Orleans County Historical Association

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Orleans County Historical Association

INTERVIEW

Mr. George W. Stalker

Lakewood Village Mobile Home Park

Medina, New York

Interviewed by:

Helen McAllister

June 27, 1978

SUBJECT: Hojack Railroad Line, New York Central

S Stalker, George (born 1894)

Mc McAllister, H.

Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to collect information about the historical development of Orleans County by means of tape-recorded conversations with people whose experiences reflect the county's growth.

These tapes and transcriptions will be preserved as educational resources and possible publication (all or in part).

I hereby release this tape and transcription to the Orleans County Historical Association.

George W. Stalker
Signed

June 27, 1978
Date

Understood and agreed to: Helen M. McWhirter
INTERVIEWER

June 27, 1978
Date

S I was born in Kinderhook, New York (near Albany), October 1, 1894. My father was Frank John Stalker, my mother was Ella Marie Shaver. I had 3 brothers and 4 sisters. My father was a farm hand. He worked on the farm by the month or year.

Mc George, when you went to school, what was it like?

S It was a one room country schoolhouse with a little entry-way to come in and hang your coats up in the hall, you know, in the front, and things like that. I can remember once of getting into a little fight out there in the hallway!

Mc Did the teacher catch you?

S Yes, and she had to stop us! (laughter).

Mc How did she punish you?

S Well, she didn't really punish us at all, but I happened to get the worst of the battle that's all. But another boy got hurt instead of me, see? The guy was going to throw a block of wood at me and he hit another boy by the name of Alan Birch; hit him just a little ways from the temple here. Boy! It put an awful hole in his head!

Mc And the teacher blamed you for it?

S Well, she blamed just this other boy and me, but then two or three other boys got into it, see? Well this made quite a stirring up. But that's the only rumpus I can think of that I ever had in school.

Mc How far did you go in school?

S Well I went thru the 4th grade and just opened up the book for the fifth grade, and then I became sixteen!

Mc Sixteen? What did you do then?

S My father was moving that spring into another locality and so I never went to school after that.

Mc Did you work in those years? Did you hire out to work in the winter or ~~xx~~ summer, or what?

S Well, I just went to live in with a farmer and would work for my board and go to school, that's all.

Mc I see. But after you became 16 what did you do?

S Well then I stayed home, right with my father and then I went on the farm. Sometimes the same farm he was on, and I would do work and I was plowing with a two-horse team. I remember well, plowing a sidehill field with a side-hill plow and you turn the furrow. When you get to the end of the land, you'd turn your

horses around and turn a lever and go back in the same furrow again thru all the land down the hill. It was quite a job for me just bein' a lad of just sixteen!

Mc You worked with horses?

S Yes, horses. Never drove a tractor in my life.

Mc Did you ever work in a mill?

S Yes, my brother Clarence and I worked a year or so in a woolen mill at Stockville, New York. After we were there a full year, we decided we'd better go on home and work in our mills at Fillmot and pay board to our mother and father rather than to strangers. So we started in and worked six weeks at a dollar a day, enough to buy a little food. The mill went on a strike and they wouldn't let us go in. The boys were outside the mill, and we had to go along with the strike for a period of two or three days. Then we were all called in the office and talked to about why we was on strike. So we were new, bein' onlt six weeks work and we didn't know what to do. They would only take one person in the office at once and the "high" people would talk to us and so they said, "Well if you go k on a strike now with only six weeks work, we won't need ya." They was actually holdin' us out and wouldn't let us go in. So that's the way strikes go as a rule. You're a new man, you don't go in and work because the Union men don't want you to work. So, that's how it is.

Mc They eventually settled the strike, but by that time you had gone somewhere else?

S Well, by that time they said they didn't want us. Therefore, that's how we come to come out here to Lyndonville.

Mc Did your brother come to Lyndonville first?

S My brother Clarence came to Lyndonville first.

Mc How did he happen to come to Lyndonville?

S Well, he read an account in the paper, the Royal New York Paper. An ad in the paper:"Help wanted on the fruit-belt of the west". So he got on a train and came out here in March.

Mc Do you remember who he worked for at first?

S George L. Cooper.

Mc Well then, did you follow close behind him?

S Yeah. Well, another brother came first. Jesse came out in April to work for Fred L. Cooper, a brother of George L.Cooper; see?

