

Transcript: Jack Rawlings Anderson

Transcribed by Kristen Muenz

Researched by Karin Page and Joyce Baer

Interviewed by Earl Mann, November 7, 1989

MANN: November the 7th, 1989. This is Earl Mann. I'm taping for the Dearborn County History Project, the oral history project, and Jack Anderson, a longtime resident of Greendale and Lawrenceburg, has been gracious enough to let me come into his home. He was his own businessman here in Lawrenceburg, so we're going to talk to him just a little while about the events, especially the 30s. Jack, tell us a little bit about yourself, and about your parents if you'd like.

ANDERSON: Well, I'm Jack R. Anderson. I was born in Republic, Missouri, in 1911, July the 11th. My grandparents, E.T. Anderson – Elija Teague Anderson was his name – he's buried there in Republic and his home was on the National Register. And at this time, he has a nephew – well, it's really a son of a niece of his, living in the home, and he's gotten permission to rebuild it somewhat for them so it'll be more modern. I buried them all there: my father, my grandfather, my father and my brother, all the same name, are buried side by side in the Republic cemetery. My grandfather gave five or seven streets, I believe it is, in the town, and all the school buildings are on his property and so is the cemetery. So he's pretty prominent in Republic, Missouri, but out here his prominence isn't known.

MANN: Jack, as an early businessman in the early 1930s, tell us a little bit about the economy of the area for the small businessman.

ANDERSON: Well the economy was good here, all through the years I was in business. I wasn't in business until 1937. Actually, it belonged to Hilda Wright and Kelly Fish, and I met them during the flood. I put their little shop back into operation. Ralph Patton had promised to do it if I'd help him, but he never helped me at all. I did it all, and put it out in the barn that belonged to a Mr. Cook on Ridge Avenue. It's now Linda Moon's property. I put it back in that barn and three days later they asked me to move them, and I moved them down onto High Street. And the total charge for both moves was 50 dollars. [LAUGHS] The economy was good in those days. There was lots of wealth here, lots of money. Even the workers working for the distilleries made good money, and the economy was very good.

MANN: Jack, you said you came here in 1932 – before the distilleries were running, I believe. Did the businesspeople at that time – did there seem to be plenty of work for people at that time, before the distilleries operated?

ANDERSON: I wasn't aware that that was before they operated. I wasn't here very long. I didn't learn a lot. I met Art and Verna Siebert¹, the first people I met here besides the Pattons, and I wasn't aware that the distilleries weren't operating. Although the Squibb family came from Missouri, and I hunted on the Squibb property in Missouri a lot of times. [Hunter Cohen?] is there, and he's the brother to the man that had the distillery here in Lawrenceburg.²

MANN: In your business, Jack, did the customers come to you, or how did you make contact with them?

ANDERSON: Well, my customers came to me and I came to them. I travelled seven counties in my typewriter work. At first I was only a printer, but that wasn't keeping me busy enough, so I went into the office equipment business. And then I bought the building on East Center Street which is now part of the – at that time it was a home furniture who had just started after the war. And I bought their building and kept them. So the press office built them a new building – they were going to buy the building I was in. Irving Laughery³ was supposed to move in the building with his little dime store off of Walnut Street, but I think he really used me to get ownership of the other business in town. And it didn't matter because I let a laundry in there and later on I had to buy the laundry. And I ran the laundry and the Peerless Printing and the Peerless Office Equipment and the typewriter repair, all myself. And I took Dale McLeaster as a partner and got relieved of some of the printing. My wife and he were great printers and they liked it, and it left me free to do all these other things. And then I started building a lot for the church and the library and so forth.

MANN: Tell us a little bit about the library. You were on the library board for a long time and acquiring some property and helping build that.

ANDERSON: I was on the library board for 25 years with the principal of the grade school. Mr. Mack – er, Mr. Harrison called me and said they put me on the library board and I wanted to know why because I

¹ William Arthur Seibert and Verna Seibert (per the obituaries held in the LPL Genealogy Room)

² Anderson may be mistaken here. According to Find a Grave, there are no Squibbs by that name buried in Missouri.

