthly report, send it in and they'd ship it and they'd pay it! Outside of buying the engine, why, they paid for all the parts, see? Oh, hell, that amounted to a lot o' money, you know?

LARRY: Bill, how did a section laborer's salary compare to somebody working in a store or working out on a farm or working in a lumberyard?

BILL: Well, a section laborer was at least ~~■~~ about as small a pay as anybody could get!

~~LARRY: Is that right?~~

~~BILL: Ya, that's right.~~ As a rule you could always get a job on a section, see, cause they was always short! ^[It was] Hard to get men, they had to ship in them foreigners and a lot of time them foreigners wouldn't come back and they'd be short o' men! And you could always go and hire out to any of these sections 'cause they was short of men and ^{'cause} the wages were s-small! See ^{^^}that's the reason, see? \$.15 an hour, ^{^^}well, you know that ain't much.

~~LARRY: No.~~

~~BILL: Oh, God!~~

LARRY: What were the chances of working of your way up? ~~I mean if some-~~
~~body in town here wasn't able to get a job and they came to you and you put~~
~~them on your section crew, how long would they have to work on a section~~
crew as a laborer before ^{How} ~~they~~ ^{a man} would have a chance of becoming a foreman?
^{he}

BILL: Oh, not very long!

~~LARRY: Oh?~~

~~BILL: That is, I started out I don't know how many of 'em! I started out,~~
altogether, eight different men! ~~Well, there's one over here now that~~
~~worked under me! He has my job.~~

~~LARRY: Oh?~~

~~BILL: And most of the foremen, see, they wouldn't do it! They wouldn't do~~
it; they didn't care nothin' about ^{[their men],} ^[the men] see. If they wanted t' work,
alright. ~~and~~ If they didn't, get off, see! And it didn't pay enough and most

[the men]

of ~~em~~ didn't want to take it up anyway! See they didn't care much about it, ~~my~~ but I always tried to talk 'em in.... Oh, I worked ~~lots~~ ^{lots} of men, of course, but ~~in~~ ^{some of 'em} later years when they paid more I got 'em to stay. I kept 'em 'til I got 'em a section, see? I done that. I got eight of 'em, I think, altogether. Course, it started to pay better, see? There's more money in it ^[now] and they stuck with it, but before that there was nothin' in it so they didn't care about it. ~~They didn't care about stayin'; there was nothin' to it! Ya, they was a bunch o' a....~~ You know, as I say, if I'd o' went into anything different, I'd of made more money. ~~Still there's a lot o' that you're away from home all the time too, see?~~

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

~~BILL: You know this train service you're gone! You know you're gone most of the time runnin'.... Is that your record? Is that too far?~~

~~LARRY: No, I don't think so!~~

~~BILL: Well, I ain't sayin' much anyway so it don't make much difference!~~

~~LARRY: No, you're doin' fine, BILL! This is the best interview I've had on railroads.~~

~~BILL: I'm doin' all the talkin'!~~

~~LARRY: Well, I don't have much to say, you know, so....~~

~~BILL: That's the kind that Nixon had, huh?~~

LARRY: ~~I don't know! Hey, Bill,~~ ^W what kind of ties did the railroad use? Were those North Dakota-cut or were they from out of state?

BILL: Well, no, they were shipped from different places! There ^{was} ~~was~~ box ^{alders,} ~~alders~~ mostly, and cedar.

~~LARRY: Oh?~~

[people said the ties would last]

~~BILL:~~ They was just untreated! Well, some ~~said~~ ^{was} five years, but not over seven years. That's about as long as they would last. ^{Boxalders} ~~Boxalders~~ ~~they~~ was ^{hewed} ~~hewed~~ ties and cedars were sawed out square.

LARRY: ~~Oh?~~ Which ^{was} ~~more~~ better? ~~box alders~~ or cedars?

[The railroad bought]

BILL: Neither one was any good! ^V The cheapest thing that they could buy.

