

This interview with Mr. Joseph Ott took place at his home in Michigan City, on October 18, 1978. The interviewers are Jerrold Gustafson and Cis Jankowski; Mrs. Ott was also present.

OTT: I started when I was old enough to be able to help out, moving folding chairs. I used to help out with the care of the horses. We had a team of Bays. I also remember the early days, of the Earl Undertaking Company when they used to come down the street with complete funeral carriages and head out to Greenwood Cemetery. They always used Washington Street, in the early days. That was about the period around 1917, 1918 when the funeral homes, including ours, which was A. G. Ott and Sons, went from the horse carriages to motor equipment. The first hearses were all the car variety; with the cars mounted on a motor chassis. I remember that ours was called a Lorraine. It was put together in Lorraine, Ohio. It had a Peters Brothers Motor for the engine. Peters, as I understand it, later on became an engineer with one of the motor companies. I don't remember if it was General Motors. It probably wasn't General Motors in those days because we had an awful lot of automobile agencies. As far as I can remember, in my day, there was forty, forty-five different types of automobiles that came on to the market. I remember our first motor vehicle was a Dodge. It was made by the Dodge Motor Company, which is now part of Chrysler. My father took that particular chassis, or delivered it I should say, down to Knightstown, Indiana. They put a sedan body on the vehicle. It was about a seven passenger, probably could hold eight people, actually. It was a "combination" which became sort of popular. It had a double rear door. If it had to come out, you took it off, and took out the back seat. He used it as an ambulance vehicle, for ambulance work. We did have a horse-drawn ambulance, previous to this. The large firm, which was the A.F. Earl Company had ambulances, and the carriages, the hacks, the hearses, and even livery, as far as a buggy, a ferry, the ferry with the fringe on the top. People used to rent those, ya know! I was kinda taken back to that particular period when we went up to Mackinaw Island, which is all horse-drawn equipment there. The large hotel there, the Grand Hotel, had a regular cab-type piece of equipment that was drawn by horses. Beautiful piece of work; maroon color. It'd make the boats look bad! (chuckles) It had to go to the dock. All of their customs came in by water, across the Straits there. There's no motor vehicles there on that island except for fire department and police. I guess, that's the way they do it. Later on, that was the two pieces of equipment that my father had, was the Dodge hearse and the sedan. That made up the extent of it for a number of years. In those days, we had individual people who had motor cars, who'd hire their cars for use. But most families were without transportation other than using maybe the street car. In our day, ya know, Michigan City had a pretty good street car system. That included the interurban that went to LaPorte. That's why I was kinda kidding you. The street car bends around the park, it came up Franklin, went down Second St. where the station was, (JG: That was a little ahead of my time) then they came back on Washington, back onto Michigan Boulevard, back to Franklin, and headed south on Franklin. Almost everybody used that form of transportation. The automobile business began to improve. They had many dealerships in Michigan City. You'd have to mention the Hupp mobile, the Dodge, the Buick. I think we had the Chandler Agency, Reo Agency, Hudson. They made what was called the Hudson Super Six. It was quite interesting to see all the different makes of automobiles. The Cadillac has been around a long, long time. There was, I believe, a Cadillac agency in Michigan City. I remember my uncle Henry having one of the first Cadillac cars. People like doctors went from horse-drawn buggies to making their house calls in motorized equipment. When we had horses, the farmers had to bring in hay into the city for their barns. The old Earl Co. had a large number of horses in stalls there, at their place of business. We had one

barn with two horses, and we had sheds for the equipment that my father used. In the early days, he was also in the furniture business, which was o' course the follow-up from the fact that my grandfather was a cabinet-maker and a carpenter and made coffins. It was natural to go into the furniture business from that stage of it. The caskets were very plain. That's where the word coffin came from. It was shaped more like your shape of the body; it was wide at the shoulders and narrow at the foot end. Pretty much similar to what you saw when the Pope was being buried. I believe that was a cypress casket, which was pretty plain as far as there was no ornamentation on it, other than the crucifix that was on the lid of the coffin. So you could almost say that was not a casket, but a coffin, that the Pope was buried in. You saw twice with the two Popes, with their deaths following so shortly. Did you see any of that?

JG: Not much but I did see a few pictures.

OTT: Well, that's the way the early coffins looked.

JG: What were they made of? What type of...

