

Transcript: Mr. Edwin Enneking

Interviewed and Transcribed by Doris Marple, 15 July 1982

Edited and Researched by Karin Page

Flood of 1937, Lawrenceburg, Indiana

MARPLE: This is Doris Marple at the Lawrenceburg Public Library on July 15, 1982. We are happy to interview Mr. Edwin Enneking¹ this morning for our local history project having to do with the flood of 1937 [Lawrenceburg, Indiana]. We surely appreciate your coming to give us some thoughts on what you remember of the flood of 1937.

ENNEKING: My recollection of the '37 flood started the day before. I was working in Seagram's office in a room facing Ridge Avenue, and the traffic coming out of Lawrenceburg was two lanes coming out and one lane going back in. People were hauling, were frightened and taking out of town what they could carry in their cars.

It was raining very hard all day. I recall seeing a teen-age boy, I think, pushing a bicycle with a mattress draped over the handlebars. He was using the sidewalk so that might have made a third lane going out to Greendale.

Later in the day, I was asked to help one of the other men in the office move some rugs and books from a house in Old Town into the attic. So, he crawled up into the attic, and we shoved the carpets and all kinds of books, and suddenly, I heard a noise, and I looked up and he had slipped off the ceiling joist - one foot came down on each side of the joist right through the ceiling. We might have saved all that trouble because the house was all under water and his books all got wet in the attic anyway. He moved his refrigerator and some of the furniture to a Seagram building over on Second Street, which was known as the Bauer property, and that also was a mistake. If he had left them where they were, all they had to do was dry out the motor and clean it up and he would have had a refrigerator. As it happened, this old Bauer shed property floated off the foundation and everything in it fell down from the second floor into the basement and it was all dented up and useless.

Along in the evening, I was asked to help a bunch of other office workers go down to the Seagram bottling house where they had a bunch of imported case goods stored in the basement which they wanted to move out. Somebody broke a hole through the concrete floor and they passed all those cases - I don't know how

¹ Edwin H. Enneking (b. 3 Sep 1916 d. 30 Jun 2006) married Margaret. "Dearborn County Obituaries," *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (accessed 24 Jun 2006).

many there were - several hundred, at least - passed them up through the hole in the floor and we piled them up on the first floor. And that also was wasted energy because the water got them anyway. Prior to that, during the day, Seagrams had loaded out from their shipping department which was in the basement of the bottling house and loaded it into box cars. But, then, because of the high water, the railroad was not permitted to run the train across the levee. So, the only place they could go was, these forty-five cars, was on the siding that led to Greendale but that didn't have enough room so all those box cars, full of case goods, were all soaked and damaged. So, sometime after the flood, Seagrams bought about four dozen square wash tubs, and they had to unload all those box cars into wash tubs, take them back to the bottling house, and recondition them bottle by bottle. As we came out of the bottling house, which was somewhere close to midnight, we tried to walk the rails to keep our feet dry because the water was already up over the cross ties.

We got up to the office and somebody, perhaps the Red Cross, had furnished some beef broth that was made years before that, during the dust bowl, when they were rescuing cattle that were starving. They slaughtered them and the government made this beef broth and later on we also got some of the beef - all in gallon size cans. For this work detail that I helped in moving books and rugs and case goods, somebody issued me a pair of bib overalls, and I don't know where they came from, but they were issued and there were a lot of them issued to various people. While I was eating this beef broth in the Seagrams office building, the bells and whistles and things all tolled, marking the time when the levee broke, and Lawrenceburg was flooded.

I went back to my room out on Nowlin Avenue where I rented a room in a private home and the next morning I went back to work - went back to the office and reported for duty. There wasn't any office work going on, so they asked me to drive my car, and I drove old Dr. Fagaly² around for some house calls. We couldn't get very far - we couldn't get as far as Lawrenceburg Junction³ because the road beyond was under water. There were just a few calls in Greendale. When I finished with that, then, I did relief driving, meeting the boats that were coming up Main Street and bringing people up out of town. As the flood progressed, the boat landing moved up. There really wasn't any boat landing or dock. The boats ran until they hit the street and then men in hip boots carried the people over to dry land. So after, that was about a Friday, I am not sure of the day, but I think it was a Friday, and Saturday, and Sunday, - we were involved in hauling people out. Saturday most

² Dr. Arthur Thomas Fagaly (b. 8 Sep 1870 d. 11 Feb 1948) "Dearborn County Obituaries," database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (accessed 24 Jun 2021).

³ Lawrenceburg Junction was the train depot northeast of Hardintown (aka Hardinburgh). See Gridley, Albert T. "Atlas of Dearborn County," Wm. B. Burford, Indianapolis, 1899, p. 27; *Lawrenceburg Public Library*.

of the people found relatives and friends in Greendale. But as the Town of Greendale filled up, all we could do was take them to another boat landing and they were hauled across Tanner's Creek, either up - probably up to Ludlow Hill, to refugee to some other areas. I know some went to Rushville and Connersville and they had relatives in other areas but they went to or some had to go to stranger's houses.

