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Joy and Sullivan Mfg. foreman

Interviewer: John Brennan, Interviewee: Ray Schlundt,

JB: Ray Schlundt, August 17, 1978 - Mr. Schlundt, you said you were born on County Line Rd, of LaPorte and Porter Counties. What year was that?

RS: 1899, when I was born

JB: did your parents come from this area?

RS: yes, from a farm in this area

JB: can you tell me about your earliest memories? what you did, where you played, what you ate.

RS: Well, mother was one for making good and substantial meals. There was always plenty to eat, five children in the family, four brothers, one sister, and the hired help. Our farm was 227 acres and we also rented a couple of other farms. We had the hired help and were always busy on the farm. From the time I was old enough to work on the farm till about 1920, then we got married but stayed on the farm with the folks.

JB: what did the farm produce?

RS: everything, you might say, we raised wheat, oats, rye, corn, and a lot of animals, we had hogs, a big herd of cows, and in the early days we had a herd of horses, they provided the horsepower in the field, and about 1916 dad bought a tractor and other heavy machinery for doing the work on the farm. Fruit, strawberries, just a big variety of everything. We had chickens,

JB: were you self sufficient on the farm

RS: yes, mother canned and canned, we raised potatoes, and just a complete variety. We still made butter, then we just separated the milk from the cream and took it too the Sanitary Dairy in Michigan City, and another dairy on the north end, maybe it was an ice company, I can't remember, maybe Hudson. Then later on we started shipping the milk by truck to Chicago.

JB: what were your chores?

RS: taking care of the horse barn

JB: what did that involve?

RS: cleaning, feeding, getting food from the silo, milking, first by hand when I was 12 or 13, later we got a milking machine. I milked and mother stripped the cows, to make sure they were milked clean.

JB: were you active on the farm playing, or did you go to other farms and play with the children there?

RS: yes, there was back and forth baseball and so on. We walked to school a half a mile away.

JB: was it a one room school?

RS: yes, the old Carver School, it is still sitting there, it was made into a home, my brother owned it, and his heirs now own it, the schoolhouse is still sitting on the property.

JB: after 8th grade, you attended one year of parochial school?

RS: yes,

JB: and after 9th grade you went back to the farm to work?

RS: yes

JB: how old were you then?

RS: I was 14 at the time, and worked and lived there till 1920 when we got married. We then lived in a 2nd house on one of the rental farm properties. We lived there for 6 years, then we moved to Michigan City, on Earl Rd.

Mrs. RS: I can remember him talking about so many of these things

JB: when we turn the tape over you can tell us about some of them. Did you get married at St Paul's in Michigan City?

RS: no, we got married in my parents' home in Porter County. Rev Berchere (?) was the minister

JB: why did you move to Michigan City?

Mrs. RS: work

RS: my job was in LaPorte County for a contractor building the Sullivan Machinery Co, in 1923, before that in 1920, I worked at the Pullman car shop which is now dismantled and torn down.

JB: how many years did you work there?

RS: 3 or 4 years, it was in the wintertime

JB: what was your job?

RS: various jobs, one year I worked in the iron foundry for Mr. Charles Draves (?), one year in the wood shop, one year in the steel fabricating, that was during the war, making car ends to ship for the war effort. Then the last year in the wood erecting shop where they built the cars right on the track. We worked on the track putting side boards on the cars.

JB: what did you do in the wood shop?

RS: the planing mill, the plank is put on a big table and planed to a certain shape

JB: the side boards for the train cars?

RS: yes, that is what they were - for the freight cars and coal cars.

JB: are there any events that are memorable to you that happened in the early 20's or late teens?