OTT: Wood. And I assume it would be, in most cases, it was probably pine, 'cause there was a lot of pine in this area. Sometimes they would shape them a little bit differently; come up and then build the lid up a little bit higher which would accommodate a bigger body or a larger person. The thing was, in those days you used no vaults to speak of. At the start, they started putting in what was called a brick vault. Now when they'd open that grave they would put a base of concrete down in the grave, and then the wood box, which was a pine box, was put in the grave. Then the brick-layer would come, after the body was actually already in the wood box and the cover was put on. He would brick that whole thing up, around the wood box, and then arch it around the lid, for strength so it wouldn't collapse. Greenwood Cemetery had quite a few of those at one time for people who could afford to put something like that in the ground. That was before the advent of the steel vaults and the concrete vaults. Now today, in this area at least, we use more concrete vaults instead of brick vaults.

JG: The brick vault, would that've been something that everybody did, or was that an expensive type of funeral?

OTT: I don't suppose it was too expensive if you look at today's prices of tangs. A brick-layer probably was getting a good deal less than what you see today. Just like on building construction, they don't lay near as many bricks as they did in the old days. That'd slow it up a little bit. Most people, we'd bury in wood boxes. If you go in an old cemetery, you're aware of where the box itself, the lid has deteriorated and then the soil will drop down in and around the casket. That's why you see that condition with the dished in graves. Sometimes where the markers were not put on a foundation would be tilting at different angles. A lot of that has been rectified by LaPorte County funds. I think there's a tax thing on that to restore and maintain a lot of the older cemeteries. Of course, Greenwood and cemeteries where you have perpetual care, they are constantly filling in these areas. The sod is removed, then they put the sand and soil in there, then put the sod back and press-it-down. That's your perpetual care. It's a part of that, you know. But you don't have that with the modern way of doing it. The concrete vault or the steel vault holds the soil up above. It'll settle for maybe a year or so till it sets down 'cause you've disturbed that.

Later on, it stays right there. The maintenance of the cemetery has been eliminated to the extent of the likes of cutting the grass, sprinkling the lawn, trimming and opening graves. That's a part of that.

JG: As far as the early coffins, were they lined in any way? Was it just a plain wooden box?

OTT: They did line them. I know that the early funeral directors were pretty handy as upholsterers to the extent of putting material in. Although in your European countries, I can remember my aunt mentioning the fact that when a person died, the body was bathed usually by an individual who agreed to assist. Much like a midwife that delivers a baby in the early days. They would come in and bathe the body and dress it and then they used to use a large sheet. They would never take a new piece of material. They would take a large sheet, something that had been mended and that would be used in the coffin, as a liner. Nothing very fancy; it was very plain, you know. Just like in the early days in the time of Christ. They used a winding sheet, which was a part of clothing the body. The orthodox Jewish people still follow that method of burial. Just like the Orthodox Jews do not use nails; they use wooden dowels and things to hold the wood together. No nails in the Jewish coffin. My grandfather did quite a bit of dowel work. He was capable of doing that. I'll just show you something that he did, how he used to work. (Tape is temporarily stopped while a drawer made without nails, bearing an inscription is shown.)

OTT: After the cabinet-makers stopped making coffins, it became a manufacturing industry as far as the production of caskets. Starting in the early days with the wood caskets, plain, and also the wood caskets with the cloth covering. Various types of plush were used. After the casket was constructed and shaped the way they wanted it, the earlier caskets, most of them were referred to as octagon, because of the way they were cut. The sides and the top and everything. They'd refer to that as an octagon casket, many-sided. Moldings were attached and after the casket was finished, why then the cloth was glued onto the wood. Then we came into a period where the interiors were no longer plain, but a lot of them were fairly elaborate, which called for the use of a seamstress in the casket industry. The textile industry produced different materials that were used for the casket interiors. Like all the variety that you have in a store that handles dry goods. You have so many different materials that are used. Funeral directors, in the present time, have been criticized for increased funeral costs. But when you stop to think about the number of people that are employed in the casket industry itself. I think the state of Indiana would be, you might say, second to none in the production of caskets. It's a large industry in our state. When you went from the hardwoods which are still being made (oak, mahogany, walnut) they're not as common today because of the scarcity of these woods, and the increase in the prices of the hardwoods. A lot of hardwoods were used in the early days when they went from the cloth covered caskets to somebody who wanted something better. Then metal came into the industry. They would do a lot of things with manufacture of metal caskets. By making different dyes, you could shape that almost any way you wanted to. And then the finish is put on. So the casket industry really has created a lot of work for designers: the hardware, for the corners of the caskets, the plating industry, the textiles that are used, and the different finishes, as far as the paint manufacturers. The finishes a couple of 'em are making of different materials. In our state alone, I couldn't tell you how many casket factories we have. I know that some of them are no longer in existence, and that's because the bigger companies are more or less absorbing them.