³ Spelling of surname here taken from the Laughery Hotel / Grocery located on 3rd Street in Aurora per the 1929 directory for Aurora (held in the LPL Genealogy Room). No record of an "Irving Laughery" was found, however, so he may be an unrelated resident with a different spelling of this surname (e.g. Laury, Lawry)

never read books at that time at all. And he said, “We have something else in mind for you,” and I was chairman of the building committee that first meeting. And the library at that time was small, and we put all their books in the little house over next to the Methodist church, where my wife had taught Sunday school. I tore that house down when I built the new Sunday school near the scout cabin.

And I got all the land around the library vacated. The alley is vacated now, however I made them leave it open for the public’s use until they wanted to use it for a parking lot. And I built the little stand with the grass in it after I went off the board. After I’d built the library, why, I went off the board and built the garden wall and the garden. And I bought the Frederick House⁴ and the old Barrott Home⁵ and then bought the Reagan Hotel⁶ so that we’d have a place for parking and for future building. And they’ve now built on all that property that I’ve bought west of the library. I put a complete heating system, and two complete restrooms, and an office, and a charge counter in the old library. I thought that that would be permanent and that they’d build a room on the west side. But they’ve remodeled all of it and rebuilt the whole thing so it’s quite a library now. It’s good enough for New York City, you might say. Madison and Batesville have nothing on us at this time about a library.

MANN: You mentioned the Methodist church. I know you were active in it, and your wife taught there. Tell us a little something about, say, the religious practices of the people in the 30s, in the Depression, as compared to, say, now, when the economy is fairly good. Can you see any difference?

ANDERSON: I can see a terrible difference. In the days when I met my wife, church was the in thing. Everybody went to church, children and all. There was probably 30-some in Hilda’s little class. And now they’re trying to start a Sunday school in the building I built - and I built a two story building with lots of space for twelve classes. And now they have no classes. They’re trying to start one or two classes now. I remember when Hilda retired from her teaching, the little girl up the street took her class and named it the “Moose Juice” class, if you can believe that! That’s what she named the class, and it all went to pieces, the whole thing. I had air conditioning in Hilda’s room, and she had a nice room, a nice display there, religious saints. Church was quite the thing in the old days, and now it’s gotten to be almost nothing. Nobody bothers about it anymore.

⁴ Likely the home of Edward C. Frederick, listed as the owner of a home at 141 Mary Street in the 1929 and 1930 directories (held by the LPL Genealogy Room). This location is near the current site of the public library as Anderson describes.

⁵ Several Barrotts lived in Lawrenceburg, and the family owned a hardware store in Lawrenceburg as well (H. E & Sons Hardware and Stoves, at 311 Walnut St). Given the location, Anderson is probably referring here to the property of Mrs. Eneas Barrott, who resided at 134 Mary St. according to the 1929, 1930, and 1931 directories (held by the LPL Genealogy Room).

⁶ The Reagan Hotel was located at 117 W. High St.

MANN: Along with the church, you were close to education – the teachers and principals of the schools here, the superintendents. What about education, say, of the youth at that time? Did you notice many of them quitting to take jobs because of the Depression?

ANDERSON: No, not too many. I called Mr. Mack one day and told him I'd like to hire a boy to clean my presses. He sent me a boy over, and the next night the boy had big gauntlet gloves on. I asked him what the gloves were for and he says his mother didn't want him to get ink on his hands. So I told him, "Well, maybe this is not the job for you," and I called Mr. Mack and said, "Can you send me another boy? This boy didn't want to get ink on his hands, and you're gonna get ink on your hands in a print shop." So he sent me a little black boy, Nathan Childers⁷. He worked for me for about 25 years – he's still working for me. He still does everything I want to have done, only I pay him 5 dollars an hour now and I used to pay him less than fifty cents an hour. [LAUGHS]

But things are different today in labor too. I didn't notice many kids quitting school. They just didn't quit school in those days. They went through high school. They didn't go to college like they do now, but they didn't quit school. Not for jobs. If they get a job, they got the job, but it had to be after school, on Saturday and Sunday. I never got Nate steady until he got out of school.

MANN: How about social clubs and service clubs? Like sororities, alliance clubs, and lodges. You were active in some of those. Could you tell us a little bit about some of those?