~~Well,~~ they had some fir, untreated! ~~See they had fir untreated.~~ And

then they got a treatment for ties, them square ones, and they ^{were} good for quite awhile. That's the kind they should of had ⁱⁿ ~~down~~ the start! They last for quite awhile, but they're a soft wood tie, too, you know. Where they had curves they had oak! They had some white oak, too, untreated white oak, and they was put down when the road was put down. They was laid and they all had a ^{lead} ~~lead~~ little ^{round} ~~round~~ button on 'em. ~~It~~ It said right on that button, "1910." They had quite a few of them there white oak scattered here and there.

LARRY: ~~Was~~ Was that lumber green?

BILL: Well, it was, ya, green is right.

LARRY: Box ~~elder~~ ^{elder} is a hardwood, isn't it? ~~Fairly hard?~~

~~BILL: Not very.~~

~~LARRY: It isn't, huh?~~

BILL: No, they don't last very long. ~~Some~~ ^{then} Some of 'em would have a big end, see, and ^{hewed} they'd taper off. They was a ~~solid~~ tie; they wasn't ^{solid.} ~~solid!~~ Box ^{elder}, no, that's a soft tie! Fir is a soft tie; cedar's a soft tie.

~~LARRY: Would the~~ ~~farmers~~ farmers fight over your....

BILL: Oh, ya, we had a lot o' scraps over them ties!

~~LARRY: I'll bet!~~

~~BILL: Some of them there fellas....~~ ~~Some of them fellas well, I never~~ ~~did!~~ I'll tell you, I always give 'em to the farmers for plow ^{ing} fireguards. We had a lot o' trouble with fireguards, see? Fires! And I used to get them farmers lined up and get them to haul them ties! They all wanted them ties ^{in them days} 'cause ^{there} ~~they're~~ wasn't no wood, see? And I used to get 'em lined up and tell 'em to haul them ties if they would plow fireguards under 'em. Well, I used to get a lot of fireguards plowed. That done a lot o' good for the company, see?

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

HP ~~BILL: And I used to fight for them fireguards! I know I was up~~ ^{this side of} ~~Regent~~ ^[the railroad] one time; they'd ^{and} shot me west of Regent. Cut off part of me here on the east end ^{was a} shot me west of Regent. There ~~was~~ ^{was a} banker up here at Regent. His

name was Bauers and he had some land this side o' Bentley or this side o' Regent. And I caught him out there one day. I ~~didn't~~ ^{didn't} know who he was, see, and I caught him out there loadin' up ties and I had already told that farmer along the line there that he could have 'em. So I caught him with a big load and I made him unload it! I didn't know that he was a banker ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ Regent, no! And he hollered! Oh, he was madder ~~than~~ than a wet hen, you know? So finally he unloaded 'em! He had no business haulin' them farmer's ties. ~~He~~ ~~know~~. And I used to fight over ~~them~~ ^{em}! Sure they had some scraps over 'em. They was ~~not~~ good only for wood. If they're was a farmer that he done a pretty good job of plowin' a fireguard, I'd maybe put him out three or four ^{pretty} good ones for corner posts, see? I used to work with ~~them~~ ^{them} and we got along fine, you know, I and the farmers. Ya, and thousands of them ties! Boy, oh, boy, we sure cleaned out a lot of 'em!

LARRY: How many would you change in a year?

BILL: ~~Oh, maybe~~ Well, it varied, of course. Some years--well, it didn't start out too bad, ~~in the start, see~~, maybe 4,000, maybe 3,500, 4,000, somethin' like that. Then the longer them there ties laid, ~~well, of course~~, the worse they got! You'd have to keep puttin' more and more and more. Well, there's about 18 ties in a rail. A rail is 33 feet and there's about from 18 to 20 ties in a rail, see?

