

This interview with Mr. Edwin Crawford, 108 Eddy, took place Nov. 22, 1977. Interviewer was Laurie Radke

LR: What year were you a motorman on the streetcar?

EC: That would be 1918 just for a short time. I just happened to be the only motorman they had and boy, they ran the daylight out of me. I lived on West Ninth, 1120, and in the mornings I had to walk down to the car barns way down on South Franklin Street, just off of Franklin.

LR: Weren't the barns at 2nd & Franklin?

EC: No, no, the barns were...what's the name of that street?...it's the second street south of the Pere Marquette Railroad.

LR: Superior?

EC: Superior. Yah. And the car barns were down there about a block and a half, two blocks. I had to walk down there in the morning and be there at 5:30. I'd get in at midnight and then I'd have to walk home see. That's kind of tough when you're standing up all day. Twenty-eight cents an hour at that time. You know there was no cars running at night after we went in the barns at midnight.

LR: If you had to describe the streetcars to someone who never saw them before, how would you describe them? You said there were both winter and summer cars?

EC: OH yes.

LR: What were the winter cars like?

EC: Well, they were enclosed and the conductors walk up and down the center of the car just like a passenger car only shorter. A streetcar was shorter than a railroad car.

LR: What kind of material was the car made out of?

EC: Well naturally wood and naturally metal...

LR: Did the side of the cars have wood?

EC: The sides of the car, that was it...and windows in the enclosed cars naturally. You know, something they never told me when I started,,,on the motor box on the street cars there's just a little couple wires only about that long that you had to wrap around two plugs. And naturally you'd have to pull the trolley down while you were doing that or you'd get killed. And they never told me about that when I tried out to be a motorman. I was on the car one night and I noticed when they turned the power on it would flash. There were some people getting on the car on the corner of 4th Street one night..I went to open the motor to start out and it blew up in my face. I couldn't see a thing. The flame come up in my face. Some son-of-a-gun, I never did know who it

was in the car, he drove my streetcar up to the depot...that was on the corner of 7th & Franklin. By the time we got there my eyes had cleared up so I could see a little bit and I took it from there on myself. That little brass or copper wire burnt me a lot, I'm telling ya'.

LR: What other kind of equipment did a motorman have? You said you had a lever that you turned?

EC: Oh yah, you had your lever to gain speed, you know, and put more power on that; just one lever and a wheel that you'd turn to wind up the brakes. The chain run down, you'd wind up that chain. Naturally that's before they got their air brakes on.

LR: How long would it take a car to stop?

EC: You'd go a little way but not too awful far. It just depended on how fast you were moving and how fast you twisted that wheel. If you a little bit scared you're going to twist it. I know down there on Barker Avenue and Fanklin there was a saloon on the corner and when you're coming from the south going north you gotta be out and almost in the street before you could see if there was anything coming or not. I'd kind of coast up to that street and sometimes I'd have to twist awfully fast to get away from a car or a team. Your view was hidden there. But on the LaPorte streetcars they had air brakes on those.

LR: In 1918 they already had air brakes?

EC: On the LaPorte cars. They run between LaPorte and South Bend.

LR: Oh, the interurban.

EC: They run on the same tracks...right down there between 7th and 8th. There was a double track from 2nd street down to 8th Street. Then it run into one. From there, a single track from South Franklin to Franklin Street Hill, there was a passing track. Down there at 8th Street, about where the Warren Building is, they had a signal. I had to stop there every time I went by and my conductor was supposed to get out and throw that signal. One morning it was so foggy you couldn't see nothing. Well I stopped and when the conductor would give me the bell, naturally I'd go ahead. He game me the bell, but he never got off to push that signal so when I stopped at the South Shore tracks at 11th St., I brought my car to a stop there was a large streetcar on the other side looking right at me. I had done a foolish thing that scared me. Well I just reversed my car and run my car backwards down to 9th Street across 9th Street so I could switch out on the Easport line and let the LaPorte car back. Of course, they reported that. I was on the carpet for a while, they wanted to know if I knew the conductor was supposed to push that signal, I guess...I made my stop and I got my bell and that's what I tended to do. What he did I can't tell you. That's the way it ended.

LR: What was the signal for?