Then I of course was riding my bicycle about fifteen miles to go to Hillsdale, New York to work on a farm there, all by myself. And I, being a twenty-year-old, I wrote to my brother Clarence and asked him to get me a job out here and then I would come out too. So, Clarence came out the first of July, 1914 to visit a few days; I quit my job and came back with him on the 5th day of July, and worked for George L. Cooper.

Mc Where did you live? Did you live right with the farm family? And your brother too?

S Oh yes. We lived right in the house.

Mc Did you eat with them?

S Oh yes, ate right with them, right at the same table. We both roomed together down to George L. Cooper's.

Mc Who is Will Lake?

S He was another farmer that I went to on the south end of Lyndonville corporation. So I worked for him the balance of ~~194~~ 1914 and then we all went home the 5th of December, thru the month of January. My brother Jesse stayed home, and Clarence and I came back. Clarence worked for Cooper again and I worked for Will Lake a full year. Then, the winter of 1915 and into '16, I went to Pearl D. Platten, on the Platten Road, to work and there's where I met Carrie (his wife).

Mc Mr. Platten was a farmer?

S Yes. Mr. Platten was a farmer and that winter he was selling out, and I had to curry the horses off, and the cows...

Mc You had to "curry" them??

S Curry them off: clean them up for the auction. The auction lasted two days!

Mc Did you have to work sawing down woods, and that sort of thing?

S Yes. I had a whole bunch of woods there to saw, all by a buck-saw. Oh, I don't know how many cords but it looked as tho it might have been thirty cords at least, when we got it over to the other small house where Plattens was going to live.

Mc Well then, you said that you met Carrie (Carrie Mae Santimaw). What was she doing there and how did you meet her?

S She was the "house-girl" in the Platten's home there. She would walk home every night to her folks because they lived in the little tenant house.But I would go and see her at the farm house awhile, maybe, and then we'd walk over to her house... and...

Mc And a romance blossomed!! (laughter)

S Then eventually we thought we wanted to get married.

Mc You were about 22 then? You were married in 1916. (They were married at the parsonage by Rev. Germer).

S Well, I might have been about that. It was 1916, yes. Of course our birthdays come in the fall, both of us, and we were married in the spring.

Mc Once you were married, then what did you do? Did you keep on working for this farmer?

S Pearl Platten had bought the Harry Gould farm, and so I went on the farm as a married man. In the meantime, Platten changed the farmland for city property and I didn't like the city manager coming to live in my house with us, so I decided I'd go on the railroad if I could get a job.

Mc Did you know anybody that worked on the railroad?

S Yes, I knew some of the men that was on there, and therefore I went and talked with John Hare, the section foreman. He said that there was an opening and that I could come to work anytime after the 15th of November. That was for the Maintainence and Way Department.

Mc You didn't have to have any expertise; just be young and strong?

S No, just start in and work along with the rest of the men. That's all there was to it. John Hare was the "boss", the foreman, up until he died in 1918.

Mc How did you get to work?

S I lived in the village. I walked to work.

Mc It wasn't that far?

S Oh no, just a little ways.

Mc Then Carrie, your wife, lived back in the farmhouse where you had worked?

S Oh no. We moved into Lyndonville the 16th of November, 1916. About the 1st of November in 1917, we moved down on Garlin Street in a private house there. We lived there seven and a half years.' Then I had to go to Kendall as a foreman, so then we had to pick up and move down to Kendall. We moved there and lived in a house and the next spring, why that house was sold, so we had to move into another house. The next spring, why that house was sold and I didn't know where I was a-going to move, but then the Lyndonville job came up and so the man from Kendall was driving every day, coming up to Lyndonville to work; and I wanted to get back to Lyndonville. So, the supervisor-track allowed us to change

jobs so I could go back to Lyndonville and the foreman, Bob Spillman his name was, he could live in his own home in Kendall. So that was in the spring of 1927.

Mc Is that when you moved to your home on Church Street in Lyndonville?

S No, see; because I had to come into another house in the spring of 1928. Then that one was sold out from under me, so then I rented the big house on 32 Church Street and we lived there five years,(He bought this house in 1945 and the family lived there 27 years, total), and then we moved. But then the railroad work was pretty bad. (The Depression).

Mc Let's back up here for just a minute. The time that you were moving around, I think that your wife was having some children. How many children did you have?

S We had six boys and a girl.

Mc Now the first child born was... your daughter?

S Yes. Mildred, in April 21, 1917.

Mc 1917... was that the year the government took over the railroad because of World War 1 ?

S Well yes, they took it over. I don't know if that's just the year or not, but they took it over. Therefore I was working for the railroad and as long as the government took the railroad over, why then I didn't have to go into the Service.