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

BILL: So ~~we~~ ^{they} used to--especially when they started to furnish them treated ties--want us to put two of them together. If you had three, four ties, you see, you put one on each side of your one poor tie. You know, scatter 'em out!

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

BILL: If they'd catch ya puttin' in four or five together, they'd fire ya! ~~Oh~~ Oh, they was stricter than the devil! ~~you know~~.

LARRY: Why? Were ~~they~~ ^{the ties} more expensive?

BILL: Well, they didn't have enough!

~~LARRY: Oh, I see.~~

~~BILL:~~ See, they had to string 'em out. ~~see~~

~~LARRY:~~ Ya.

~~BILL:~~ They cost more, see, than those black ones, you know.

~~LARRY:~~ Yes.

~~BILL:~~ Oh, I used to do--oh, some places ~~was~~ right close to the stockyard where ~~there~~ ^[the ties] was pretty well buried ⁱⁿ sand, I used to put in a whole pile. I used to put 'em in and cover 'em up with sand and they never saw 'em! ~~see~~

~~BILL:~~ ~~used to put under~~ I put under thousands of grain doors in my day on the railroad! Rough track! I'd have a hole I couldn't hold; I'd put some grain doors under it. Ya, that's the way I kept 'em on! I'd steal these doors from the agent! The depot agent had to keep track of 'em and I'd take them doors, see? Sneak in there with a pushcar and I'd get a whole load of doors and ^{I'd go out there and I'd} fix up some of them holes, see? Thousands of 'em! Ah, hell! Finally there was an old roadmaster come over here off the main line. He was rough! ~~Old Pete Vern and IAA~~ I'd heard about him, you know, ~~and the doors~~. He says to me, "Bill," he says, "do you put under grain doors?" I says, "N-no, I never put 'em under." He says, "If I catch you doin' it, I'll fire ya." ~~He says~~ "You're done!" I says, "Don't worry now! I ain't gonna." I put 'em in right along; he didn't know it!

~~BILL:~~ LARRY: When did the union get strong? ~~then?~~

BILL: Well, it started ~~in there~~ in the '20s. I think that was in the '20s when it started in gettin' strong. More ^[railroad workers wave] ~~of~~ payin' in; more of 'em to keep it goin, you see. And then finally when they got a foothold, then they started to dictate back to the company, ~~was~~ and their wages started to come up also. I'll tell you, when I left here in '61, I was gettin' about \$440 a month, mind ya, and now they're gettin' about \$840!

LARRY: Is that ~~right?~~

BILL: Ya, they're ~~gettin'~~ ^[I was a] gettin' about \$840 or \$900. ~~section~~ foreman ~~and~~ I was gettin' right around \$440 and I was payin' 6½ percent on my ~~retirement~~ retirement--6½! So now you can figure... ~~see~~ You see that cut into it and

then I had to pay income tax. Essentially though, ~~them~~ them fellas made just as much as I did 'cause I had to pay more income tax and I had to pay retirement and the hospital fees. I was only makin' about ~~135~~¹³⁵ every two weeks, clear. Hell, there was nothin' in it; I wasn't makin' no money! If they hadn't of furnished a section house and coal, why, it'd o' been pretty rough! And that helped a lot--a section house, you know. When we got married, ~~I don't know why~~ ^[my wife] she went right to work. The company helped her fix up the inside and she kept it up. She worked and kept everything right up, you know, and we got by alright, see?

~~1/10/44~~

LARRY: Did the Milwaukee do more business than the NP?

BILL: Oh, ya! Oh, ya! Ya, the Milwaukee had the business. They didn't have as good a railroad. The NP always had a better railroad 'cause they had ~~more~~ it better right from the start! They kept it up; they had more men and everything! But the Milwaukee had the business; no question about that, ya! Where you take east here now far as Elgin. From Elgin east it ain't much! Selfridge is ~~the~~ the last station on the branch so that's pretty good, but Shields, Freda, Brisbain and Raleigh and Leith there ain't much train. Rough, you see, rough country ya. The Milwaukee made a lot o' money on this here north line. Must have and they must be making it yet 'cause they only got two section crews! One at Mott and one at Selfridge, one man to each section, one foreman and one man!