ANDERSON: Well, the Lions Club and the Corner, I belonged to the Lions Club and the Corner both. And – [LAUGHS] – I hate to say this where it can be repeated, but I told them when I resigned that I had a bigger program on my own than they had as an organization. And I did have! Of course at that time I started the playgrounds under Bob Baker, the mayor, and I was quite busy with the building around town. Especially in the section around the library. I built about all of that: the parking lots and the church and the Sunday school and the scout cabin, all of those things I built. We rode donkeys to the Greendale building – I remember we played donkey baseball to get the logs to build that building. ...what else was it you was asking me?

MANN: What about some other recreation? Besides the clubs, besides donkey baseball. What else kind of recreation did you have?

ANDERSON: There wasn't any recreation here until Bob Baker put me on the playground commission, and then I built eight playgrounds and two swimming pools. We built the Tate Street Shelter House and I put windows in it later on, and taught the welder out here in Greendale. He was a Lawrenceburg boy at

⁷ Likely Nathan Allen Childers, died 5 April 1995 per the obituaries held in the LPL Genealogy Room.

that time. Ralph Patton had cut all the bars for me, and we taught Andy Rolls⁸ to weld, and Andy Rolls welded up all the windows on the Tate Street Playground building for me. He went to the South Pole with Admiral Byrd three times as a welder, so that's one good deed I remember I did, and I've always been proud of that. He learned to weld for us. When Arlie Baer⁹ and I built the first swimming pool, we decided to build another one and build a little bigger. We built a better one and I got the boat trip away from the Business Friends Club at one year. And then it burned. I made \$1500 that year and I hired Pat O'Neal¹⁰ for the summer, and Bud Bateman¹¹. We were trying to give them jobs in the summer, keep them here. We didn't want them to get away from us. They were good men.

MANN: Can you tell us about some of your experiences as announcer for these games? I used to listen to you quite a lot, in the high school gym and other places.

ANDERSON: Well, when we started football, I started football here. But I'll never forget the night I went over to the board and told them, "I wanna start football," and they laughed at me and said, "This is basketball country! Football'll never go over here." And I said, "Now let me tell you what I'm afraid of: I'm afraid football will de-emphasize basketball to the point where we won't have much basketball. Football'll pay for all your sports before you're done. It'll be the biggest sport you got." And they couldn't believe that. They only let me start six man, but they didn't have any money, so I had to go out to raise the money to buy the equipment. And since then I've been buying it every year! Bob told me that. Bob Myers told me that he had to buy 40 new helmets the other day and he took it out of my money! [LAUGHS]

Then I paid \$500 to get us in the Hall of Fame up at – someplace they're building the Hall of Fame, and it cost \$500 to get a school enrolled, and Bob asked me for the 500 and I gave it to him. I already put 100 in for myself. Sports was the thing then, and they are now. In fact the matter is they've overdone the sports, I think. And when I endowed the school for Mr. Couch, who I consider as the best man we ever had, I did fix it so they couldn't go too far with sports. I put up \$10,000 for one sport, that's for the athletic scholarship, the boy and the girl that got the athletic scholarship, and I put \$20,000 up for the teachers who were outstanding.

We need outstanding teachers. We're not getting them anymore. Back in the old days, my teacher was on the National Debate Team, for the whole nation. She was married, an elderly woman, very homely, big and stout, and had two children in high school, and was a wonderful teacher. We had a lot of wonderful teachers in those days, but we don't have them anymore. Kids are going through college and getting these teaching jobs and they don't care a thing about the student, they don't care a thing about their future, all they care about is their own future. That's my opinion.

⁸ Surname spelling guessed based on a "Roll" family present in Lawrenceburg per the obituaries held in the LPL Genealogy Room. Spelling could also be Rowls, Roals.

⁹ Arlie J. Baer, died 17 December 1989 per the obituaries held in the LPL Genealogy Room.

¹⁰ Surname spelling guessed from O'Neals present in Dearborn county. Could also be O'Neil or O'Neill.

¹¹ George "Bud" Bateman, died 26 January 2006 per the obituaries held in the LPL Genealogy Room.

MANN: How about the Ohio River? It's changed quite a bit since that time in the 1930s. How important was the Ohio River then, for business, for recreation? Do you remember anything about that?