Mc Aside from that, what difference did it make that the government took over the railroads?

S Well, the work was all the same. We went right on and done our same kind of work.

Mc They probably wouldn't let them ship certain things; is that right, unless it was important to the war effort?

S Well, I don't know if there was a thing like that, but then we didn't work any different on the railroad just because it was taken over by the government.

Mc Would you tell me, George, what your work really was like? You went there as a young man. What kind of work did you do?

S Well, I started right in like any of the rest. I had to help dig out the old railroad ties and put in new ties and had to get them installed under the rail. Then we had to tamp them up and spike them up, and drive spike into them. So, I started right in just as if I'd been there ten years before, because that was going to be my job from then on.

Mc You got nineteen cents an hour, was that all?

S Yes, I got 19¢ an hour that first year that I worked there.

Mc That was pretty hard work!

S W~ll yes, but we worked ten hours a day back in those days and did n't think nothing of it.

Mc How about meal time, or lunch time, or coffee-break time, or anything like that?

S Well, we didn't take coffee-breaks. Oh maybe somebody would run to their dinner pail and get an apple out of it or some little thing like that. But we had a drink from the water pail... somebody went and got fresh water every little while and so we'd have a drink of water occasionally. We didn't take no breaks. We worked our time 'til noon came, and then we took our hour's nooning and then...

Mc What time did you go to work in the morning; about seven?

S Seven o'clock in the morning.

Mc Then you had an hour for lunch. What did you do for lunch? Did you bring your lunch pail?

S Oh yes. We brought our lunch pails and I well remember one foreman saying that when you packed your dinner pail, why your pie is usually on the top of the food. See? And as soon as he would open his dinner pail, why he would say,"Well, I'll eat my pie first and then I'll be sure I'll have that!"

Mc You took pie in your lunch pail?

S Pie and two or three sandwiches, cookies, orange. Whatever come handy. Whatever there was to put up.

Mc I suppose your wife made the bread?

S In those days, yes. She made her own bread and cookies. Yes, she was a good cook.

Mc Did you wear gloves or did you just get callouses and blisters?

S Well, certain jobs you could wear gloves at. We all had gloves on the job, but some wore canvas gloves. When we was handling the creosote-ties, then we would put on a heavy pair of gloves. You couldn't wear a mitten only in the wintertime when you really wasn't doin' work. For actual labor or work, you had to have the use of your fingers and you would wear a glove or somethin' that would keep your hands warm.

Mc You had special overalls?

S Just one pair we kept on purpose to unload the railroad ties;

the black, dirty ties out of the railroad car, see?You'd have to stack 'emall up in piles (crisscross 'em so they wouldn't fall down), about 8 high and then shovel all around 'em and put some dirt over the top to keep the sparks from the engine from settin' fire to 'em. Then dig a trench all around the ties about two feet wide, then turn the sod over or put new dirt onto it to cover the dirt up. Anything to prevent a fire because back in those days we used to have quite a few fires along the line somewhere, when they was burning soft coal, you know. Sometimes the foreman would get a call from the dispatcher and we'd have to go down, maybe, on another section and help put out a fire.

Mc A fire on the train or on the tracks?

S On the tracks, along side of the track, see? The grass that was growin' there. (grass-fire).

Mc And that was part of your job too?

S Oh sure. Anything to keep the track lookin' good back in those days. But..

Mc You worked about six miles of track; was that about it?

S That's about all I had, right here in Lyndonville, when I first was on the section. But after that, about 1918-1919 along in there,! they took off every-other six miles.

Mc What do you mean,"They took off every-other six miles"?

S Section. Laid the "gang" (work force) right off. Closed that section right up!

Mc Made you work twice as hard really?

S Well, we had more territory to take care of.

Mc Why did they do that?

S Well, that's what we all want to know! But I suppose because they started giving us motor-cars to run with and not using our hand-cars, we could travel further with the motor-car. Of course, we would have to go to a certain point and do that piece of work that we were going to work at, between certain mile posts, we would work at for this day's work.

Mc Well now, supposing a track down the road aways needed some new ties. Would you carry those ties on your hand-car or motor-car?

S Yeah, on a flat-car behind the motor-car. Pull that along to where we got to where we wanted to work.

Mc Were there any side-rails, so that if a train was going to come along, you could get out of the way?