EC: Well, when a LaPorte car would come 'in or on Franklin Street they had two cars. Maybe while I would be on the north end one would be on the south end. See what I mean? Well, we'd

have to pass on Franklin Street Hill on account of that single track between Ninth and Franklin Street Hill. This signal there on 8th Street that would put a red light on Franklin Street Hill so the guy would wait on the passing track until I got up there or vice versa. If the LaPorte car would come in they would push the signal, then that signal down on 8th Street would be red. A city car wouldn't go by...My conductor fell down and so did I because I didn't prove that he was pushing that signal. We didn't hit or nothing but just scared the daylights out of me. The power was so poor on 9th Street whenever I had the prison run that many-a-time when I wanted to go up near the Michigan Central Railroad there'd be hardly enough power to take your car across.

LR: Do you know where the electrical generating plant was, for the power lines?

EC: No, or I knew where the streetcar barns were and I think that's where most of the power came from. I'M not certain about that. Years ago they used to be on Willard Avenue just before the prison curve. You know where Willard curves down there on the south end. They used to be on the west side of the street, there used to be a big car barn. I know when I was little we used to play in there until we got caught. Shows you what kids will do. We'd go in there and there was a place where we'd get quite a shock...we could have gotten killed and didn't even know it. The kids would go in there and each one would get a shock...we never touched the wrong place or we'd of got killed. But when they know kids were going in there, well, they stopped that right sudden. That was many years ago when I was a little kid about six or seven years old. Something like that.

LR: Do you remember what colors the streetcars were?

EC: Well, they were sort of a yellow or light orange maybe.

LR: And the winter cars, you said there was an aisle down the middle. What were the seats made out of?

EC: Well....II don't remember if they were all leather or some kind of plastic or something.

LR: How many people would a streetcar hold?

EC: Oh, let's see.....II would say thirty or forty or more. They had double seats on both sides of the aisle. I imagine ...I couldn't say for sure'- but I'd say thirty at least. Because I know a lot of times, boy, they was crowded...standing in the aisle back where the conductor was. Some of them would be standing behind me.

LR: The conductor's job was to take fares?

EC: Oh yeah, and cheat the company all they could

LR: Did they have to wear a uniform?

EC: Well, I just wore a coat. They were supposed to...I just wore a coat and had a hat.

LR: You said you got paid twenty-eight cents a day?

EC: Twenty-eight cents an hour.

LR: How many days of the week did you have to work?

EC: Well, that was a seven day job.

LR: Did you get any days off at all .. holidays?

EC: No, as I said I was the only extra one...extra motorman. Well, they just worked the daylight out of me. They called me all the time.

LR: How many motormen were employed by the company?

EC: I'll tell you, each one ...there'd be two cars. One would be Eastport, Franklin St., that's four. Ninth Street run was two. That was six regular.. There was supposed to be two shifts, you know...I worked both of them. At that time, a dollar was a dollar, you know.

LR: What other equipment did you have? And how did you operate it? The bell or gong?

EC: Oh yeah...you stomped your feet. The lever was on the floor for the gong and the conductor had a little bell...he was supposed to ring this bell every time he took in a fare, see. But nine times out of ten maybe there'd be five or six people that would get on..he'd ring that bell once or twice. The rest he'd put in his pocket. I know, I set up in front of the car and this bell that the conductor would ring, when he'd ring the register was right in back of my head. I could hear that bell every time. They'd made more money than some people.

LR: Did you have to stand up the whole time?

EC: Oh yeah...there was a stool, a high stool to sit on but I didn't. No, you couldn't wind that brake too fast if you were sitting on the stool...

LR: When the people came on the streetcar, they'd come in the front & get off the back?

EC: They were supposed to get on the back and off the front. But it didn't work that way always...because my conductor a good share of the time was assistant superintendent Charlie Fogelman, He had special friends...kind of a ladies man in other words, in plain American language. If they were his friend's he'd let them off the back. I figured he was assistant super and wouldn't do no wrong. But it turned out that he did once in a while. Now I was supposed to insist that they got off the front so I could watch them when they step down off the steps. Well, he'd let them off the back and then say, "OK Crawford" and I'd take off. He wouldn't even give me the bell. I'd let him get by. A woman lost her slip skirt once, but he didn't notice when she sent to step off she had on a long skirt. She stepped down and her skirt was caught on the top step. He stepped up there and only had one hand on the edge of the door. I heard him say "allright". and I took off. I heard a scream and I stopped right quick. I didn't move but just a few feet but it took

her skirt. Then him and I went around and around. He started bawling me out and I stood up on my hind feet and talked back to him. I said "After this, they'll get off the front according to the rules. In other words, you give me a bell." He said, "Well we won't argue about it." I went up and got ahead of my levers. I didn't get no bell. I set right there. Boy, he almost tore that bell right off the wall. After that I made him follow the rules, the same as I did.

LR: Were there doors on your cars?