ANDERSON: Yes. The river was more important then than it is now, it seems. Although today they bring such large boats up with oil and other things on it, we have unloading places we didn't have in those days. They used to unload down on the end of Walnut Street. My wife used to tell me about it, said you could hear the beer barrels rolling around on Sunday. There was a lot of beer. 22 saloons here, in those days, they tell me.

I've been trustee of the Rees Estate now for 20 years, and they tell me they came down the river on a flatboat in 1803 and built a log house on what is now the Rees Estate. There are two houses on the estate. I've remodeled both of them. And last year was my best year. At the time I took it over, they weren't giving the church a dime, and last year I gave the church \$9,000. And the retired minister who lived in the house, I couldn't get a local man, so I went down to the conference and got a man from over in Riley, Indiana. He just left there and went back to Indianapolis to be near his son and the doctors, as he and his wife, neither one are very well. I'm gonna send him money this year. I told him I'd give him 7/12ths of whatever I had for him this year. I'll know that at the end of the year when I'm making up my report.

But the Rees Estate, they owned the entire valley from Lawrenceburg to Aurora – to Wilson Creek, rather. They had a land grant from Pennsylvania for 1200 acres, and they owned the entire valley. They had a ferry built on Tanner's Creek, and they had a toll road to Aurora. Hilda used to tell me about it. She was born in 1890, she told me about '99, it was, 1899 – she told me when they used to rent horses from the Fitch Funeral Home. Every Sunday they'd rent a horse and carriage and drive down to her grandmother's on lower Conwell in Aurora.

MANN: What is the location of these Fitch Houses now? Or, not the Fitch, but the Rees House?

ANDERSON: Well, the Rees House is located where the ramp is that goes down to the marina. That's all the Mary and Martha Rees land that I farmed. They have a tenant house there. They used to have a tenant living there. The first thing I did when I took that over, I didn't take that in, paid him rent for 13 years. I took that job to make money for the church. They left that farm to the church trustees, with the stipulation that 75% of the net income would be used to remodel the church and do repairs, and 25% would go to a retired minister who was living in the home. Now the first will they left was so that Reverend Wilson could live in the home, and after he was deceased his wife could live in the home. And then after he's gone, it's to be retired ministers from our church, and if none were available it had to be from our conference. Now this year, I've had every local man turn me down, that preached here, that are still living and retired. They all turned me down. So I got Reverend Gause's¹² name, I believe it is,

¹² Surname spelling guessed from a Gause present in the obituaries held in the LPL Genealogy Room. Could be Gauze, Gase, Gahs.

from Aurora, and I'm gonna try to get him in there. But right today, the house is empty, and I want to remodel but I'm too weak to do it. When my nephew gets here, he'll probably help me do some of it.

MANN: Now this house is the white frame house that sits –

ANDERSON: No, it's the big brick house.

MANN: Big brick house, yeah, before you turn to go down to the marina.

ANDERSON: Just as you turn – well, it's after you turn, after you get past the marina road. It's got a big front yard that runs down to the highway. And it's this side of Harry Pellman. In fact, they own Harry Pellman. They sold Harry Pellman ten and a half acres for \$3,000. And the church recently sold Greendale their 26 and a half acres for \$115,000. And Greendale just sold two and a half acres of that to the Port Agency over there, for \$17,500 an acre. So if you think the price isn't going up, that'll give you a good idea. [LAUGHS]

MANN: Jack, Lawrenceburg and Greendale, because of their location – I know you've been interested in this for a long time, in one local unit, one local government. You got any comments on that?

ANDERSON: Yes I have! I won't sleep in my grave very well until I know these two towns are to one. There's no excuse for the residential section of a town not being associated with its business section. I've never heard of such a thing in all my life. I realized Charlie Lowe¹³ did the wrong thing, but Chester Bielby¹⁴ was your attorney in Greendale, and he was defending Greendale against Lawrenceburg, and he told me before he died, he and I became great friends, he told me before he died he only had 73% of the signers in Greendale and if Lawrenceburg had continued they would've won the case. And I said, "Well, why'd you do that?" And he, Chad said, "You know I wanted Greendale and Lawrenceburg together as much as any man did, but when I have a job to do, I do the job." And I said, "I know that, Chad, and I admire you for it." If Chad had told everybody at that time what he told me later... and I never told it.

