

BH: The following interview was conducted with Marie Lawson on behalf of the Putnam County Museum for the Transportation Oral History Project. It took place on January 11, 2006 at 601 Apple Street. The interviewer was Brooke Havlick.

BH: Okay, to start out with, what kind of transportation did you use most often and why?

ML: Well, when we started out, we only had horse and buggy and then bicycles because my father used to ride a three-wheel bicycle. Then from there, we went to train. We had three train tracks here - the Monon, Pennsylvania... In fact, the highway, Veterans Highway, that used to be the Pennsylvania Railroad and then we had New York Central and then we had Greyhound would come through here. It would come through every day and it would come from St. Louis to Indianapolis. Then we'd change to Indianapolis and get something else. Then we had the trailway and they would come through every hour. It would come through from Terre Haute to Indianapolis. Then there was a little bus called Helen Siskel was the lady that drove it and it would come from Bloomington, Indiana and go to Crawfordsville.

And that's the three that we had.

BH: And which one did you use most often?

ML: I've done the trailway. Trailway because see you could ride the trailway right to Indianapolis because there wasn't that many shopping centers. When I went to beauty school, I had to ride the trailway because that was the only way to get there.

BH: How long did it take to travel from town to town?

ML: Well, from here to Indianapolis it would take an hour on the trailway. But in a car you can do it in 45 minutes. But back then they didn't have the speed limit like they do now.

BH: Okay, I'm going to move on to just like walking and that'll be our first mode of transportation. That's where we're going to start. What places did you visit accessible by walking?

ML: Every place because we didn't, I didn't, we were poor. We didn't have a car and we would go to school. We'd walk to school in the morning. School took up at 8:15. We'd get out at 11:30. We'd walk home, eat our lunch, turn around, walk back to school and get out of school at quarter to four. Then we'd walk home. We had to walk to town. Where the town is now, that's where all our stores used to be. And we'd walk. We didn't have Walmart and all that. That was all country out there. But all our transportation was more poor people. We walked. We didn't mind walking.

BH: So then how did you get from town to town?

ML: Like when we went out of town?.

BH: Yeah.

ML: Trailway bus because we had...

BH: Before that even.

ML: Before the trailway was there? Well, let's see. I didn't get out of town. I didn't get it. The buses would bring the ball players because my kids always played basketball. They would bring them in. That's the only thing. And very few people had cars. So bus was our main transportation. The Monon train, it would go from Louisville, Kentucky, stop in Bloomington, then come through here. You know where the Monon restaurant is now? Well, that used to be the Monon train station right there. Then it would take you on to Hammond, Indiana. Then from Hammond, we'd have to take a streetcar and go into Chicago. So that's our transportation.

BH: How often did you walk to hang out?

ML: Well, let's see. We didn't have too many places. People's houses. We had lots of house parties. Then after my kids got older, their grandparents lived in Bloomington. So I would take them. He would work for the Monon train station, and I would put the kids on the train here, and they'd go to Bloomington, and their grandfather and grandmother would pick them up.

BH: What often did you walk on? Like, were the roads just all gravel then, or..?

ML: Well, no -

BH: Did you have sidewalks?

ML: Some parts of town had sidewalks, but we would call this was in city. We called it in city time. We had sidewalks, but when we had friends that lived in the country, then we walked out by the airport. Lots of people lived out that way. You know, I still don't have sidewalks. But the mayor, the new mayor, has put some sidewalks down here. But this was considered the poor end of town, South End. That's where most of the black people lived. Back there then, we couldn't live anywhere in Greencastle. So we had few. When we used to play in the alleys, and I remember our yard being nothing but gravel, and I'd get out there and sweep it, call myself cleaning up. But that's about all.

BH: Were the roads downtown like brick?

ML: No, I can't remember. We had some brick streets but they were down here in South End.

Yeah, then when the interurban came through, we had some brick sidewalks up on Seminary Street. But it was, I can't remember too much about the brick.

BH: Did you feel safe walking? Oh yes, I really felt, because when I start, I went to beauty school in 78, and I would ride the bus.

I'd leave here at four o'clock, ride the bus to Indianapolis, to the bus station, walk to the Indiana Avenue to school, get out at 10, and 11 o'clock I caught a bus back to Greencastle. And I would walk from the beauty school to the bus station, no fear at all, but I wouldn't do it now. And then I lived here, and the bus station was up where Walden Inn is right now.