EC: Oh yes, there the people got on and off you could shut them. That worked with a hand lever. They didn't have any of that up to date stuff years ago.

LR: So the people would open the doors themselves?

EC: Nor no - you'd open them..you know like on these big buses. The driver opens the door and closes it. That's the way the cars were at the time.

LR: You said the summer cars were open car...were they made of wood too?

EC: Oh yeah! The body of the car naturally was wood.

LR: What about the seats?

EC: Well, they were cushioned...I don't think the conductors liked that very well, once in a while you'd get caught in the rain. The conductors would have to walk around on the outside of the cars, reach out on each side and get their fare, if they (passengers) didn't pay when they first got on.

LR: Was their a running board around the car?

EC: Oh yeah, a lot like a long plank. He'd hang on with one hand and walk around.

LR: There was no aisle down the middle

EC: No, no, not on the summer cars.

LR: Do you know how many seats there were?

EC: No. I don't remember.

LR: Did they have any seats along the side of the car like the winter cars did?

EC: No, they all went right across the center of the car, on each side & along the running boards.

LR: What about heat in the winter cars...did you have any heat at all in them?

EC: Yes there was but I couldn't tell you much about the heat.

LR: Was it electrical too?

EC: Oh yeah, but when I worked there it was warm weather and I don't know much about that.

LR: What about the runs ...could you describe the Eastside run; what streets it took?

EC: You'd go down Franklin Street to 9th and then you'd go 9th to Michigan. Then it turned on Michigan out there to Carroll Avenue where that shopping center is. There was a saloon there and a big ball diamond.

LR: How would you turn around?

EC: Well, you wouldn't turn the car around. You'd just change...take your levers and walk back to the other end. The conductor would swing the trolley. There was a motor on each end of these cars. You never had to turn the car around.

LR: What about the seats?

EC: The same way, you'd flip them over.

LR: You were telling me before about bumping blocks?

EC: On Michigan Street out there at Carroll Avenue they had a bumping block. But on Franklin Street...the north end of Frankling, they didn't. There was just an open track. In between 2nd Street and the railroad the two lines run into one like a "Y". You'd run in this way and come back on the southbound track. One guy went down that too fast and he stopped his car right on the Michigan Central Railroad tracks and went right on the pavement. But he didn't last too long, that was his last run...he got fired...they got the boss to bring a team of horses over there and they hooked onto the car and pulled it back. You see, the car was run right along onto brick pavement, just like nothing. There was no trolley there, they couldn't do it on their own power.

LR: Was the Franklin Street run called the south run?

EC: You'd run from 2nd Street down to Coolspring Avenue. That was the end of the Franklin Street run.

LR: Were there bumping blocks there too?

EC: No, you had your open lane because that was where the LaPorte car went on that same track. That was where you were going to stop. If you didn't stop right exactly, well, it wouldn't hurt anything... LR.How about the prison run, how did that go out?

EC: You went right up in front of the door of the prison. Right now the prison has got a big building built over where the old entrance used to be. They was building that in 1951. That's when I started working at the prison.

LR: How did the tracks go out to the prison?

EC: Well they went down into 9th Street to Willard Avenue, down Willard to where the street curved there...make a right turn, go in toward the prison wall and go right up in front of the door. That's the way it used to be.

LR: How many runs did you make a day?

EC: You had thirty minutes to make a round trip. You had to run from Franklin Street down to the prison and back in thirty minutes ...you had thirty minutes to do that.

LR: How many cars did they have on one line at a time?

EC: They had two on each run, two prison, two Franklin, and two Eastgate...

LR: Were there side tracks so you wouldn't hit each other?