S We would have to have a written order before we left the Lyndon-

ville depot. We would get an order from the agent there, from the dispatcher in Rochester, that we could hold the track until 10:30 or some hour like that. We would have to be where we could clear up.

Mc By "clear up", you mean to get out of the way?

S Yeah, get off the track at the siding somewhere with our cars, or a highway crossing. Back in those days, we had sort of a fishing pole-type telephone extension that we could reach up and clamp onto two wires and then talk on our telephone just like you would right here in the house. We would talk to the dispatcher and find out from there where the train is and how long we could use the track before we would have to be in the clear. Then we would go back to the 'phone again and tell 'em,"Okay, we're all set for a train to go by".

Mc Did you ever have any close calls?

S Well, I had one. Just out of Carlton yard was a bad call. But then, nobody got hurt and we got the track back in shape. So we could be thankful for that!

Mc What happened that you were worried?

S Why, just not being too much experienced I'll say. I'll take the blame on myself because I was the foreman. We took out probably ten ties, to put in ten new ones. We shouldn't have took out only four and put in two or three new ones first. So we got what we call a "letter S" in our track and so we had a job then of getting the track back in shape again. There was a freight train at Carlton depot waiting to come past us. I had one man out as a flagman, to keep the train away from us 'til the other six or seven men of us got the track back in shape again, a straight line, so they could run over it. We had to work quickly then to get that back in shape. You learn your lesson! There's always a lesson to be learned.

Mc George, how many men worked with you as a group?

S Six most of the time. Only sometimes, in the wintertime, we would put on extra men to help us clean the switches. We'd have to have those switches so that when the train come along, they could use 'em, throw them to go from track to the other side with.

Mc What's a switch?

S Well, a switch is where you go from the main track to a siding. A switch-stand there, and you'd unlock it and get ahold of the lever, and that throws the point over to the side-track one, the point against the main track so that you can turn onto a side

track. After they go over the switch, then they can close the switch behind 'em and leave the main track straight again.

Mc What other kind of work did you do in the winter time? Was there a lot of work in the winter time?

S Yes, back in those days when we only had the 6 or 18 miles, we used to have to build all of our fences when they was not very much snow. That time we would build our fences because the railroad was fenced in because of the farmers.

Mc You mean the railroad had to build the fencing, not the farmers?

S Yes. The railroad had to build the fences. I put up many a rod of fence in the winter time. You see, the railroad land was bought from the farmers with the understanding that the fences would be kept up. But now-a-days they're lettin' 'em go to pieces. They're not doin' it.

Mc What kind of fencing did you use? Was it metal or wood?

S Metal fence.

Mc Like barbed wire?

S No! No! We didn't use a bit of barbed wire. American fence it was, and it would probably be about four and a half feet high, I should think. They come in 40 rods rolls and in a good winter, we would put up as much as 600 rods of fence.

Mc What other kind of work did you do in the winter?

S When they wasn't too much snow, we was supposed to, if there was a sapplin' growin', a young tree growin' that shouldn't be there, we'd have to take it down. Back in the early days we mowed our right-a-way twice a year; hand-scythe, one man following behind the other. We would start the day after the 4th of July. That was just hay and flowers then, and weeds and stuff, see? Then we'd start again the day after Labor Day. So, we would mow our six, eight, ten, twelve miles of track... whatever we had. But then, I should judge, when they got up to eighteen miles apart, each person taking care of the 18-20 miles, why then we didn't mow no more. They stopped the mowin'.

Mc How did they handle that then?

S Just let it grow up to weeds and trees. That's why it's so bad today! We had too many miles to take care of and you couldn't di it with only five or six men!

Mc Did you ever work with the water towers? Was that part of your job?

S No. We had nothing to do with the water towers. Only back when

they had the steam engines there, before they went to deisels. Two engines stayed overnight here in the early days in Lyndonville and we used to have to unload some coal and put it into a coal hopper here and then sometimes we would have to throw some on the engine from out of that thing there so that they wouldn't run short of coal, back in the early days.

Mc So then you had to work right in the train to do that?

S Oh no! We worked just throwing our soft coal out into the tender of the engine.

Mc What about the mail? Do you remember that they used to hand out bags of mail on an "arm"?

S Well, the only place I saw, that was when I was down to Kendall, the two years I was down to Kendall. They had the "arm" there and the man would put a bag of mail on this "arm", hang it up there and let it be there.When the passenger train come along. why they would swing a thing out of the door and it would grab that bag right around the neck of the bag and take it out of there. But they'd throw the other one onto the ground, to West Kendall. That's the only place I ever saw that.