RS: I remember the boat loads of people that used to come over to Michigan City on the boat from Chicago. I remember the runaway horses, out there on Old Chicago Rd, in the underpass. I was hauling gravel and the train was going over, also on Ohio and Coolspring, I was delivering milk to Sanitary Dairy, the horses got scared there too. They started to run towards Michigan City on Ohio St, to Garfield St near Pullman. I had about 90 gallons of milk on board and didn't spill a drop. The milk was delivered to Sanitary Dairy after I repaired the broken harness. Runaways are frightening, you can pull on the line all you want and it doesn't do any good when the horses are scared.

JB: when you lived on the farm did the family make outings to Michigan City?

RS: yes, always, but more in the winter, we would get together with old-timers and relations, we would visit and they would play cards, and us kids would play games until we were tired, and then just go to sleep on the floor till time to go home. A lot of times there was music and square dancing. Bobsledding at Beattys Corners. Lots of cards and games, no TV or radio in those days.

JB: what did the adults do, besides play cards?

RS: baseball teams were always getting together.

JB: did you travel by horse and buggy?

RS: yes, horse and buggy or in the wintertime, on horses pulled bobsleds. Sometimes we had 15 or 20 people on a bobsled to go to Beattys Corners, or Waterford. We had hay in there and hot bricks to keep warm with.

JB: heated bricks?

RS: that's right, we wrapped them with burlap to keep our feet warm. It was cold.

Mrs. RS: sometimes the snow was so deep you could go right over the top of a fence.

RS: sometimes it was so cold that the horse could go right on top of the snow and not break through

JB: can you describe a typical shopping day in Michigan City, did you go in horse and buggy.

RS: very seldom would us kids go, mostly just the folks on Friday or so, to get flour and sugar and the like

JB: do you remember your first trip into Michigan City?

RS: that would be hard to say, but no matter what work we had or how busy we were, even though we were five miles out, every Sunday morning we went to church without fail. Church was a must.

JB: that was in Michigan City?

RS: right

JB: was the church more important than the community?

RS: I can't say, but the St Paul church was built by the members who mortgaged their homes to build the church in 1876.

Mrs. RS: we celebrated our church centennial 2 years ago.

RS: I can probably find figures on how much it cost to build the church

JB: you were talking about the cold winters, how were the houses heated.

RS: I was waiting for that, our house was quite large, the parlor was never heated, it was only used for special occasions, the next room was the sitting room, it had a big potbelly stove, the dining room had another stove, the kitchen had a stove for cooking, the summer kitchen is where the butchering and all that stuff was done. It had a cook stove. Everything was heated with wood

JB: were the bedrooms heated?

RS: not at first, but later on we cut an opening in the floor for a register. The brothers room was upstairs, the sisters downstairs, she had the stove and we had the heat from that in our room.

JB: what did you do before that?

RS: lots of feather beds

Mrs. RS: I heard them tell about the snow that would blow in.

RS: yes, the ceiling was not plastered so when it snowed we had snow in our bedroom

JB: were the holiday festivities different then?

RS: Christmas was a big get-together, but nobody knew who trimmed the Christmas tree, we thought Santa Claus did but nobody ever saw him do it, but we would come down Christmas morning and there it would be, all trimmed with all the presents underneath. We were lead to believe that Santa Claus had done it all.

JB: did the families get together for dinner on the holidays?

RS: oh yes, someone was always there, all the uncles and aunts were in Michigan City, they would come out a butchering time and help us with the hogs, we made sausage, liver sausage, we were very self sufficient.

JB: can you describe the hog slaughter

RS: yes, there was a routine set up, everybody was assigned to do certain things. My job, and my younger brother Ed's job, was to get the water hot. Another one had the job of roping the pig and bring them in, someone would shave the pig under the chin, someone would hit him over the head with an axe to kill it, someone would tie the legs, and someone would bleed it. The blood would be saved to make blood sausage, mother did that, she would catch it in a pan with vinegar in it, that was to keep the blood from coagulating. She was then preparing to make the sausage. The hog was then dragged over to the hot water, the hog was then scalded to prepare for skinning. It was then hung up and washed again and gutted. Some of the parts were saved, the heart, liver, etc, and some were discarded. Sometimes the stomach was saved to make baloney.