I was recalling one particular instance of a lady who probably was middle-aged or slightly beyond, and a daughter probably around twenty. The daughter was all distraught. She said: "Mama, what are we going to do?" Mama said: "When the water goes down, we will go back down in there and we will shovel out the mud and scrub up and move back in. What else can we do?" I think the mother had been through something like this before, perhaps in 1913, but it was all new and all most disheartening to the younger girl.

By Monday, they had moved practically all the people out of town. I parked my car out in Greendale. The garage I rented had been taken over to store furniture, and I gave the keys to the landlady and I got back down and caught a Chris-Craft boat⁴ out of, across Tanner's Creek to the foot of Ludlow Hill and I started walking up the hill, wondering how I was to get to my parent's home in Oldenburg. I recognized an automobile, and I went back in the crowd and found a man that lived next door to my parents, and I asked him if I could ride over with him and he said "Yes, in just a little bit." He had brought down a load of boots and various other relief supplies and had been ferrying them across into town.

A few things I remember about the picking up the refugees or the people coming in in boats, was one of the ladies who worked with me in the office. In fact, she was working with me at the time, who had lived in Old Town and had taken refuge with some friends in Newtown in an area that had never been in water. But this '37 flood was higher than they had before, and they had to be vacated from there. They had gotten the more distant people first. So, when they came to pick these people up, they told them, on, some while before, they told them "We'll get you on the next trip. But, don't bring anything with you except what you are wearing" because they had been overloaded with so much stuff that people were trying to bring along in the boats. So I remember this girl being carried out of the boat, wearing two coats and three hats all tied down with a big scarf. She brought only what she was wearing.

The highest point in Old Town was the courthouse, a three story building. And, a lot of people took refuge over there, and I remember seeing some people that came when they were brought over from the courthouse. They brought probably the most valuable thing, at least the thing they had needed the most in the

⁴ Chris-Craft Boats began building boats in 1874. (www.chriscraft.com)

courthouse. Of course, there weren't any restroom facilities or anything else. But, I can remember some man in Greendale proudly swinging a big white chamber pot which had been their 'convenience' in the courthouse. And, of course, they dumped it out the window when they used it, and then it was ready for another one. I don't know how many people, but there may have been about twenty-five or thirty people in the courthouse - refugees on the third floor.

When I got to Oldenburg, I had nothing much to do there. My reading glasses were in my desk - when I went to work, I left them there when I went refugee helping. I left them there so I didn't have my reading glasses and I couldn't read the papers. About the only thing you could get on the radio was Louisville station WHAS, and not being familiar with Louisville, it didn't mean too much to me. But I found out later that one of the announcers on the Louisville station is well known these days as Foster Brooks, a comedian.⁵

After spending a week in Oldenburg listening mostly to the radio, there weren't any television in those days, of course, on a Monday, a week after I had gotten there to Oldenburg, my father and I drove to Batesville, and we went to some office. And I don't know whether it was National Guard or Red Cross or who - but we had to get a permit to give the guards so I could get back down in Lawrenceburg. And we got the papers and I drove back down to Lawrenceburg to the foot of Ludlow Hill and turned the car around for my father and then sought a ride for myself. Whereas I left town in a Chris-Craft and went back in a john-boat with the mail, they were hauling the United States mail in the same johnboat. So then I reported back to Seagrams to work. At any rate, that is where the johnboat landed - in the Seagram property, then back to my room in Greendale.

The landlady told me that they had been using my room and would it be all right if they sent somebody to sleep with me. And I said "Sure." So I went to bed at my usual hour since I was tired, and when I woke up the next morning, there was a high school boy in bed with me and he was still asleep. The same thing went on for two more nights before I finally found out and got introduced to the guy that I had been sleeping with.

I also was able to find out some of the things that had gone on other than what the relief part I had been doing - the driving. The Seagram's office had been taken over almost immediately for various relief purposes. The morning after the levee broke, the Indiana State police came in with a short wave system and they used one of the upstairs offices and they strung a wire from the office building over to a tall building, the mill building, for an antenna. They were providing emergency communications. My office had been taken over and became the operating room

⁵ Foster Brooks worked for WHAS (AM) known for reporting on the 1937 flood. ("Foster Brooks," Wikipedia : accessed 23 June 2021).

and there were some operations in there and probably some babies born. Another office across the hall was taken over as the contagious ward, and they must have had some patients there. And the main accounting office had been taken over as a hospital ward. Some beds had been set up in there. The desks had been stacked, and double, triple decked to get them out of the way, but there really wasn't any place to take them. The boilers at Seagrams had been flooded out, but Seagrams had their own electric generators. But they ran two steam locomotives up the track close to the generator room and ran pipes from those locomotives over to the generators and by firing those steam engines provided steam to run Seagram's generators which provided electricity for the whole town of Greendale with the limitation that each house was limited to one light.