Just like what is happening in almost any industry today. You look in some places, there's a conglomerate thing where the small people are gradually faded out.

JG: When did these metal caskets first come into use?

OTT: Metal caskets? Well, as long as I can remember, a good many years ago, it was probably done on a smaller scale. Probably with a good deal of handwork in shaping the metal instead of all the machinery they use today. You have different gauges of metal. Perhaps the thinnest was about twenty gauge and then you have a heavier gauge. I go from twenty to eighteen, a nineteen or eighteen gauge, then as heavy as sixteen gauge. Metal was used for more expensive caskets, using copper, and bronze for anyone who wanted to have something in a heavier casket.

JG: How much would a casket of today weigh; twenty gauge metal casket with the upholstery inside?

OTT: Oh, I would say perhaps around a hundred, a hundred and fifty pounds. Your metal caskets in twenty gauge were not as heavy as the hardwood caskets, which were made of wood. They used to use one inch planks in the early days. And there still are different hardwoods made that are heavier than other hardwoods, depending on what a person would want. Just like in the furniture deal, you know, you can get a table like this with a simulated top (gestures toward table), but its real wood's all there. Now getting back to the word "undertaker", as we mentioned before. We were talking about midwives. The undertaker, of course, came into the picture because the people needed someone to help. You couldn't depend on the family to do it. So it was a neighbor or a friend who agreed to undertake the task of preparing the dead for burial. The individual, I s'pose, after they did a certain amount of that, they probably decided to help in that and make it a life's calling. A lot of your funerals were held in the home, or residence of the deceased. It was almost a must in the early days. At the start of the undertaking field, you had maybe what you call a parlor. You've heard of that, the funeral parlor. Well, that was for people who maybe lived in hotels or had no home of their own, or they preferred to do it that way rather than have the funeral in their home. They would have the deceased of their family laid out in the funeral parlor. And in most cases, o'course, the service would be there rather than at the church with the body, and the funeral last rites at the church. A lot of the churches in Michigan City were used in the funerals a great deal more than they are today. Almost everyone belonged to some religious group, whether they were Protestant, or Catholic or Jewish. The services used to last a little bit longer than they do today in the homes. The funeral director had to move his equipment in there. When I started, I had done some body preparation in the home, (embalming in the home) 'cause my father was doing it. It was customary to bring into the home what was called a cooling board, and the body would be placed on that and embalmed in home. Then, the family would come in and select the casket. You'd bring the casket out to the house, finish the work, dress the body, and place it in the casket. Then put the casket in a suitable position in the home, and friends'd come in. Your so-called wakes were two or three day affairs in the early days. You'd go then from the home to the cemetery, and the ministry would come to the home. If it was a religious denomination that existed, the church services, which were held to the extent that the Catholics and the Lutherans and the other religious groups would want a church service, then you'd go to the church for the funeral. And then to the cemetery.

JG: How have the embalming practices changed over the years? Have they changed much?

OTT: Not a great deal. You can go back to the days of Abraham Lincoln, who was preserved at the time of his assassination. I think you remember reading about his body came into Michigan City and the people viewed it down at the Michigan Central station. I went to Springfield a few years ago and was amazed at how wonderful that tomb was there that they placed him in. But he was embalmed thoroughly. As far as my knowledge is concerned, they had no problem with deterioration. They may have done things from time to time on the trip, I don't know. The embalming process is based on the full use of the arterial circulation of the blood in the body. In other words, your embalming chemical goes into the arterial side and the preservative is injected into the body. You get a case where you have, well let's say, darkened fingernails. Well, it'll all clear up if the body is properly preserved. If you had to wait five days, the preservation would still be there. In fact, I remember my father holding a man for seven months, who was a man who died in the prison. He was from Mexico and they wanted to send his body back. His mother was ill at the time, and they didn't want to shock her, so they waited and waited, and then after a certain period of time, they made the decision that they'd bury him here anyway. And it shows you that the length of time that you could do it, even longer than that if you wanted to work at it. The early Egyptians, you know, King Tut was preserved. They had a different system in those days. It was much more complicated than ours is. Their method, o'course, really calls for a thorough saturation of the body in preservatives. They did remove organs and things that were in the body, which o'course would deteriorate. They had the advantage o'course of having a dry climate, where bacteria didn't progress the way it does here. Where they find somebody who has died by the roadside, if they're there for only a few days, sometimes they're unrecognizable. The preservation itself would run indefinitely. A lot of people say "Well, how long does a person remain preserved in the ground?" Well, that question is kinda hard to answer. It kinda depends on the condition of the soil, and what they're encased in, if they were in a sealed casket. But eventually we'll all go back to dust, as it says in the Bible.