Mc Did you have to keep the "arm" in repair?

S No; it stayed there the two years I was there. So I never had no fixin' to it.

END OF SIDE ONE OF TAPED INTERVIEW)

Mc You became a foreman. How did you accomplish that? Did you take a written examination?

S We had to fill out a sort of big questionnaire pertaining to our work and how it was done, and things like that.

Mc You did that in 1925? (Mr. Stalker had worked seven and a half years as part of the railroad crew).

S Well yes, I did that in the early part of 1925 and so I passed and took charge of the Kendall section then.

Mc About how much was your salary at that time?

S Well, it wasn't too much.

Mc At that time, it was considered to be pretty good, wasn't it?

S Well, I do remember that when I went to Kendall as a foreman, why then the foreman is paid by the month, and the month's pay was $117.00, so I worked like that for quite a long time.

Mc Can you remember anything at all about what they used to put on the trains, or what they used to ship? Was it mostly passengers

or was it mostly cargo?

S Why, they had an express on the passenger train there that went thru. They had an express car on it, or half of it; a car, the "smoker" usually is half a car and the other half is for express. Why eggs was shipped, and cream. A lot of cream went from every station along.

Mc Cream?

S Cream, yes. That is, the farmers would bring the cream in, you know. A "cream-can", a little 8 or 10 gallon cream-can would set there.

Mc But they didn't ship the milk?

S Well yes. There was milk here at Murdock's crossing, in the Lyndonville area.

Mc How did they keep it cold?

S Well, the farmer come just ahead of the train time and set it up onto the platform.

Mc In the big milk cans; but they didn't try to keep it cold? Did they have refigerator cars, or ice-cars?

S Well, I don't know what the train had whether they had a refigerator in the car, in that end of the car where they put the milk or not. But back in the old days the farmers drawed the milk to the crossin' there.(To the milk-platform). When I first came around here the milk platform was at the Murdock Road, then they moved it down to the Marshall Road. Then they finally stopped doin' that and I got the job of tearing down the milk platform. I got the wood for tearin' it down.

Mc Really? Now was that the wood that went down to the John A. Davis Bible School, or was that something else? Okay, something else. Well, you got the wood and then you were able to sell it?

S I sold some of it, some of the planks that was good. Well, that was like the cattle-shoot too, where I bought two cattle-shoots.

Mc What's a "cattle-shoot" ? (laughter)

S Well, that's where you put your cattle in. The farmer was unloading the cattle in the yard here at Lyndonville, and also at Millers, and they'd place a cattle car there. Back in those days when the train would come, they'd have the cattle in the car. They'd go to market that way.

Mc Was there a Mr. Woodworth around there?

S Yes Mr. Woodworth was there. He used to get cattle in the cars, the young steers, and take 'em home and grow 'em to a good heavy weight, in the spring. Then maybe bring 'em back there and maybe ship 'em away again.

Mc Did they ever do that with sheep or pigs?

S I never seen any of them handled around here.

Mc What about barrels of apples. Were they shipped on the train?

S Apples was usually put in a car by themselves, a refigerator car. The same way with peaches mostly. But still, there was a lot of peaches that was brought ~~here~~ there. Red Top. When I first come here in 1914, the first three or four years, they used to be a lot of peaches bein' shipped out of Lyndonville in... I don't know how many... quart baskets; but probably a 14 quart basket or 16 quart basket. Called 'em RED CAPS.

Mc Do you know where they were shipped to?

S No, I wouldn't know that part. You see, they put a red piece of netting over the top of it, like this (demonstrates). That's why they called them "Red Tops"; yes.

Mc Did they ship much lumber?

S No. I never saw any lumber shipped.

Mc What about bales of meat?

S Well, the cold storage had to have .. I don't know what all went on around the cold storage. They had meat shipped in there, you know. And stored in there. Carloads!

Mc And that would mean sausage as well?

S I don't know what kind of meat it was. I never had anything to do with that.

Mc What about Medina sandstone? Did you see any of that shipped?

S No I never saw any of that. No, that never came here while I was in Lyndonville.

Mc Do you remember any wrecks on the trains, that you had to help clean up?

S Well I remember one at Wilson at one time that done a little damage there and we had to go up there. That of course, was off my territory but they just told us section-men to all go up there and to help the foreman at that point to put the track back in shape again. See? Because when you have a wreck, why you have 2-3-4-5 rails that are bent out of shape and you can't use 'em again. You have to have new rails comin' to you; and put some new straight rails in place.