Now, that was quite a problem. In the house that I lived in, a three bed-room house, and they took in various refugees, friends of there's. I didn't know who I slept with. Ivy Leake⁶ and her mother were there, and there were two couples in the basement, each one with a baby, separated by sheets strung across on a line and it was rather unique to hear a baby cry from the basement - the sounds came through the hot air ducts. Across the street was the Miller's house, a boarding house, where I had eaten at for quite a few years. They had about fifty people in there, so many people that they kept a roster - who went to bed and when they went to bed. So, when somebody else wanted to go to bed, they would look to see who had the most sleep and they would wake them up and it was your time to get up. So, that is some idea of the crowding.

Most of the refugee work - there were a few people had some power boats that could fight the current - most of the relief work was done with Coast Guard lifeboats that were brought in by rail from New Haven, Connecticut. They did the primary hauling jobs. They were brought in at the Lawrenceburg Junction and drove through water the rest of the way. The main channel of the Miami River used to be right alongside of Ridge Avenue. There's a low spot right along Ridge Avenue, if you take the time to look somewhere where it hasn't been built up. Well, during the flood, that's were the channel there's a channel during the flood that is where the main channel diverted. Well, there's a current, a very strong current, right along there. That's reason why we had to use power boats to get into the area to do the rescuing. After a few days, there were state policemen from Massachusetts came in and relieved the Indiana state police on the short wave radio communications.

Seagrams upstairs ladies' rest room and lounge was converted into a kitchen and the office across the hall became a dining room for all the people that were working, like the state police, or anyone else. There weren't any restaurants

⁶ Possibly Iva Leake (d. 8 June 1979). "Dearborn County Obituaries," database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (accessed 24 June 2021).

available. I suppose all their food and supplies for eating came from the Red Cross. Mrs. Walker was the "major domo" over the kitchen with help from some of the other ladies, and we all ate - two shifts in eating in an office - would hold probably no more than two dozen at a time.

I was very interested one evening sitting in there was two Massachusetts state policemen were eating. That evening we had scrambled eggs with hominy in it. One of the men had never seen hominy and asked "What is this?" And the other man said, "Well, that's kind of a rare egg of a bird mixed in with the scrambled eggs." He really didn't know, and said, "When the flood goes down, we will go down and see if we can catch some of those hominy birds." And this fellow didn't know any better, I guess he eventually found out. But up east they had never heard of hominy and he never went south! But the one guy pulled the other guys leg, and I had a hard time keeping a straight face.

That pretty well takes care of the time until the water went down. I may think of some more items which you can insert where they belong. After the water went down, there was an office somewhere set up with the National Guard on patrol, which I had referred to previously by having to get a permit to get back into Lawrenceburg. So, they patrolled the town, and you had to pass a check-point with your permit to get back into town.

One of the girls in the office had lived on Front Street - the building where Dr. Pfeiffer's office was located for quite a few years. She had a minimum of clothing - everybody had to wear what was on their back. There was a shortage of power for pumping water and all that so everybody had to make do. She got [a] permit and asked me if I would go with her to see if we could get in her house. She lived there with her grandmother, and her grandmother had gone somewhere else in the state. So, I got a permit and went with her. It was quite a task to walk from Seagrams to Front Street. There was about an inch of slippery mud over everywhere - it hadn't dried off. We had to take short steps like you were walking on ice. So, we got to the house, and she said there was a ladder in this woodshed. Well, wood is light, and wood floats, and so the wood had floated all around in the woodshed so we had to wiggle quite a while before we could get enough wood out of the way before we could open the door to get in to get the ladder. So, we put the ladder up to the second story porch and crawled up the ladder. The last step was the big one but we did make it, and we got the upstairs door open. Her clothing was all hanging on hangers very neatly, and very fine and not at all damaged. But her shoes were all on the floor and had all been in water because it had been about five to six inches deep on the second story. So, she found a bushel basket from somewhere and she loaded a bunch of her clothes in the bushel basket. We were very fearful trying to step down from the second story porch on down to the top of a six-foot ladder, and

so we decided to go out another route. There was a spiral stairway that did go down. It was also covered with about half inch of slippery mud, and a window pane was broken out right above the sidewalk which had left a glass hole through the sash big enough to crawl through. But it becomes quite a problem to crawl head first through a window and land on the windowsill and try to figure out how to land feet first down on the ground, but eventually we did make it. And we did get the bushel basket and her out. I had gone out first, so she had a little easier time of it. And we carried the basket between us, back out to Greendale, where ever she was staying.