LARRY: Ha, ha!

BILL: That's right!

LARRY: Ya.

BILL: That guy at Selfridge has got 74 miles, 77 miles of track, he got one man. This fella at Mott has got 57 and he's got one man! Just think of it! And we used to have nine section ~~crews~~ crews and we used to have nine or ten depot agents! Now they got one here at Mott and I think one here at New England! ~~See what~~ See what.... Course they didn't pay the wages them days, but accordin' to what the men was workin', why, they ~~were makin'~~ were makin'.

LARRY: What's brought the railroad down, Bill?

BILL: Unions. The unions raise cane! The unions is alright. You gotta have 'em, but they're too powerful! They're too strong! I'll tell you why. When I was workin' down there, ~~was~~ they kept ^{a-} cuttin' us off out of our men! See, they raised our wages maybe \$.15 an hour or \$.10 an hour or a little bit, see? Not too much! Unions was ~~was~~ always after more money, more money, and everytime they'd get more money--cut their heads off! There'd be so many men knocked off, see? There should of been a limit to all these here wages right from the start, ~~was~~ I'll tell ya, a man should draw a decent wage! That's what he should, but it goes too far and that's why the railroad started to go down. As I said, the unions was alright, but like everything else they go too far! I don't give a damn! People would ~~criticize~~ ^{criticize} me for talkin' that way, but I used to have say three men down here and I'd get a raise or we'd all get a raise ^[and the company would] cut two men right now!

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

R ~~BILL:~~ Then we'd get a raise again--cut ^{to} ~~one~~ one man! Cut here, cut there, cut here, cut there! ^{Put your men all out o' work. That's what they done!} You couldn't blame the railroad so much! You ~~can~~ ^{can} blame the union and the railroad. The railroad should have paid more money when they started us out. When they started us out, see, they didn't do that! See they made us ^{[organize]!} If they'd of all paid from the start the way they should have, there wouldn't of been no unions! ~~You know that?~~ →

~~LARRY: Ya, ya.~~

~~BILL:~~ See, that's the big trouble. They had to organize 'cause they couldn't live.... I can never figure out ^{why} ~~why~~ they would cut down! They would raise wages and cut off men! It didn't make sense, did it?

~~LARRY: No!~~ →

~~BILL: Why, no, it don't! It don't make sense! They need the men, see?~~

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

R ~~BILL:~~ I'll tell ya you take ^A all of the darn railroads are run down ~~down~~ somethin' awful!

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

~~BILL:~~ Everybody knows that! Track--there's nobody workin'! Well, you know that's wrong!

~~LARRY: Sure is!~~

~~BILL:~~ It don't make sense! And ~~now~~ now the trucks is, see, haulin' the wheat! Well, they can't haul that wheat like the railroads could, ~~can't~~ ~~can't~~?

~~AA LARRY: No!~~

BILL: ^{We} ~~The~~ need these trains; ^{We} ~~they~~ should have 'em! Why, ^{man,} see the grain they can haul out of them there.... And we used to have a good packin' business here, a lot o' cream, ~~hauling~~ hauled out a lot o' cream and express and cattle! Man, why, we shipped cattle and that! ^[Now] ~~Everything~~ is trucked; everything is trucked! Trucks started in! Trucks started in and then the railroad started to.... ~~Course the unions were hollerin' for more wages and more wages! They had to pay it I guess. It looked like it! And then they'd lay off men and so forth. Ya, that's the way it was! Cause I know! I worked there; I know just how it works out! It didn't work out with a.... It was no good. No good!~~ They oughta have men on these here roads right now! See the wrecks ^{they're} ~~there~~ havin'!