Mc What do you think causes so many trains wrecks today, not around here necessarily but all throughout the country?

S Well I'd just have to use my own words on that. I don't know too much about the cars themselves, see, but I know that years ago we used to have "car-knockers" that would follow these trains in the depot; the big depots. They would follow along and see that the journal boxes was okay. If they needed any re-packing, they would pack it right there in front of the depot while the train was standin' there.But whether they do that today or not, I don't know.

Mc George, what is a "car-knocker"?

S Well, his job would be to raise up the journal-box of the car wheels and sometimes they have to put some more "waste", oily waste into it, or add more oil to it, or somethin' like that, to the car wheels.

Mc You said that a "car-knocker" would follow along. Would he come...

S Well, he'd walk along the train that was standin' still. He'd walk from one wheel to the next wheel.

Mc Oh yes! I've seen pictures of that! Yeah!

S Sure!! (laughter)

Mc What about the Unions? They came in about 1918 for the trains, I think. Do you think that they helped or not?

S Well I don't know. I know that our Union here on the Hojack Line was formed in 1918 and they had a special train come here from Oswego up thru, and us foremen and laborers on this west Hojack got on the train and rode up to "Model City".(Near Lewiston and Ramsomville). We had a meeting there and we formed a Union for the HOJACK SYSTEM, from Oswego to Suspension Bridge.

Mc Since you worked for the railroad, were you ever able to get passes for your family so that they could ride on the train and it didn't cost them anything?

S Well, before I was able to carry a "pass" in my own pocket, why I would get a pass just to go down to see my folks. I would ride as far as Hudson on the train; from here thru to Hudson on a certain pass. At the present day I am carrying a pass in my pocket. It's a little out-dated but I have rode from Buffalo to Chicago on the one that I carry in my pocket now; dated for 1963-1964 combined. Mother (his wife, Carrie) and I rode in 1967 from ten o'clock from Buffalo to Chicago depot. We got off at 7 o'clock in the morning.

Mc So they still honor your pass?

S Well they still honor our pass, but I haven't asked to ride on my pass in a long, long time. Therefore if I was going to try to ride on it, I would go and see the superintendent or something, and see whether they would give me a new one that is more up to date. It says on my pass:"anywhere that New York Central track goes" I can ride on it, on account of having 45 years railroad work in!!

Mc What about the HOBOES? Were there quite a few? Where did they ride and where did they come from; what were they like? Were they white or black people? Tell me about that please.

S Well I think that the most that I've ever seen on the HOJACK there while I was working, they were white men. I don't know as I ever really saw a black man riding and goin' up and down the railroad as a hoboe. I'll give them credit for that! I think they were all white men, but some of them were nice, good men. I worked with them on the farm. In fact, I had one down to Kendall when I was there. He was just a "floater". We call 'em a "floater", see? And I needed a help so I put him on (hired him).

Mc Would he be like a migrant laborer that would have come up north to get work?

S Yes, yes. Could be. I employed him there and had him on all one summer there. Then about Christmas time I got him a pass, just a one-trip pass and back.From Kendall to Buffalo and return. The guy had been putting one check a month up on the little window sill, over top of the window. So we discovered the morning that he left on the train, he reached up there and got those and took them to Buffalo with him. But of course, he was a drinkin' man and they wouldn't cash his checks then because some of them was as much as six months old. They figured that if he cashed 'em, that he would be on a "spree" probably for another 4-5 days or longer and then lose all his money! So they just told him the story that they had to send 'em to the headquarters to get 'em okayed. But instead, the checks came right back to the Kendall depot. The agent called me in there one morning and said, " Now we have Henry's checks here and what do you think about it?" There was six checks there amounting to, adding together would have been around $400, and maybe a little more. So we decided that we would, 'til he... he came home on the train and went to his bunk-(room)and stayed there. The rest of us men, of course, all went home but he stayed right in the tool house nights and done his own cookin' and things like that. So, after he got sobered up, why we kinda

talked to him and I went up to the depot to see the agent and him, to get his handful of checks, and we talked it over there. There was a man by the name of Henry Evans that run the hardware there in Kendall and they would go to the Holley Bank quite often. So we suggested that Henry Evans take the checks up there and get a bank book for him. So, of course, he was proud of that when the papers came back for him to sign the book and to know that he had some money in the bank. So he got sobered up and came back and worked with me. Then around Christmas time he quit. Thought he'd had enough railroadin'. He never drove the car... he bought a car with the money and he had other people drive him around! So, he hired a man to drive him and the car all the way to Boston to give this car to a sister out in Boston. And, he paid this man car fare for comin' back! I don't know as I ever saw the man since that time. He went out to Boston to see his sister and that's the end that I know about the car. Hoboes would be drinkin' and stay around the creek and do their cookin'. They'd go and work a day or two, and then they'd have to get some "drink" again.