And I'd walk home at night by myself, didn't think nothing about it.

BH: Was there a street lighting or anything like that?

ML: Yeah, there were street, oh we always had street lights. We always played under the street lights.

BH: Was it gas or was it?

ML: You mean? Like how were they? It was electric, electric street lights.

BH: Did they have electric lights?

ML: We had lamps, or kerosene. In fact, I got one in there now, kerosene lamps. I think there's still some streets in Greencastle that don't have electric lights.

BH: Really?

ML: In fact, there's none out here. Did you see a light right there on the corner when you came in?

BH: I don't think so.

ML: Yeah, we had lights.

BH: So your parents felt safe about you walking?

ML: Oh yeah.

BH: Okay, now we're going to move on to bikes. Did you ever ride a bike?

ML: Yes, yes, yes.

BH: And for what purpose?

ML: I would go to the store, like I said, most of the stores were uptown on the square. And my daddy had an old three-wheel bike, and that was the joy of our life to get to ride that bicycle. Yeah, I rode a bike, still can - I don't know.

BH: So when did you learn how to ride a bike?

ML: Oh gosh, I was in my teens, and I used to roller skate places too.

BH: Oh really?

ML: Yeah, I learned how to roller skate. We used to roller skate downtown.

BH: Was that pretty big among like teenagers?

ML: Oh yeah, we roller skate, because we schooled over in the tennis, DePauw had a tennis court, and everybody would go to the tennis court and get to roller skate.

BH: So did all your friends' families have bikes too?

ML: Oh no, no.

BH: You were lucky?

ML: Yeah, the reason why my daddy had bikes, because he worked, he did janitorial work, and he rode, that was his transportation going to work. And then he would go to the store, he had a great big basket, I don't know what he used, a big basket on the front, and we could carry some of the groceries home in the basket.

BH: Um, how far do you think you could travel in a day with a bike? I mean, did you travel from town to town?

ML: No, not on a bike, no.

BH: Um, do you think bikes have changed a lot over your lifetime?

ML: Yeah, because they got faster bikes. I don't think I've ever seen, your lady's seen a three-wheel bike, have you?

BH: No, I haven't.

ML: They had a big wheel in the back, two little wheels, I mean a big wheel in the front and little wheels in the back, and they had a big basket on the front.

BH: Did you ever witness a bike accident or have a bike accident?

ML: Fell off them many a time.

BH: Okay, we're going to move to buses. I know we already talked about them a little bit, but that's okay, so we kind of repeat ourselves. So we know you've rode the bus, and where were the, I know you said the Walden Inn was one place.

ML: The bus station is center where we are right now, used to be the old bus station.

BH: It's the, what center?

ML: The Walden Inn Center, I'm talking about the family community center. That used to be the old bus station. They moved it where it is now. There used to be houses along there. They tore all the houses down and moved the bus station there.

BH: Um, where did you go on the bus? I went to Indianapolis, and I went to Franklin, Indiana, and the bus didn't [?]. That trailway didn't go to Bloomington.

They had a, like I told you, we had a special bus that come from Bloomington to Greencastle, and from Greencastle to Crawfordsville.

BH: Was that mostly for like the college kids, or did anyone?

ML: Anybody. You had to pay, I get a little bit to ride, get a ticket and ride the bus.

BH: Do you remember how much it cost?

ML: It wasn't, wasn't too much. I'd say about eight dollars to go to Indianapolis, but then before then we had the trail- or the interurban.

BH: I think we have questions about that.

ML: Okay, all right.

BH: Yeah, we do. Okay, um, so how often did you use the bus? You used the bus every day?

ML: Every day when I was going to go to beauty school for a whole year. It took me a whole year to get my hours in.

BH: And then other than that?

ML: Other than that, you go, like if you want to go shopping, you go to Terre Haute, Indianapolis, or even if you want to go visit your friends. I had family in Indianapolis. I would ride the bus to Indianapolis, and they would ride the bus to Greencastle, and then sometimes the Greyhound bus would come through here, but not as often as the trailway.

BH: Did you ever have any problems with the buses, like breaking down or anything like that?

ML: No, no. The only problem I had with the bus was my husband was in the service, and we were going back to the south. We had, it was prejudice. We had to sit on the back seat. If the back seat was full, you got, you had to get off.

BH: That was in Putnam County, it was like that?