JG: Is it necessary to drain the blood from the body before you...

OTT: What is usually done is the drainage goes along with the injection because you can't inject something without displacing something else.

JG: You say there were no pumps...

OTT: No pumps involved other than today, an electric embalming machine is used. It's run by electricity and it is a form of injecting rather than using the bulb syringe of gravity. As you'll see them injecting the I.V.'s in hospitals. That method was used for the dead in the early days with a larger container. The embalming solution was fed into the arterial side of the body. It's pretty similar to an I.V. only a bigger container. It takes about three and half hours to do it properly because you're using gravity. With the machine embalming today, the pressure can be adjusted but you have to be careful because you could cause swelling if it's done in less time. You might say, in most cases, in less than two hours. There are difficulties which are unique from time to time in the preparation of any human body. Those things would call for extra time spent.

JG: What are some of the difficulties?

OTT: Well, for instance, someone with advanced arteriosclerosis, atherosclerosis; the different things that can interfere with your circulation. Just like we would have it in living. If your circulation isn't what it should be, you're not getting blood to certain areas in the body, and that's due to maybe poor heart action. We really don't realize how important that heart is and what it does for us. It's as close a thing to perpetual motion you're going to get.

JG: What are the chemicals that go into a body in preserving?

OTT: Well, the actual ingredients are very seldom listed on the body, or on the bottle of embalming fluid. It's a percentage of formaldehyde, which is the basic preservative. And a good amount of alcohol is in embalming fluid. Then you have what is termed cosmetic salt. The different fluids sometimes will have more color than others which does restore some of the color by the varying amount it has. Like the fingernails are sometimes pink, because you are also doing a certain amount of bleaching with the injection of these chemicals. And there's glycerin. At one time there were certain things that were used in the compounding of the embalming fluid which were of a metallic nature. Like zinc and some of those things. They were prohibited later on because of the problem you'd have detecting in autopsies, if a person died a natural death or was poisoned. And the laws set forth, (your state laws and federal laws) the ingredients you could use. You've heard the question brought up that embalming isn't necessary. Well, you don't have to embalm a body if you don't want to. I mean, you don't have to have it preserved, but you better have your service within about twenty-four hours because the body will deteriorate. In the early days before embalming, they used ice. They put it into containers, and that's where the word "cooling board" came from, what I mentioned to you. They had drapes around it and you were aware perhaps that it was there, but it did keep the body cool. 'Course you had more trouble in the summer time than you did in the winter time. The embalming process is only necessary if you are going to wait three or four days, which most of us have to. By the time funeral arrangements are straightened out to the point where you've decided what day to have the funeral, two or three days always elapse. And without embalming there would be deterioration. Can't get away from it.

JG: All these chemicals, are these varied as to proportions for different conditions and different bodies?

OTT: Well, the strength of embalming preparation is usually adjusted by the embalmer. Depending on what the cause of death was, you know what kind of problems you'll run into. For example, if you were to prepare a body that had been dead for a longer period of time, let's say more than twelve, eighteen, twenty-four hours, you would use a stronger solution to preserve that body. The tissues are already beginning to break down. They will start to deteriorate after rigor mortis passes off which of course, is a variable thing depending on the cause of death, and the outside temperature, the conditions the person is found in. So, there are different chemicals that would be used for certain purposes.

JG: Embalming sounds like it really isn't a cut-and-dried kind of thing. It sounds like there's a knack to it. Would you say it takes a while to learn?