EC: On 9th Street there was...at Lafayette Street just a little bit west of that. That's where the Eastport cars would pass. Now maybe you'd be out on Michigan Avenue and you'd get held up a little bit. Well the guy coming from town, he'd wait there on that siding until you passed him. Now one Sunday I had one of those open cars. I had a big load of people and when I changed my levers down to the other end of the car when I got downtown, I looked down from my lever clock and there was a billfold laying there. I picked it up while the conductor was changing the trolley. He had seen me pick something up off the floor, He wanted to know what I had there and I said "I don't know what it is yet and I'll see when we get up to the end of the line." I looked when we got out to Eastport. I had somebody's billfold with \$119.00. The conductor said "What are you going to do with it, Crawford, you gonna turn it in?" I said "no, I, gonna wait until I see an ad in the paper and if it's in the paper I'll return it. If it isn't I'll keep it." In Monday night's paper there was an ad---Paul Penski. He lived right at 11th and Michigan Street. I looked at that paper money in that billfold I don't know how many times ...this conductor, he wanted me to split that money and throw the pocket book away. I don't know what? Or give it to him, he'd turn it in. I said, "I'll be caught doin' that." When the ad was in the paper my dad and I went down to this place. I knocked on the door and this woman came to the door. I asked if Paul was there, she said "yes but I don't want to wake him up. He works nights and he just got to sleep." I said "I understand he lost some money." Well, she said "Wait a minute, I'll call him!" So she called him and he came out and I asked him to describe the billfold. I asked him "How much did you lose"? He said "There's something between one hundred fifteen and one hundred twenty-five. I can't tell you exactly". But he said "There's some gold print on the inside of that billfold." Well I turned around & looked and sure, there it was. I looked at that thing I don't know how many times and never noticed that print. I gave him his money and he gave me a twenty dollar tip for bringing it back. Later on in the day when I went back to work I had the same conductor as I had when I found it. He wanted to know what I had done with the money and I told him. He asked if the owner gave me a tip. I said yes. How much? I said "twenty dollars". Well, he said "How 'bout splitting it?" I said "The devil with you, you stood right there all the way up from Eastport into downtown and didn't see it. You don't get any of the reward." He turned me in to the superintendent. The superintendent came out to check out the situation. He stood right beside me

on my run all the way from downtown out to Eastport and never said a word. On the way back downtown he asked me about it. I told him I had returned it. I had the owner give me a receipt that I had returned it. I showed the super and he said "Mr. Crawford, don't you know that the law says that you should turn it into the office? Why didn't you?" Well, I figured if anybody got a reward, it belonged to me." He said "If you find anything else, you turn it in." I said "I'll think about it". That's all there was to it. But that conductor wasn't my friend anymore.

LA: Did you always get the same conductor for every run?

EC: Oh no, not always...if I had the Eastport run I'd probably have the same conductor each times. It varied, it was hard to tell which one you'd get.

LR: When you picked up passengers, did you stop at every corner?

EC: If there was a passenger there, Yeah you were supposed to stop at every corner. It used to be kind of a pain in the neck with a lot of people. You had a board across the front end of your car that told if you were the Franklin Street car or prison or Eastport. A lot of 'em (passengers) would walk out from the sidewalk and they'd stand there until you got stopped and then they'd walk back. That would make you mad 'cause that was hard work.

LR: When you released your brake again did you hang on to the wheel or did you just let it go.

EC: No, just let the wheel go. That was a poor system to stop a car.

LR: How fast would you go?

EC: Well, really I don't know...no speedometer to tell you. Just make a guess. I'd say they'd go somewhere around twenty-five, maybe thirty ...if it was good weather and everything was clear.

LR: Would you have to call out the stops for people?

EC: Oh no, no, that was up to the passengers themselves. If they wanted to get off at a certain place they better tell you about it, or tell the conductor.

LR: How would they tell you?

EC: He (conductor) would give me a bell ...when I'd hear that bell I'd stop at the next crossing.

LR: It had to be a crossing? Couldn't you stop in the middle of the block?

EC: Oh no, you were supposed to stop at the street corner. I know most of them (passengers) they'd try to get you to stop in the middle of the block somewhere. But you weren't suppose to although they did stop in the middle of the block occasionally...

LR: Was the track laid even with the street?

EC: The top of the rails and the brick was just about even there.

LR: Did you have much trouble with automobile traffic?

EC: No, there weren't so many automobiles in those days, way back then there weren't many.

LR: Was there horse traffic?

EC: Oh yeah! There were teams and wagons. Sure all these coal dealers around town and lumber dealers they had teams and wagons. But automobiles were almost as scarce as I'm telling ye'. Yeah, there wasn't many.

LR: Did you have many accidents?

EC: No, I never had an accident. I never hit anything.

LR: How about the other motormen?

EC: Once in a great while they'd maybe bump into a wagon or something like that. I was lucky I never hit anybody. Thank the Lord for that much.

LR: What were the biggest changes that took place?

EC: Not while I was working there but afterwards they put air brakes on the cars. They changed the brake system. One of my brothers worked there, a long while after I did. At that time they had air brakes. But I had a spinning wheel.

LR: Was the motorman's job an envied job...was it a popular job?

EC: I don't think there was anything too awful popular about it. The conductor had the easiest job...all he had to do was collect fares and ring them up and change the trolley when you got to the end of the run. The motorman was up there where he had to watch traffic. That was a little bit different.

LR: Was the motorman separated from the rest of the car?