Later on, after the flood had come along a little bit later in the history, you didn't need permits to get into town. I walked over and stopped at Klepper's⁷ and Ez was in there trying to clean up the mud. I asked him if he had a beer around, and he said, "Yeah, but it has been in the flood." So he opened it, and we wiped it, and I think I had the first beer in Klepper's after the flood.

MARPLE: Klepper's was on Main Street?

ENNEKING: Klepper's was on Third Street. On what is now Highway 50. It has been torn down to make way for the Progressive Building and Loan.

The current being so strong, it had washed out almost all of High Street of the high road which is Highway 50 - the area is all built up around there now - but there was only one slab of concrete pavement still remaining of what is now Highway 50. The rest of the street, drives, and sidewalks had been washed out. That became the most popular place for dumping mattresses, pianos, sofas, and everything else that people had to throw away. You really don't think so much about the things that have to be thrown away but when water gets into a piano and swells all the wood inside it and it became practically useless, and mattresses the same way and overstuffed furniture and things like that.

I was amused, and I think it was a true story. Bob Albright⁸ lived over on Elm Street - his sister still lives in the same place. They went over to clean out and they threw out a Victrola and a bunch of records and things like that to clean up the house. And then after they had the house cleaned up, they went out in the yard to clean up. And now they said, "Those records could be cleaned up - you didn't really have to throw them away." So they started to pick up the records and the first one he picked was "The Beautiful Ohio" and it was immediately broken right over his

⁷ Klepper's Confectionary. "Ez" was probably Ezra John Klepper (d. 12 Sep 1980). ("Dearborn County Obituaries," database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (accessed 24 Jun 2021).

⁸ Robert L. Albright (d. 26 Dec 1983); "Dearborn County Obituaries," database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (accessed 24 Jun 2024).

knee! Let me see if I can think of anything more ...

MARPLE: What did they do then with the furniture that had to be thrown away? Did they have a dump of some kind?

ENNEKING: Well, that was the original dump, but when they got to rebuilding the road, they had to dump it somewhere else, but it all had to be moved to a dump. As I got over into, further into town, particularly down along High Street, it was obvious that the country conveniences had been pretty well moved out of Lawrenceburg because there were "chick-sales" hanging on telephone wires all over the place. For the convenience of people trying to clean out their areas in Old Town, a manhole had been removed from the sewer at the corner of Walnut and High Streets, and a "chick-sale" had been placed right over the sewer entrance. So the people could use rest rooms right in the middle of the street. It took quite a long while for people to get moved back into their houses. It took a long while for them to dry out. I remember helping a friend - they had white enamel woodwork. And all the paint had to be scraped off to let the wood dry before they could paint it. In many cases, plaster had to be repaired. A lot of floors had to be taken up and dried and re-laid so it was most of the summer before most of the people got their homes habitable again - the ones that were not swept away and there were a lot of them also.

I guess that's about it.

MARPLE: Oh, thank you so much.

ENNEKING: As an afterthought, when I got over into Newtown, Third Street, then, Highway 50 and Eads Parkway now, I was surprised to see the street practically full of vehicles. Lawrenceburg fire engines were all parked there, and a couple of semi-trailer trucks and tractors parked there. The street was full of cars. It had never been flooded before. The fire engines had been completely submerged, and I noticed one particular tractor trailer had a high water mark that was about eight inches from the top of the trailer to give an idea of how deep the water was - at that area of town.

MARPLE: That was amazing.

ENNEKING: During the time I was driving a car on relief duty, I was asked to deliver some medicines or something to Schenley's, and I didn't know where Schenley's was, and I was driving in Greendale, and I saw some man on the street and I asked

him if he could tell me where Mary Street was, and he said "Yeah, over in Old Town, twenty-five feet under water." He didn't realize, either, that there was another Mary Street in Greendale.

I mentioned off-tape, in order to have access into Seagram's plant, being the regular access was under water, they tore down a fence between the Seagram office building and G Warehouse, and they laid boards across the grass to provide vehicular entrance into the distillery area. Just in passing, I recall that the water was six feet deep on the bottling line, on the bottling floor at the bottling house. So, besides losing all the case goods loaded in box cars, they also lost all the blended whiskies in the blending and bottling tanks, and also a lot of barrels that were around. Then, as now, Seagrams always had a stack of empty barrels and they tried to corral them. I think Harry Seibel⁹ was the warehouse superintendent at that time. They tried to corral them, to stretch a fence or rope around them, but that didn't work, so those whiskey barrels were floating down the Ohio River, all the way down. I'm sure they went past Louisville. And some kids got hurt afterwards as a result of that. They would find a barrel after the water went down. They would pull the bung and strike a match to see what was in it, and some of those barrels exploded then.

⁹ Harry W. Seibel (d. 1 Feb 1988). "Dearborn County Obituaries," database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (accessed 24 Jun 2021).