JB: did you slaughter any other animals?

RS: some calves, but most of those were sold to butcher shops in Michigan City.

JB: was travel slow in the late teens and early 20's, were there any cars?

RS: in the early 20's my dads first car was a model T, there were then a few cars in the neighborhood. Someone had a Mitchell, there was a model T about 1914. It had presto lights.

JB: was it exciting when the first model T was around.

RS: yes, that was really something.

JB: how old were you when your dad bought his car?

RS: 17, he bought the car at Polder Brothers in Westville. They sold Fords. I was at home when he brought it into the driveway.

JB: did he let you drive it.

RS: I doubt it. But we kept it in a big long building where we kept the machinery; we used to keep the horses and buggy in there. There was a feed manger in there for the horses. The car had pedals on the floor, the right one brake, center reverse, and other one is forward, you put your foot on it till about 15 mph then let up and it would go into high gear. Emergency brake was on the side. The car would go 40 to 45 miles per hour, it was a 4 cylinder. When he was putting the car into the garage he put the foot on the wrong pedal and went right through the garage.

JB: did you do any courting in that car?

Mrs. RS: you brought the car once or twice

RS: mostly the horse and buggy in the beginning, and later on I took the car more often.

JB: were courtships different in those days?

RS: we went to dances, a lot of barn dances, that's where we met, and picture shows, movies

JB: did you go into Michigan City for the movies

RS: yes, there were 3 theatres, Orpheum was one, Starland, and the Lido now, but I'm not sure what it was then. We had a lot of get-togethers, company, dinners with families, definitely more togetherness than today

JB: you moved off the farm, into Michigan City in '26, is that right? Did you get a better job?

RS: no, I had the job in '23 at the shop, at Sullivan, we built our own home, a new home 2 blocks from the VFW at Ohio and Coolspring. We lived there 16 years and were the only house in that area and now it's built up solid.

JB: when you worked at the factory was the pay good

RS: well, at that time we thought it was. I quit working for the P & H Crane Company, put up 11 cranes, their factory still exists in Milwaukee, then I hired out to Sullivan's as a millwright for 65 cents an hour.

JB: what did you do?

RS: that was just general work, whatever the superintendent assigned, that was it.

JB: did you operate machines

RS: no not at that time, mostly it was moving coal up to the coal pile, running a switch engine, working in the boilers, yard work, or doing something in the plant, like loading machinery.

JB: who owned the factory?

RS: The Sullivan Machinery Co, they have 2 plants, they moved from 1826 W Lake St to Michigan City and the other one is in Clermont, New Hampshire, in Sullivan County.

Both plants were later purchased by Joy Manufacturing.

JB: were the working conditions good there

RS: better than they are now, it was a family factory, most of the people that came here from Chicago were Swedes, Norwegians, some Polish, it was all like family.

JB: any talk of unions at that time

RS: no I don't even know when those talks started, maybe in the early 30's, after the recession

JB: how many years did you work at Sullivan?

RS: 41-1/2, started in July of '23, till end of October 1964

JB: did you get laid off during the depression,

RS: no it was real tough, but sometimes I only worked 1 2 or 3 days a month, 7 hours a day

JB: was that enough to keep you going?

Mrs. RS: no, but we did.

RS: We had too, we survived, we kept our home. The bank said keep up on the interest, if you can't pay that come see us and we will help. We had a garden, we cut wood, didn't have to buy any coal, the folks helped out with eggs milk and other things. We walked to town when we needed to.

JB: did your job change, from millwright

RS: oh yes, first I was assigned to work the clamshell on the coal pile which I mentioned before, took care of the coal supply to keep the plant warm, to make electricity, I ran the switch engine, repaired trucks and equipment, then I was assigned to the assembly floor, then the machine shop where I ran lathes. I worked in the experimental department for several years, experimenting with all the machinery that was coming up. I did 13 years of field service work, working on machinery out in the field. When I finished with that I was assigned to be assistant foreman

JB: how many employees did the factory have at the time?