OTT: You have to be skilled in doing it. There's a good deal of time spent in preparation of posing the features. You've got to make sure the body is in the right state when you begin embalming. If you just go ahead and inject the solution without any preparation or pre-preparation, your results wouldn't be very good. There are instances of where bodies are donated to medical schools today. Some people are doing that. It has increased more than it was years ago. If they really want to use some of the parts, like the eyes, for medical purposes, they don't want the body embalmed. It needs to be taken direct to the place, and then later on, perhaps they'd embalm it. They might even remove 'em before the body is removed from the hospital, and put in an eye bank. Or a kidney transplant if it was an accident case; the kidney would be removed.

JG: Do you think a young fella who's in the business as a funeral director would take a while to gain the experience to do the embalming to a good result?

OTT: I would say so. Since I went to school, they've changed the rules and regulations. Back in 1930 when I went to school, I had to serve an apprenticeship. I was about sixteen, seventeen years of age when my father registered me with the Indiana Board of Embalmers. I had to serve an apprenticeship of three years before I could go to school. I couldn't go to school to get a license till I was twenty-one. By the time I got into school, I was twenty-one so it worked out alright. My course at that time was one full year. I went down there in September and I came back in May. I went to Indiana College of Embalming of Indianapolis. I also put in some time as a resident student at a mortuary there in Indianapolis, all the time I went to school. There were four of us at this particular mortuary. They were allowed to call us out to help on funerals even if we were in school. We'd have to be back at a certain time. At that time they had good street car transportation, it went right by the door. So we'd hop a street car and be back and work on the funeral as a driver or assistant. So you got plenty of experience; a lot of it in the actual doing of something, as far as learning a task. I was capable of doing quite a few things before I went to school. Some of those I went with to school hadn't any previous experience. They'd be pretty, what would you say, "green", when they came out of school unless they had some experience beforehand. Just like for example, in the medical profession. After they get you through your school, why, you serve an internship, and that is where you really are able to apply what you learned. You're actually doing the things that are necessary.

JG: Is embalming required by state law?

OTT: I'm not sure about the Indiana Law today. If a body is buried within twenty-four hours, embalming isn't necessary. You could bury that body without embalming. There, again, you have not only the problem of "Can you get this all done within twenty-four hours?" Your old rules of the Jewish Orthodox people was, I believe, that if you died after sunrise you're supposed to be buried before sundown the next day. Not too sure about that but that was within about a twenty-four hour period. I don't think that rule was set up just as a religious rule but mostly because it was necessary. There isn't as much embalming done in Europe today in many countries.

JG: So it's more a health thing than a

OTT: Yeah, but you see, for example, with the way things are going in our country, so many people have moved away from their areas. They're living in Florida, or they're living in California. They have to be transported by common carrier, which used to be the railroad. But today, the airlines are doing most of the transportation. Now, of course, they can move someone faster than the railroad used to be able to do. But you had to comply with the health rules as far as transportation is concerned. That body, when it was put on that train, had to be in a state of preservation. They could refuse accepting that particular shipment of that deceased person, if fluids were running out of the shipping case, or if there is a disagreeable odor. So you have to comply with the shipping laws which are interstate. Well, take our government and what they have done in returning soldiers from battlefields. They had a very elaborate system set up in the preservation of the remains of the deceased soldiers. Now, if he was in a state of wholeness, you might say, they would embalm him in an outlying area away from the battlefields. Some of the men were sent back, you wouldn't know that anything had happened to them. But if they were found out in the fields or in a shellhole or in an airplane crash, then of course, they would be identified and sent back in caskets that were sealed. But they follow that very thoroughly as far as preservation and identification. Many people, during the W.W. II were concerned that this was their boy. They wouldn't send anyone back to a family if they weren't positive about the identification. The dog tag every soldier had, and if that wasn't found, the dental chart was the next thing. Finger prints, if possible. If they couldn't say that this is John Doe, then they would bury that veteran in a common grave with others that say John Doe, John Smith. But they wouldn't say this is your son. They did a thorough job on that. As a rule, there were routines that were set up and funeral directors served under a good many of those routines in the mortuary services.

JG: You talked about some of the customs for the home funerals; how have customs changed for a service in the funeral parlor itself?