MANN: [MUFFLED] Quite a bit on this went down –

¹³ Charles A. Lowe, judge. Died 8 May 1962 per the obituaries held in the LPL Genealogy Room.

¹⁴ Chester E. Bielby, died 14 April 1987 per the obituaries held in the LPL Genealogy Room.

ANDERSON: I was working for Henkle¹⁵ when I came back here off the road. Mr. Henkle got mad at me. I always called him "Mr. Henkle," although I sometimes referred to him as Louie. He got a little mad at me because I drove from way down Brownstown, Texas¹⁶ all the way to Michigan, and Pat paid me my 40 cents an hour for driving. He said I should've paid them bus fare. And he told me it'd be a good time for me to go back to St. Louis, he was just being smart. I said, "I think I'll walk out of Seagram's and go to work." He said, "Yeah, I'd like to see that," so I walked right out of Seagram's and went right to work.

I wanted in the electrical gang because that was my principal trade, although I was doing 11 and 12 crafts every day, and he knew what a good man I was. I had a man on the road offer me – had me out to dinner one night, I was making 40 cents an hour and he offered me, he said, "The most I can pay you is 2 and a half an hour, and I know you're making more than that, and I can't offer you more than that, so I know I shouldn't talk to you about you working for me." [LAUGHS] Two and a half an hour, and I was making 40 cents!

And I went right on working for 40 cents. That's what I got at Seagram's, but I got a promotion over there. The first week I was there, they laid off 250 men, and I was laid off with them. Of course, I was one of the newest men they'd hired, and it was fair that I'd be laid off. But my boss called the bottling house and said, "I got a man who works so hard it'd be a shame to lay him off. You need any good men over there? He's gonna go on an electrical gang someday." And they said, "Send him down!" And I went down there and got three promotions in just a few weeks.

One day I was working for Perry Carver and I came back in the import room and he said, "What's this I hear about you?" I said, "I don't know, what'd you hear?" And he says, "I heard you's throwing a case every time Clark threw one." I said, "What's wrong with that?" He said, "You can't throw cases with Clark, he'll kill you!" I said, "I never met a man I couldn't work beside and keep up with him." And he said, "Well you're taking an awful chance, trying to throw a case every time Clark throws one." But I did. And that's why I got three promotions. I was a [car diagram?] when I left there.

When the flood – Jimmy, a Mr. Jennings, the man I worked for in the bottling house – he was the head of the bottling house. A fine gentleman, if I ever met one. One day they wanted to search me and I wouldn't be searched, and they took me into his office. And he said, "What seems to be wrong?" And I said, "They're trying to search me." I said, "Mr. Jennings, if you don't trust me, fire me. I don't use your product, and if I did, I'd throw it down in the wastebasket under the fence and pick it up tonight. And from that day til now, they send a policeman down with whoever dumps the trash. [LAUGHS] They never did search me, though.

MANN: Then, in the late 1930s, how about women working in factories or businesses? Were there very many applying? I'm sure there weren't as many working as there are now. What do you remember about women working?

¹⁵ Likely Louis R. Henkle, died 4 April 1936 per the obituaries held in the LPL Genealogy Room.

¹⁶ Anderson may be misremembering the name here. There is no Brownstown, Texas, although there is a Brownsville.

ANDERSON: The thing I remember about women working in those days: they were all in offices. None of them worked on the lines. They worked in the office as secretaries and so forth. And they were beginning to go to business college. My wife and her sister both went to business college. And my wife was a typist. But that's about all that women did in those days: type and work in offices. They didn't work out in the field. Now you see them working on the highway!

MANN: Right.

ANDERSON: They work everywhere today. Course, with the prices – they ran the prices up themselves, though. When I worked for Seal in St. Louis, I could buy 17 pounds of the best bacon made for a dollar. 17 pounds, the best bacon made, for one dollar! Today you can't buy a pound of it for that. And the only reason is because their wages've gotten so high. 40 cents an hour, everybody said, "Well, that money'd buy so much!" It only bought me board and room and a car, and some decent clothes, that's all I ever had.

MANN: What did the 1937 flood cost you in terms of your business operations?