ML: Oh, yeah. No, no, no. Oh, it was from Bloomington, Bloomington. I think he was stationed Fort Knox, Kentucky, but I remember we got on the bus in Bloomington, and me being from the country, I wasn't used, from here, I wasn't used to that, and the back seat was full. That's where the soldiers... and the bus driver told me I had to sit on the back seat, else get off, and I remember riding my, sitting on my husband's lap all the way to Kentucky.

BH: But, so there wasn't any racial segregation in Putnam County?

ML: No, not in Putnam County.

BH: How do you think the buses affected commuting at Putnam County? Was there a lot of people that commuted?

ML: Yeah, that's what, because very few people had cars. We had cabs here then, too.

BH: Really?

ML: We had cabs. It was Stoner Cab and Crawford's Cab.

BH: It was Crawford's?

ML: Crawford's, that's the name of it, and that was a 50 cents. You can go downtown or anywhere in town for 50 cents.

BH: Downtown Greencastle?

ML: Uh-huh, downtown Greencastle.

BH: Last question about buses is, how do you think closing of the buses affected the community?

ML: It affected a lots of people, because there's lots of older people that can't drive cars, and there's lots of people that couldn't afford cars. And like right now, if there was a bus, I would get out of town more, but I can't see at night to drive. So yeah, I think, in fact, even we had cabs around here it would help.

BH: Especially for the older community?

ML: Yeah, for the older community.

BH: Okay, now we're going to move on to cars. Who was the first person you knew who owned a car?

ML: My grandfather, his old Model-T Ford, and I can remember that when they got ready to change the car, the tire, my two uncles would hold the car up. They were real light. Hold them up and change the car, change the tire. Yeah, my grandfather lived on old Sycamore Street. They had a Model T Ford. They didn't have all these cars like they had now.

BH: Only a few choices.

ML: Uh-huh. And you had to almost be rich to have a car. I remember gas was 10, because gas was down.

BH: Do you remember what year he got it? Or what era at least?

ML: I'm 83, so I was born in 23. So back in 23, 1923.

BH: Still pretty early, though. What was your family's first car?

ML: Oh, daddy had an old truck, old truck, because he did construction work. And we would ride in the back, and him and mom and the baby would ride in the front. It was a truck.

BH: So how old were you, do you think?

ML: Oh, I was about 12, 12 years old.

BH: How far could you travel in a day in a car? Or what's the furthest you remember traveling?

ML: You don't mean without stopping?

BH: Well, yeah, not overnight, but...

ML: We could travel. We could go to Indianaopolis and back in a car. We used to go to Bloomington and back in a car. We have been, I have been to Cleveland, Ohio to drive in a car, but we always had to stop, you know, get gas or something.

BH: Right, right, right. Okay, and now, like modern day, like how far?

ML: Can I drive in a car? I can travel from here to the center. That's the only farther I can go.

BH: Well, a few years back, like did you travel farther than that, like because of limitations on the car?

ML: Well, yeah, because I've been to California.

BH: In a car?

ML: In a car, yeah. And when DeWayne graduated from New Mexico, we went to New Mexico in a car. We stopped at night, you know. Yeah, as far as I've been in a car, I'll say California.

BH: Okay. Do you remember getting your driver's license?

ML: Yes, I do. I remember it was, uh, I would have my driver's license. I was about 42 before I learned how to drive a car, and I think I failed the first time. Let's see. I don't remember. I didn't have a car. I think I borrowed somebody's car.

BH: So you had to use your own car?

ML: Oh, yeah, you had to drive your own car to get your driver's license.

BH: And then there was a written and a driving test?

ML: Oh, yeah, written. We had to take a written test, driver's test. The lady would come in here from Danville to give us our test. They didn't have them right here in Greencastle.

BH: So did you ever drive without one previous to that?

ML: Probably did. Probably did. See, my husband, I learned how to drive before he did. I probably did. You know, when I learned how to drive, I didn't have a license. We had to have a beginner's permit first, and I probably did, yeah. They can't put me in jail now.

BH: Do you remember when the first stoplight came to town?

ML: No. They didn't have them all over town. We still don't have them all over town. We just have them downtown. No, I don't remember, but we didn't have them all over town.

BH: Do you remember, like, when your grandpa had a car?

ML: There wasn't any stoplight. There wasn't any speed limit. I remember when I drove it one time, they didn't have a speed limit. Just, you know, later years that they started the speed limits thing.