OTT: You have the majority of services being held in the funeral home, for a number of reasons. Some families want to make the services as complete as they can with the minister serving there rather than going to church. In a good many cases you have people who are not church members so they don't feel they want to do it. If you don't belong to a particular church or parish, why that's the best way to handle it. Using the funeral home rather than the average residence. What brought all that about was people moving into apartment houses where you couldn't possibly have a funeral service. If you go around town and see some of these larger homes, people had a lot of room. The smaller homes of course would be pretty crowded if you had your services in a small room. Well, just take this room for example. You don't have too much room here for holding a funeral service. People used to do it. In fact they'd insist on it.

JG: Have the type of services changed over the years at the funeral home then?

OTT: No, I wouldn't say that it has, because in many ways the funeral home or funeral chapel is an intermediate way of doing it between having the funeral in the home or having it in the church. It's really a matter of preference. If you go to a church that insists on using the church facilities, the pastor may suggest that to people. You run into that in many cases in the Catholics, the Lutherans, the Episcopalians. They insist on having a church service. All three groups (I don't want to leave any of the others out) the Presbyterian Church, they have a good many

services in the church today. The Methodist people do, the Baptists. It's really a matter of preference, outside of if you're a Catholic, or maybe a Lutheran or Episcopalian. They feel you should have a church service.

JG: Are there differences in the types of services that those three sects of Christianity...

OTT: The Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church is centered around the Mass which is the prayers for the dead. The Lutheran church has a modified type of service like that. The pastor in all of them, including the Catholic, would come down to the chapel. It's strictly a religious service with scriptural reading and prayers said for the deceased and the consolation of the family. You also have a certain number of graveside services where the body will be taken to the cemetery and the minister will have a committal service at the graveside. They accommodate people that way.

MRS. OTT: I was wondering whether you cared to touch on the amount of paperwork that's involved. Hasn't that changed a lot?

OTT: You have a lot of forms to make out. You help people on all of that. Actually you start with getting the necessary required information you need that's required by state law. You don't use father and mother's name. You used to even have to put the birthplace of the father and mother. Now, the regulation death certificate just calls for the father and mother's name, husband or wife's name, birth date, place of birth. Then you'd have the medical certification. After you'd show them the necessary information, as far as family history, then you'd take the certificate to a doctor and he'd complete the medical certification. Now, if there's no doctor in charge, then you'd have to call the coroner. And he'd determine what the cause of death was. But for anyone under a doctor's care, usually it's signed by the attending physician. If he thinks he doesn't know enough about what the cause of death was, well, he might suggest an autopsy. A postmortem examination. That doesn't necessarily influence the coroner only in the case of a violent death the physician won't sign the certificate. It becomes the coroner's option to fill out that as an investigator. If he feels he has to call for an autopsy, he will do so, under the law. After you've done that, the funeral director has a place for his name, and his license number. The funeral director's number and the cemetery, goes in on the death certificate. So it becomes a part of the vital statistics. Now here in our health department (which is now the LaPorte County Health Department) I think they're microfilming all this. They'd put all of it in a book before. They may still be using a book but they also microfilm. And they condense it and that winds up at the LaPorte Health Department, the County Health office. Ours was individual at one time, the Michigan City Health Department. Now it's all county. Same as your ambulance service. There's one thing I didn't dwell on. We did give ambulance service for many years. All the funeral directors did. And that was a part of business too. The reason was they were the logical people to provide it. They had the horses and they had the ambulances.

JG: Was this ambulance service bringing the dead from, say, outlying areas to the funeral home?

OTT: No, the ambulance service was provided for the living, moving people who were too sick in the home to go to the hospital, or if it was an accident. In those days, most of your accidents were factory accidents. I can remember when I was a kid growing up, how many of those calls

the Earl Co. used to get. They'd come down Washington St. and go in the 6th Street gate at Pullman, or 8th Street and men were getting hurt quite often in the factories. And Pullman, of course, was one of the biggest factories. They'd have steel fall on them, or some hot metal would hit 'em. They weren't all fatalities, but it was easy to get hurt. They'd even get hit with these cars as they were moving around the plant. It's that area, you know, on Wabash. That was a big factory at one time. You moved someone with what was called a first call. The wagon in a sense was similar to a hearse in design. We used what was called an ambulance basket, in those days, moving a person from one place to the other. The body was put in this ambulance basket similar to a casket in the sense it had handles on it. Then the body would be brought in and prepared for burial. The ambulances were not used for the dead other than if you went out on an accident and that person was dead. Same as with our ambulance service today. Everybody that they move isn't all living. There were fatalities in an accident and they were brought into the hospital first and pronounced dead by the medical men.