Mc Most of the men were really what you would call "floaters"?

S Yes, floaters. They just floated.

Mc How did the police take care of this, or didn't they?

S Why no. I don't think the police harmed the men. If they was too rowdy, then maybe they (the police) would come down and talk to them.

Mc Was it the local town's police, or did the railroad have their own?

S No. The local town would. The hoboes would come and get the well-water from the well or a faucet somewhere and do their cookin' down there by the creek, and people just left them alone.

Mc Where did they ride? Inside, under or on top of the railroad cars?

S Why, rode in boxcars, when the doors was left open; or in the gondola cars.

Mc What's a gondola car?

S Why that's a coal-car, or a low-side about four feet high steel car. The others are called hoppers; coal is carried in usually.

Mc You said that the passenger trains would stop overnight when they would go to Lyndonville. Is that right?

S Well, that was back in the early days. In fact, back in the early days, two trains stayed all night in Lyndonville.

Mc George, what do you mean by "early days"?

S Well, that would be the day that I came to Lyndonville in 1914.

That's my "early days". The only time I know about Lyndonville at all is when I came up here to work on the farm.

Mc So then, the train would stop overnight in Lyndonville. Then what would the passengers do?

S That's as far as they wanted to go that day, see, because just like myself coming from Rochester, I wanted to come to Lyndonville, and my brother. We wanted to stay there. Well then, in the morning those trains would start out again and go east to Rochester and west to Niagara Fall, or Suspension Bridge.

Mc The train (New York Central-- HOJACK LINE) didn't go at night?

S No, there's no trains thru Lyndonville (at night). We had four trains that passed thru there during the day.

Mc At night the trains stopped?

S No trains run there at night, unless it was a freight train or something like that.

Mc What about the "boardung houses" in Lyndonville. Were there any?

S Yes, there was regular boarding houses there because these trainmen stayed in different houses there. They was two or three along Main Street that used to... and then other would have men like myself. But they were trainmen and they worked on these trains <u>out</u> of there.

Mc Not for the passengers then?

S No.

Mc Would you rent your room (in the boarding house) by the week or the month, or as you came in?

S Well, these men stayed right in these"rooming houses" probably as long as they was in Lyndonville.

Mc Would they eat there too or would they have to go someplace else to eat?

S Well these trainmen probably boarded (ate) there but some of 'em maybe owned their own houses, far as I know. I don't know. I wasn't interested in the train service. I was interested in my railroad work

Mc What about the immigrants that came in? Do you remember anything about them?

S No, that was before my days. They came before my days. I just heard say about immigrant trains that used to pass thru Lyndonville; come in on boats in New York and come up thru and get on the train, goin' west somewhere out of here.

Mc What about the "Toonerville Trolley" that used to be in the comic strip.

S Well, that was somethin'!! That Toonerville Trolley was a little car that run up thru, motor in the front end and the passenger car fastened; all under one unit.

Mc You mean that there really was such a thing?

S Yes. It was a small little... the whole thing probably wasn't over 60-70 feet long, you know, all in one unit. They didn't carry many passengers. That, of course, come and went from Rochester thru to Suspension Bridge (near Niagara Falls), and then would come back again in the afternoon. That was about our last trains we had.

Mc Torpedoes on the train tracks were used not just for celebrations and kid's pranks but for what reasons?

S If you had your track out of order and you didn't want the train to come too close to you, you would send your flagman down and put two torpedoes just so far away from the danger spot. Then he would come back three or four hundred feet and stand still there and wave his flag. And then the train would stop automatically so he could talk to 'em.

Mc George, if you were working on the railroad and you got sick, did you have any medical assistence, or did you have to pay your own doctor bills?

S Why I paid my own doctor bills as far as I know. I've never had no Medicare that was paid for!

Mc Did you ever get hurt on the railroad; drop anything on your foot or hurt your hands?

S No. I got a rupture shovelin' snow in the wintertime. My policies that I carry with the railroad thru the Traveler's Company, why they took care of that good and paid all my bills on that.