EC: It was kind of an open space there. Then the people would get off, they'd walk right behind you or right by one side and you'd open the door to let them out. There was nothing so special about that job. My first day on the job, I'll never forget that. It was raining cats and dogs. We had a hard storm.

LR: Did you have windshield wipers on those cars?

FC: No. You just had to take it. I made up my mind when I went on the job that if people with me...they're gonna be out when I can see 'em. I only had so much time to make the trip. I don't know whether I missed anybody or not but I went down the line. My dad came from home. He

brought me a raincoat and I happened to see him standing on the corner of 9th and Franklin. I stopped the car and ran off and got my coat. I had to walk all the way home that night. I know the conductor told me "Crawford, you get by today and you're going to be all right..." It rained, rained awfully hard and you can imagine with the rain hitting the glass you couldn't see very much.

LR: Did you have headlights on those cars?

EC: Oh yeah. They had a big round headlight right in the center. You'd be standing there and it would be down below you a ways, you know. I never could figure it out. The company got on all the guys that were stealing money. Then they got fare boxes. You'd drop the money in the box and the money would drop down... and would go into the bottom of the box. Now some of the conductors, they had some kind of system where they'd take a string with a cud of gum and work that down in there and pull money out of the box. I never could figure it out how they done it but they did. Somehow the nickel would stick to their gum and somehow or other they'd get it out. One thing that was funny. A lot of the guys would want to lay off a day...my mother-in-law died or my grandmother died...that was their excuse. Well, one guy, he buried his grandmother I don't know how many times while I was there but that was an excuse. One guy broke his leg. They'd call in with all sorts of excuses like that. I never could figure it out. The company got on all the guys that were stealing money. Then they got fare boxes. You'd drop the money in the box and the money would drop down... and would go into the bottom of the box. Now some of the conductors, they had some kind of system where they'd take a string with a cud of gum and work that down in there and pull money out of the box. I never could figure it out how they done it but they did. Somehow the nickel would stick to their gum and somehow or other they'd get it out. One thing that was funny. A lot of the guys would want to lay off a day...my mother-in-law died or my grandmother died...that was their excuse. Well, one guy, he buried his grandmother I don't know how many times while I was there but that was an excuse. One guy broke his leg. They'd call in with all sorts of excuses like that.

LR: Was any one run more popular with the motormen---like the Eastside run or prison run?

EC: Personally, I would prefer the Franklin Street run because that was a straight run. The other two runs, you'd have to stop at 9th Street and get out...you had a long iron rod about this long. You'd have to reach down and throw the switch, if you wanted to turn off on 9th Street you have to open the switch. The motorman had to do that. A lot of 'em would come up to 9th Street real slow...they'd jump off and run ahead and flip the switch and jump back on the car while the car was in motion. I would never do it because you could slip and fall and maybe lose a leg.

LR: Where was this switch?

EC: The switch was right there at 9th Street.

LR: Ninth and what?

EC: Ninth and Franklin. One way would run you over to the prison, the other way would take you out to Eastport. You'd go down 9th St. to Michigan and down Michigan.

LR: Do you think that if they brought streetcars back that they'd be popular?

EC: I don't think so now, there's too many automobiles. I used to live down at 1002 W. Eighth and I got so that if I wanted to go down to Willard Avenue just about a half or three quarters of a block away, I'd just jump in the car and go down. Just like the South Shore, they used to have many stops through the country and they haven't...now one stop is Beverly Shores, the next one is Tremont. They used to have all kinds of stops. If a farmer wanted to ship a hog into town, you know...a dressed hog...he'd take it down to the streetcar station, they'd have a platform. He'd put in on the platform and he'd notify the company. When the car came along they'd pick that hog up and take it into New Carlisle or Michigan City, wherever, maybe South Bend. But he'd have to notify the company that it would be there and they'd pick it up.

LR: Did you ever move merchandise on the street car?

EC: No, no not on the city car, no. Well, if we'd do that, they'd all be people. Ha ha ha.

LR: How much were the fares?

EC: A nickel.

LR: Could you buy transfers?

EC: Yes, there was a way...you could change from Franklin on to a wrong car, you know? Ha

LR: I was wondering ...if someone lived out by Dolls Park if they took the Eastside run in and then transfer to go to work at the prison without paying another nickel.

EC: They probably would.

LR: Did you take a lot of tours around? Was tourism still popular when you were on the car?

EC: Oh no, not that I ever did. Not that I knew of...well you'd get quite a few people. Ha

LR: Didn't people tour the prison?

EC: No I never took gangs of 'em like that who wanted to go out and tour the prison. No I never did. Some of 'em might of. There wasn't too awful many they'd let in there.