ANDERSON: Well, I hadn't really gotten into the business at that time. I came across the levy one morning, where they were building the new sewage disposal plant, and two girls pulled up in a car and turned out to want to borrow my lantern. And it turned out to be Hilda Wright, that I married later, and Kelly Fish, her partner in the Peerless Printing Company. And I told them I couldn't loan them a lantern because it was a gasoline lantern and they wouldn't know how to use it – they wanted to start the furnace in their house. I asked them if they knew Ralph Patton and they said yes, and I said, "He'll loan you a coal oil lamp, he's got a lot of them." So they went over to borrow a coal oil lamp and I went on to work.

The next thing I knew, there was the same two girls down in the engine room at the flour mill talking with Ralph Patton. And he called me down the upstairs engine room – we had two small engines up there making power. I was working up there on the panel. He called me down, and that's when he asked me if I'd help them move their shop, because they'd been up on High Street and it was all full of mud and everything. And I turned them down again, that was the second time I'd turned them down. And he said, "Well, I'll take the job. Would you help me?" And I told him I would. And I had to do the job alone – he never did show up. Although I had to help – I was staying at his brother's house, and I had to clean my own room. And Mr. Jennings told me not to leave. I went to him and asked him if I could go get my stuff, he said, "Anything you lose, Seagram's will take care of it." I never told him I lost anything, so Seagram's never had to take care of anything. I was always fair with Seagram's. And I think if people would ask Seagram's, they'd be fair with the town too. Ralph was the man who told me they pump 10 to 12 million gallons of water a day. I did a favor of Mr. Jennings: he had 350 cases of import whiskey on the sublevel. I cut a hole in the corrugated floor and saved those 350 cases. We shoved it up through a

conveyor. There was 14 of us left there – that’s all of us that stayed with Mr. Jennings. The rest of them left.

MANN: Jack, give us a little of your impression about the development of the area around Lawrenceburg and Aurora.

ANDERSON: I think there are great possibilities here for development, as well as they are in Kentucky. But it’ll never happen to a divided community. A community divided against itself – a house divided against itself can only fail. I’ve said that before and I’ll say it again. Whenever they get together and work together for a common cause, the chances of development here are great. I think Lawrenceburg’d be a fool to let Greendale develop any further than they have, and I’ve said so in the past, and I’ll say it again. It’s wrong. A divided community will never be successful. No one wants to come where there’re people fighting – you know that, I know that, everybody knows that, but we got a few politicians out here who want to have a town of their own to do with as they please, because the voting public is the most ignorant people in the world. My contention is you should vote for the new man every time, and I do. I vote for the man that’s throwing the other man out of office, because they don’t have to be in there long and it gets to be very lucrative. Too many propositions for ‘em. I think it was awful in that time –

[INTERRUPTION ON THE TAPE – recording may have been stopped and restarted]

MANN: Okay, this is Earl Mann again, certainly want to thank Jack Anderson for his thoughts and recollections here during the 1930s and 1940s.

ANDERSON: [MUFFLED as Mann is talking, in the background] I’ve gotta talk about the road –

MANN: Okay, Jack’s got another comment here.

ANDERSON: About the road up to the hospital. I was so instrumental in the hospital building in Lawrenceburg instead of down the road. And Greendale and Lawrenceburg both have the benefit of having the hospital. But Greendale – I wrote the state of Indiana and suggested they bring the road down from the playground, through the Lawrenceburg industrial park to the foot of the street here, this next street, what is this...

MANN: Uh...

ANDERSON: Two streets, there's two streets –

MANN: Probasco?

ANDERSON: Probasco. Bring it to the foot of Probasco and let Lawrenceburg and Greendale build a bridge across it, then take it on through Greendale and down through the Greendale industrial park, and out to Highway 50. They need a new road to the hospital. Now, that's an selfish thing on my part because, being in charge of the Rees Estate, it'd be of great benefit to me running the road down by the Rees Estate and let them build on it, and let me sell them ground to build on it, or lease it – I don't want to sell any ground, I want to lease. I don't believe in ever turning loose of your principal, that's something I always said. And I've made more money since I moved out here in Granton Hill to pass away than I ever made in my life because I used the principal to get the interest. And I think – I've written in the paper about this road, and I don't know what they're going to do. I still think the state has already made up their mind to build the road down to 50.

MANN: Okay Jack, thanks again for your time, certainly appreciate it.