RS: approximately 325 in the shop, about 600 when I retired.

JB: what did the employees do after work, like now, to go out and have a beer?

RS: no, it was different then, when you were on the job you were there to work, on time, nobody had coffee break, everyone just wanted to work hard and do a good job. Everybody was proud to be doing a good job

JB: how did the union come about?

RS: I think it was because of wages, but it was always if you did a good job consistently the wage increases would come automatically.

JB: was the community politically active in the late 20's

RS: I would say so, maybe not so open as today, but politics has always been a big thing in Michigan City from what I know, there was a mayor and a commission

JB: how did that work, there was a mayor, a council and an additional party that kept them in line

RS: there was no mayor at the, just the commission

JB: any scandals back then

RS: I don't know, maybe on a smaller scale

JB: were there any other political parties besides Democrats and Republicans

RS: not that I know of

JB: Entertainment, did you ever go to the Chateauguay

RS: yes, that was so long ago, we haven't had any for years. We had the circus in a big tent

JB: is the circus better now than then

RS: there are better acts, the acrobats are better

JB: any vaudeville

RS: there used to be a theatre, think the name was Grand, on Michigan Blvd near where the Jaymar Ruby factory

JB: what kind of acts

RS: dancing, singing, acrobatics, a little bit of everything

JB: did they throw cabbages

RS: no I don't remember that

JB: what about the Oasis ballroom what happened there

RS: big crowds, they had booths all around the sides, a very festive atmosphere, everybody looked forward to it.

Mrs. RS: we couldn't afford to go very often

JB: what kind of dancing was there?

RS: waltz, foxtrot, I don't think there was any square dancing, not with that kind of music

Mrs. RS: not in the Oasis

JB: did you ever attend the Sky View (?) arena

RS: no, because of the price, I remember the arena, out on 2nd Street, they had fights there, it didn't last, the prices were too high or people just didn't have any money, they tore it out.

JB: back to industry again, do you remember what kind of efforts the Chamber of Commerce put out to attract industry to Michigan City

RS: the reason Sullivan Machinery came to Michigan City was because of the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Walter Greenabaum was head of the Chamber of Commerce, and he was the instigator to get them to come here.

JB: did he bring others to town too

RS: yes, but I can't remember who they were. At the time the Chamber wanted to tell the companies what kind of wages to pay, but they companies said they would pay what wages they wanted to.

JB: did you belong to any fraternal organizations

RS: no never

JB; were there many blacks in Michigan City in the 20's

RS: no not very many....very few.....about 5 colored people who had jobs in Chicago with Sullivan came with the company.

JB: did they get along with the other workers, any discrimination?

RS: no, they got along well

JB: what about the KKK

RS: they were active,

Mrs. RS: they had a parade once,

RS: after that they just faded out.

JB: what changes stand out in your mind through the years in Michigan City?

RS: one bad thing was the fire at Pullman yards, burned it out completely. A 500,000 dollar fire. A windstorm that blew out the west wall of the prison and a bunch of prisoners got out. John Dillinger escaped from prison

JB; what differences are in the workers now from when you were hired

RS: most were family men, now the younger generation, about 50%, is single and younger. Us old timers have a club, after you have worked for the company for 20 years, you belong. We have a dinner coming up soon at Red Lantern, there are about 450 members.

JB: what year did Sullivan change to Joy?

RS: Joy also manufactures mining machinery, so Joy bought them to get Sullivan products too. Joy already had 3 or 4 other plants, one in Franklin PA, and Pittsburgh,

They now have about 27 plants, I don't know what year they buy took place.

JB: when you became a foreman, how did that affect your work at the plant?

RS: I think I got the job because I knew machinery and the work.

(End of tape)