Mc Now I want to ask you about the Yates Academy. In 1914 it was torn down. You had a part in that didn't you?

S Yes. I was working that winter for P.D.Platten over on the Platten Road, and I lived right in the house there with them. He, being a Baptist, he sent me down there to Yates Center to help tear down this building, along with a lot of other volunteer help and we would tear the pieces down carefully. When noontime come, why we went to the Baptist Church down there and had a nice dinner put on by the ladies of the church. Eventually that lumber was all drawed up to the depot here and put into two cars, boxcars I believe it was, and it was sent down to Binghamton, New York for the Bible School there.

Mc Was that the John A. Davis School?

S Yes, I think it was the John A. Davis Bible School.

Mc Now I want to ask you about your membership in the United Methodist Church.

S Well, I came to Lyndonville and landed there on the 5th day of July, 1914 and, according to the records, why I must have joined the church the first Sunday that I was in Lyndonville. I never belonged to any church before, but I used to go as a kid, to the Methodist Church in Fillmot, before I came out here. So I started right up and of course, my brothers was with me. So we all three went to the Methodist Church there (64 years a member).

Mc Okay George. Now the last question: what do you remember about the Depression of 1929, or did it hit you before that time?

S No, that's about the time that it was bad.

Mc Was your work cut back on the railroad?

S Yes. We only worked two days one week, and three days the next. We worked on sort of a two week period. I went up to Fred Cooper's and worked on the farm there. The other days that I didn't have to work on the railroad, I would go there and work on the farm and I would get my dinner and supper. I would get my supper because I would milk the two cows, then I would have a two quart pail of milk to take home. I got other vegetables and things that they had, that I didn't have. They'd give them to me, just to help keep my family a-goin'.

Mc You had your children to take care of?

S Yes. We had probably five at that time see. Two or three were born after that.

Mc How do you think that life today compares with the Depression? Do you think that times are as bad, or do you think that there are quite a few "helps" that we get?

S Well, I don't know. I did accept a sack of flour and a few other things that the welfare was givin' out, because they wanted to give it to me, and so I took it. I needed it. I needed it.

Mc Did you have a garden of your own, and chickens?

S Oh yes. I always had a garden, and yes, I had chickens!

Mc Did you have pigs?

S No. Just once I raised a pig and that was in the village. But that was before they put an ordinance to it, yes. I had a pig runnin' in the yard and also the man next door had a pig or two in his yard. But those things are all outlawed now. They won't let you have them. But as far as the chickens are concerned, I've had chickens practically all my life. Generally I would start in with the baby chicks and raise 'em up to layin'.

Mc How did you do that? With incubators or just the mother hen?

S No, I had a brooder and I would buy the baby chicks; buy fifty or seventy-five, and put 'em in the brooder.

Mc A "brooder" was one of those things, sort of like a large box, that had a little light bulb in to help keep the chicks warm?

S Yes, they had a big light bulb, and the chicks would crawl in under the "hoover" (roof-like) and keep warm by the light under there.

Mc Did most of the chicks survive?

S Oh yes! You'd get the day-old chicks, or I would always like to buy the two-week-old-chicks; you'd pay a few cents more per chicken because after they are 2-3 weeks old you very seldom lose any of them then.

Mc How did they come in; thru the Post Office?

S Well no. I would get 'em from the Wilson Hatchery, up to Wilson,N.Y.

Mc They still come in thru the Post Office, because when I was in there in the springtime I could hear them:"cheep, cheep, cheep".

S Well, they do ship some by the Post Office, but I got mine from Wilson when I was buying my chickens.

Mc Well George, now you are living here at Lakewood Village (in Medina) and it's a different kind of "ball-game", isn't it?

S Yes. Everything is different now.

Mc But this is nice!

S It's nice, yes. I've got a good trailer (Mobile Home), and I'll stay here as long as I like.

(END OF TAPE)

Mr. George Stalker, 84 years of age, has a keen mind and a sensitive soul. He likes people, enjoys good conversation, good food and is a marvelous conversationalist. He works "magic" in any garden and is seldom idle.

The Hojack line of the New York Central railroad was so named because many hoboes rode. They were greeted with "Ho, Jack"... "ho" being short for "hello" and "Jack" being the nick-name for any un=named man. Thus the name "Hojack" for this section of the railroad line. It is still called by this name. (September 1978). The "Hojack" first ran in 1876, according to information in the files of the Orleans County historian.

Typed and edited by: Helen M. McAllister, Medina, N.Y.