BH: So there wasn't any, like, police force for cars back then?

ML: No, no, sure wasn't.

BH: Okay. Did you ever take, like, a vacation by car?

ML: Let's see. After I got married, my husband had people in Cleveland, and we'd take the kids and go to Cleveland, Ohio. Yeah.

BH: Do you remember what year, like, that was?

ML: Oh, let's see. DeWayne, uh, Steven is 62, so figure that out.

BH: Okay, I will later.

ML: 62. He was a baby.

BH: Okay, um, how reliable were the cars?

ML: Oh, they were pretty good. Yeah, the only thing, uh, they, and I remember the cars, when you have a flat tire, they had a pump that you pumped the air in. You couldn't go to the filling station to get it filled up. Then you'd carry a pump in the back, in the back, uh, trunk, and you take it, put it on your tire, and then you'd pump, put the air in. You don't remember that?

BH: No, not quite. Um, how do you think cars affected commuting outside of the county? The same with buses?

ML: There's, yeah, I don't, everybody had a car. They could go where they wanted to and everything.

BH: Um, how important were cars when you were a teenager?

ML: Well, because we couldn't afford, we didn't have any cars when we were teenagers. I can't see, I can't remember any teenager, when I was coming up, had a car. Maybe they could get their family, their father or mother's car, but we didn't, we didn't have cars. Not, not with us.

BH: Not like it is today?

ML: No, not, oh gosh, no, we couldn't drive to school. They, you couldn't drive a car to school.

BH: Okay. Um, so this kind of doesn't, I can ask this question, do you remember what the like cool cars were at all or?

ML: Model A Ford, that was, that's what it was. Model A Ford.

BH: Is that your favorite car or?

ML: I didn't, I don't think I'd have had every car except a Cadillac or something like that or ordinary car I've had in my lifetime. I never owned a Cadillac or Jaguar or anything like that.

BH: Me either. Okay, um, we're going to switch to roads. We talked about them a little bit, but we'll just talk a little more about them. Um, how did roads change, do you think, when cars became more popular?

ML: They paved them. It used to be, there'd be, uh, you know, gravel roads. All the roads were gravel and later on they start paving the roads.

BH: Um, what were the country roads like when you first?

ML: Gravel too.

BH: Gravel?

ML: Gravel too.

BH: Do you remember when they started to pave those or?

ML: No.

BH: Do you think they're better or worse now?

ML: Oh, well, in the wintertime some of them are worse because they have those big chuck holes and things.

BH: So, um, how safe were those roads back then?

ML: Well, I don't think they had as many accidents as they do now because these kids, uh, not only kids, but grown people take these curves and things at a high speed. I don't think we had that many accidents.

BH: Um, did the weather ever affect how you travel on the roads?

ML: Well, you know, it had to because, uh, we had those tires that you put... They're not like they were now and, uh, yeah, the weather would, and the cars were light, you know, light in weight. They were light. Yeah, the weather would have a lot to do with it.

BH: So there wasn't, like, do you remember when a plowing system actually came through for the snow or anything like that?

ML: Gosh, it was after I started driving, way after I started driving.

BH: So when that happened, you just didn't go out?

ML: No, you just couldn't. In fact, we had a snow, so one time, my daughter lived across the street, I couldn't even get across the street. And even with the, with the snow plows and things, the country roads, you couldn't go out in the country because they didn't go in the country. It had just been city roads.

BH: Do you remember, um, anyone in the country like that really affecting them if they had to stay in their homes for so long that they couldn't get into town to get food, or...?

ML: Lots of people. Lots of people lived in the country. I didn't have any friends, but one thing, we didn't have any snow days for the kids at school. The school bus, like they didn't have the least little snow, they have but we didn't have that. The school bus picked up the kids. We didn't have snow days.

BH: Um, okay, now I'm going to talk a little bit about Highway 40 and the National Road. How did the improvement of Highway 40 affect travel in and out of the county?

ML: It helped a whole lot because, uh, we didn't have the highway here. We had the back highway, you know, back by Walmart. That used to be our highway. And then they built this, uh, new, new highway. Then they built 70. They didn't have 70 then, so it affected and helped a lot.

BH: Um, what types of businesses or restaurants or gas stations do you remember, like, developing on Highway 40?

ML: Let's see, Highway 40. Uh, there was, out this way, there wasn't any stores and things along there. They'd all, I mean, McDonald's and all that, they came later, later in the years. I just don't remember.