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

~~BILL:~~ You see ~~them~~ around ~~And~~, boy, that costs a lot o' money! See the stuff they spoil, lumber and machinery and wheat! It's a crime!

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

~~BILL:~~ It's just too bad. Them wrecks I'll tell you! You used to hear.... Course not like on the main line! You know, here they maybe have off six cars, five or six cars; but on the main line they'd have off maybe 30, 35 cars sometimes, see?

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

~~BILL:~~ I often wonder why the government don't ~~take~~ take a hold 'cause it's ~~nothin'~~ nothin' that causes these derailments.... Most of 'em is rough track!

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

BILL: Rough track. They'll tell ya different! See they'll put it on to somethin' else. That's the main--sometimes there's a worn-out journal or somethin' like that, ~~see~~ but as a rule the track is rough. The track is rough.

LARRY: Bill, was there a shortage of boxcars in the early days like there is now?

BILL: No, 'Course they didn't have the stuff to ship, the grain! They used to ship a lot o' grain, but they had smaller cars! They had 80's'; that was about the biggest! 60's and 80's but we never had such trouble with shortage until they got in ~~this~~ this here machine business. This here raisin' wheat, more wheat, ~~see, you know,~~ and bigger crops, see, and that's the time that the shortage started.

LARRY: So, in your opinion it wasn't any different policies on the part of the railroad. It was the fact that the farmers were producing more grain that caused the boxcar shortage.

BILL: Right, right! That had a lot to do with it! They didn't raise so much grain as they do now, you see? →

~~LARRY: Ya, ~~see~~~~

~~BILL:~~ Now you take in the '20's and along in the '30's there wasn't near the grain shipped as there had been in the '40's, '50's, and '60's, you know--
bigger crop-- they farmed different and it was all machinery. In the '20's and '30's, that was horses, see.

LARRY: Were you proud to work on a railroad, Bill? I mean did you feel like you were working for an employer that was important and, you know, respected and so forth?

BILL: Sure! I did; that's right! ~~Ya, sure did.~~ Well, I always figured I should work and earn my money! That's what I figured. I wasn't gettin' much, but I figured that I should work and earn it. Well, it's the same nowadays. You get a lot o' men that's on now ~~now~~ ^{--They} don't care whether they do a day's work or not! →

~~LARRY: Ya.~~

~~BILL:~~ It's always been that way it seems. And it's too bad, especially

~~Now!~~ They're gettin' such big wages!

LARRY: Ya.

~~BILL:~~ Them days, ~~they had a little~~ You couldn't hardly blame a man for not wantin' to do anymore than he had to!

LARRY: Ya.

~~BILL:~~ 'Cause he wasn't gettin' paid, see? It's a lot different now than it was. ~~now, you know!~~

LARRY: Was there more pride among railroad employees back then than there is now? ~~do you think?~~

BILL: Well, ah, I don't believe it makes much difference.

LARRY: Oh?

BILL: You mean....

LARRY: ~~In doing a good job.~~

~~BILL:~~ Well, as a rule, it's rough, **Rough!** I've worked with all kinds of these here railroad men, trained men, and all kinds, ~~and wrecks,~~ bridge crews and ~~oh~~ what not. **And** there's more, ~~see~~ "I don't give a damn!"

LARRY: I see.

~~BILL:~~ And that's what's goin' on right now. Right now! It's, "I'll do what I have to do, but that's all," see?

LARRY: So the railroad has always had a lot of rowdies or reckless people working for them?

BILL: Much so or they used to have, ya! Come and go! Where you got men that's workin' here today and ^[are] gone tommorrow! There's no interest there; they don't care, see? That's been the big trouble ~~all the while~~ all the way through! I never was that way! I figured if I didn't want the job, I'd quit!

LARRY: ~~So these~~ **P** people didn't have a feeling of responsibility about what they did?

BILL: No, no, they didn't care.