JG: If you went in, and you had a live person that you were bringing in, were you driving at breakneck speeds with the horses as you would say, now?

OTT: They would go as fast as conditions would allow. Now, you know, the streets and roads in those days weren't the smoothest. All the ambulances had bells on them. Like the old fire equipment, they pushed it with their foot. I can remember our ambulance. Just for your information, you could stop down at the chapel. We got a pretty good picture of our old ambulance with the horses, taken in front of the post office. It was about toward the end of the horse-drawn era in 1918. My father got this Dodge which was his first car in about 1918. It was a slower mode of transportation. In the early days, they had quite a few people getting hurt with horses, too. Getting kicked by a horse was not uncommon. Probably even bit in some cases when they were foolin' with 'em in the barns.

JG: Would these have been big draft horses that you used?

OTT: They were a medium-sized horse. You wouldn't use anything like a Clydesdale or a Percheron. You wouldn't use anything that big. They had different types of horses. If you were in the coal business, delivering coal, you might use a Percheron, or a Clydesdale, because you're hauling tonnage there. For a real workhorse, these were more or less a cross between a race horse and a heavier duty horse. The heavier horse was used on farms to pull plows. But if you were a bigger farmer, you'd probably have a smaller horse that you'd hitch onto a buggy if you came into town. You wouldn't want to use a big horse like that.

JG: In those days, would there have been a funeral procession similar to today where people would follow the hearse in their buggies?

OTT: You had this type of equipment: A clergyman buggy where the clergyman would ride in with the funeral director at the head of the procession. Then you had another vehicle that was used for the pallbearers. It'd probably seat six to eight. And then the hearse, which was all horse-drawn. And then after that would come your family hacks for the immediate family and the relatives. In the early days, if you wanted to go to that funeral you'd call up the funeral director and tell him that you wanted a hack for this funeral. Or you wanted a seat in a hack and they

would provide that. So if he had four people calling, he would get a hack for four people. They used to come out of the church or the funeral establishment and read off the names. Just like you would put somebody on an airplane. They'd read off the names, then they'd start moving on down the street. When all the hacks were filled, why, then they'd go on down to the cemetery. And today we still make out what is called the auto list which is similar to the hack list.

JG: In this pamphlet that you gave me, you mentioned the train wreck in, I think it was 1918, and the epidemics. What memories do you have of those two occurrences?

OTT: Well, I was only a lad when that happened. I remember listening in on the phone conversation. My dad was home at the time. One of the doctors in town had called him and told him about that. He was instructed to go to the Michigan Central Station and they did say it was an emergency train. This was a division point here at one time, Michigan City was. Later on it was moved to Niles. I remember them backing into the station there at Michigan Central. They took these people off at the end of the train. You know how those passenger cars were put together. The Earl Company had their ambulances there, and my dad went down. I don't know if there was more than two or three ambulances in town at that particular time. These people then were taken to St. Anthony's Hospital. As a kid, I remember going down there and watching that. I wasn't old enough to help. They backed all the way from Porter, which isn't too terribly far from here. You know where Chesterton is. You see, that whole area there was all blocked off. That was an X-type crossing. It was the New York Central and the Michigan Central. It divided there, coming out of Chicago. Some how or another they got their signals mixed up. You might have something down there at the library on that. I know my father assisted in taking care of a number of people who were killed in that.

JG: How about this flu epidemic?

OTT: The flu, I think, was a pretty serious thing here too. Most of that developed into this, I believe, pneumonia condition, as a result of the flu. The death rate was pretty high in Michigan City. I couldn't give you any statistics on that. I know my father had talked about getting started early in the morning or late at night and working right around the clock, for a whole twenty-four hour period till he was ready to drop himself. In those days, when you had contagious diseases you weren't able to move those people around either. The Health Department wouldn't permit you to do it. You couldn't have anybody go to funerals if someone had died of small pox, or scarlet fever, or any of the contagious diseases. You would prepare that body and it was made as private as possible. Then you'd go to the cemetery and bury it in a short time. You wouldn't prolong it. Those were the days before you had your antibiotics. There was no sulfur then, no penicillin, or anything to fight those things with. Pneumonia was a very, very serious illness in those days. Certain types of pneumonia today are very, very bad. I'm sure that every funeral director throughout the areas where the flu hit were kept very busy. There was a large number of infants and children that died from childhood diseases. In a family, maybe three would follow in a short span of time, within less than a week. All probably due to some strain of flu. They never made it through childhood or early youth. I can remember too, how people used to go around during these epidemics, they had these masks they'd put on. Nowadays, when you see someone going down the street who's got a little bit of a heart problem, he wears a mask to warm the air. It reminds me of some of those things that used to happen. Then as a kid I can remember that