BH: Do you remember, like, any gas, there's probably a lot of gas stations.

ML: Oh yeah, we had, oh yeah, we had lots of gas stations. I remember the main one was Hubbard had a gas station right here in town. And, uh, let's see, there was a gas station downtown, but there wasn't any gas station out here. When we get to Five Miles, there was always a gas station out there as you go to Indianapolis.

BH: Do you remember, um, like, how gas stations have changed? Can you talk a little bit about that?

ML: Let's see, how have they changed? Well, they pumped the gas. We didn't have, we didn't pump our own gas. And if you get your oil, they changed your oil and checked your oil, and they don't do that. You can't get anybody to check your oil and things now. Then they would always have a little place where you get canned air or, uh, you know, little restaurants in there. Then they had, always had a place outside where you could put air, later on, put air in your tires.

But I don't think they even do that anymore, do they? No, no, they, I think they have some, some, some gas stations have those. So did that, so that can be still at the stores, and did they have public restrooms there or anything like that?

ML: Yeah, they'd have a public restroom, but, uh, we didn't pump our own gas. We always had somebody to pump it.

BH: That'd be nice. Okay, um, and how about I-70? What changes did you notice in Putnam County as a whole, and the result of I-70?

ML: I never did like I-70, but, uh.

BH: Do you have a reason for not liking it?

ML: Well, because it's so, it was so, uh, how could, it wasn't any place, like if you had a flat tire or something, there wasn't, there wasn't any filling stations and things along I-70. And there wasn't too many homes on I-70 either. It was kind of hard. I still don't like I-70 driving.

BH: Um, so did you notice, did it change anymore in Putnam County once that developed, or?

ML: Well, there's still not too many restrooms and things, and unless you go into a town, now I think from here to Belleville, there's no place to stop. I think the first place that you can really stop is Plainfield. Because if you have a broken down car or something, unless you got a cell phone, that you'd have to go to Plainfield.

BH: Um, so those two roads, did that make you, you know, you feel any more connected to the rest of the state? You could get around the state easier? Well, 70 would take you from here to California, yeah. Is that what you took to California, or? Yeah, yeah, but now 40 would take us to Indianapolis, and then, excuse me, Brazil. That's, that's what 40 does.

BH: Okay. Um, let me talk a little bit about the airplanes. Have you ever used?

ML: Yeah, I've flown to California on an airplane.

BH: Okay. But I've never used these. Right, you probably flew out of Indianapolis or something.

ML: Uh-huh, out of Indianapolis, yeah.

BH: So when was your first time you ever flew on an airplane?

ML: Oh, first time was after DeWayne went to California. I was 67 years old, yeah.

BH: And so you've never used Putnam County, or do you know?

ML: No, no, no, no.

BH: Do you know anyone who ever uses it?

ML: No, I have a cousin that lives in Bloomington. In fact, he's going to speak suddenly at Gobin Church, Marvin Chandler, Reverend Marvin Chandler. He used to fly in this little airport out here.

BH: Was it a private plane?

ML: Yeah, he had his own private plane. I think that's how most of the planes there.

BH: How do you think, um, the people of the county feel about the airport?

ML: Well, I don't think they, because there's not that many airports, airplanes come in here. I very seldom hear airplanes, do you? No, I very seldom. I don't think it bothers them.

I know they like that new, uh, air, uh, thing out there, you know, for a restaurant, Dixie Chopper restaurant. Yeah, I think everybody likes that because it's a nice place, but I've never heard anybody complain about the airplane worrying them so they couldn't sleep or anything. Right.

But I don't hear, I don't know when I have heard an airplane go over here. Yeah, I don't think they come around too often. I don't think so either.

BH: Okay, um, we're talking about trains. You know, you've ridden a train, and do you just want to say again what local trains you?

ML: Well, the Monon would take us from, they had the station there where the Monon, uh, grill is. You know where that is? Well, that used to be the Monon station right there. It would take you from, it would come in from Louisville, Kentucky, and they had two trains a day. It would be one early in the morning, then one late at night, coming here about 12 o'clock at night. And, uh, you would go to Hammond, then you'd take, take a bus or streetcar from Hammond into Chicago. Then the New York Central would only stop when they had a flight. Then the Pennsylvania station was right down there.

BH: What do you mean by right down there?