vaccination stuff that they used to scratch your arm with. You can remember that, can't you? They just have to scratch it once, then show 'em your arm. Well, if you're going to travel, then I think you have to do certain things before they let you out of the country. Small pox vaccination, I think you have to have that. I remember one time, when I was quite young, I took care of a man who had died of typhoid. It was suggested that I go and get a shot against that. I went to the doctor and he had a syringe there, and it was a big one! He gave that to me and the first thing he said "I think you'd better sit down". Then all of a sudden it hit me. The blood just drained out of my face. I never got typhoid!

CJ: Is it that you're able to do most of these tasks alone, or how many people are basically involved in the whole process?

OTT: With us, I worked with my father, being the oldest and then my brothers came in to the work later. When I worked with him, he had an extra man. He had men who were embalmers who worked for him, course he himself was an embalmer. He took the state boards, and got a license. And then o'course he had to have a funeral director's license. We have two types of licenses. First of all, to go into the work you have to have an embalmer's license if you want to manage your own business. Then you take the funeral directors test which is a lot different. It isn't concerned with the embalming part of it at all. It's another form of tests to find out if you're suited to be a funeral director. Now, if I were not an embalmer, I could go into the funeral service here in Michigan City, but I would have to take the funeral directors license test right after that. Then I would have to employ a full time embalmer, at all times to run a business. There are funeral directors that are not licensed embalmers. Lynn Haverstock who succeeded us there, (I still go down and assist, although I'm not actually connected with the business anymore) has two other men. One is licensed and the other is studying to take the test.

CJ: Approximately how long ago is it that they instituted having to be licensed?

OTT: It seems to me that my father had a certificate from the Cincinnati College of Embalming which was in Ohio. He went there, I believe, and took a short course which probably didn't exceed six weeks, maybe. He got a certificate from them. Now I think that was before your states made it necessary for you to be registered with your particular state. Indiana, of course, was always far advanced as far as seeing that the proper people were licensed to do things. It is a, you might say, protective health measure, to have people properly trained that are working with the dead. If you didn't have the training, you could do things that'd be detrimental to the health of others. You have to follow the precautions. Of course, you always get good advice from the medical profession if you had something to take care of that was extremely dangerous, which could happen with the types of disease. They would warn you when you come to remove a body to be very careful about it. The whole thing, under certain circumstances, is to be sure you're not contaminating other people. For instance, you could go into a home and be exposed to certain things then go out and mingle with a crowd. It's simply that you have to watch, of course, 'cause they say today, we're fortunate in being able to keep some of these things under control. But every so often, it's like this so-called Legionnaire's Disease. They had quite a time trying to find out what was actually happening there. All the facts that they'd gathered didn't make sense there for awhile, to find out what the source was. Remember that hotel that really went out of business? That probably shoulda never really happened because since then, they haven't done

anything like that. They've had other cases of this Legionnaire's Disease. Viruses, and bacteria, and so-called bugs; they can be really something. They can be very tricky. Remember the old song "some day a little bug's gonna getcha?"

JG: Does it make you feel wary about your occupation?

OTT: There have been times when I was concerned about my health. I think I've been fortunate going through fifty years in this without having had much of anything other than that typhoid shot I was telling you about. 'Course I had been vaccinated when we did take care of some people who had small pox, and diseases similar to that. My father in fact, had a very severe case of small pox that he contracted from a patient that died that he took care of. He was laid up for a long time. He just didn't get the vaccination, I guess. We all got the small pox. It was all in our whole family. Years ago, they would have people that would die of Anthrax, which is considered very infectious. If the funeral director had to take care of somebody like that, they had to be very, very careful. A lot of it depends on whether you're handling...

JG: Is Anthrax a cow disease?

OTT: It comes from animals. It wasn't common but it happened 'cause you had animals. You had your horses, you had the four-legged friends who were providing the motivation for your transportation. Those things did crop up on farms, and probably other areas. It's a rare thing, but very contagious. I shouldn't say contagious; I should say infectious, I guess.