Interviewee: Mr. Leonard Hill[1]

Interviewer: Robert Lawless, July 6, 1982[2]

Edited and Researched by Karin Page

HILL: [19]'30's was shanty boat times and things like that along the Ohio River. You had "Pinky" Brooks,[3] Neal Brooks, and the Goodpasters. And Dick Trester, he run the old what-you-call-it, and Gus Gerlach, he run the wharf boat. That's when the New York Central Railroad backed their trains down from Lawrenceburg years ago before that was ever closed. Also, Whitey Seth – all of them were fishermen – Thornton Baker. They seined along the river here and lived along the river there around the old box factory and the waterworks. Also, the Lockwoods – Lockwood, he run the waterworks and sold fish and seined – all around the depression times, here around Aurora. That was way before the [19]'37 flood, and when I started on the river. I was, I think, seventeen, and I went to work for the American Barge Line out of Louisville with Captain Alfred Schipper.

LAWLESS: O.K., Leonard, that is what we want to know about, some really interesting [stories] about the river.

HILL: This is all part of river life and that…

LAWLESS: This is July 6, 1982. We are in Aurora, Indiana, Dearborn County, with the Dearborn Oral History Project. We are interviewing Leonard Hill and the interviewer is Robert Lawless. O.K. I understand that you were born here in Aurora.

HILL: Born in Aurora.

LAWLESS: O.K. Would you like to tell us a little bit? You went to school here?

HILL: Very little school. More hooky.

LAWLESS: I would say your schooling would be your self-experiences, days on the river boats.

[1] Dearborn County Obituaries, database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (www.lpld.lib.in.us : accessed 7 Apr 2022); citing Journal Press 23 Apr 1991; Register 11 Apr 1991; entry for Leonard L. Hill d. 10 Apr 1991. 71 years old; of Aurora, IN. Funeral Apr. 13, Filter Funeral Home, Aurora, IN. WWII Marine Corps veteran. Wife Juanita.

[2] Recording missing from Lawrenceburg Public Library prior to 2 August 2017.

[3] Dearborn County Obituaries, database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (www.lpld.lib.in.us : accessed 7 Apr 2022); citing Register 7 Mar 1963; entry for Ernest "Pinky" Marshall Brooks b. 3 Oct 1883; d. 1 Mar 1963. 79 years old. Funeral was held March 4 at Holthause Rullman Funeral Home, Aurora, IN. His father, Tinsley Brooks, preceded him in death 1902, one daughter, Verna Mae Brooks 1944; predeceased by 1st wife Pearl M. Goodpaster Brewer.

HILL: That's true. The river was always the first drawing card of most all kids. In other words, there was swimming. Swimming across the river, swimming on logs. Now this was true. Lot of times without any swimming suits too.

LAWLESS: When did you graduate?

HILL: I never did graduate. I only went to the sixth grade of school, and, just as I say, I went up here to the old Southside school, which was located right here, and I been in this place – brought here many a time.

LAWLESS: At Hillforest?

HILL: Yeah. The school used to come up here when the Storks owned the place, and we'd visit in the upper room which was called the pilot house room. That's the round what-you-may-call-it. Every so often we would make a trip from school up here, and my teacher at that time, when I first started out, was Blanche Rushworth,[4] and she is still living today and she is in a nursing home. Some Methodist Nursing home up at Franklin, Indiana, I believe. I don't know, you could find out but since she's retired. Why she married Frank Smith and he passed away and she sold her home and moved up there. And then, Julia Spaeth[5] and Miss Dean. Now, that's another one there you have on historical houses down on Third Street – Emma Dean. Anyway, why, I always fancied the river and knew the Schipper family that lived up on Market Street. That's Grandma Schipper and she's the one that I met Alfred Schipper, the pilot and captain of the what-you-may-call-it in them days. Whenever the tow boat went by, he blowed his signals. Now, that was two longs and a short was his signal to let them know that he was going by. And Alfred Schipper was also relation to the Stolls which owned the Stoll Meat Market which was out of business today. That's right below the barbershop – where you're barbering today. And if you happen to go to Merrie's, you'd see some pictures of the Stoll Meat Market. And finally, Alfred Schipper got me on the towboats. So I went to work for the American Barge Line on the steamer, *Plymouth*.[6] And, at that time, they had the *American*, they had the *George T. Price*, the *Duncan L. Bruce*, the *Inman*, and *Arthur A. Hyder*, was towing

[4] Dearborn County Obituaries, database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (www.lpld.lib.in.us : accessed 7 Apr 2022); citing Journal Press 27 Dec 1983; entry for Blanche Smith; d. 25 Dec 1983. 84 years old, Aurora. Funeral, Dec. 28; survived by brother, Lawrence Rushworth. Member of First United Methodist Church, Aurora, IN.

[5] Dearborn County Obituaries, database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (www.lpld.lib.in.us : accessed 7 Apr 2022); citing L. Press and Register, each dated 10 Mar 1960; entry for Julia Anna Spaeth; b. 11 Nov 1871 d. 7 Mar 1960. 88 years old; Aurora, IN. Member of Presbyterian Church, Aurora, IN. Preceded in death by father, Henry P. Spaeth.

[6] "Plymouth (Towboat, 1911-1945)," database with images University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries (www.search.library.wisc.edu/digital/A4ULPUEJA7K2B59B : accessed 7 Apr 2022); Image of the Plymouth; Sternwheel, Towboat; built 1899 at Brownsville, Pennsylvania; retired at Jeffersonville, IN and sank there on January 14, 1945; Owners: E.J. Hickey Transportation Company; American Barge Line; Officers & Crew: Captain Alfred A. Schipper (master); Rivers: Kanawha River; Other Information: Renamed the Plymouth after the boilers exploded on the R.L. Aubrey and she was rebuilt. Towed between the Kanawha River and Cincinnati. On March 25, 1917 she sank at Lock 3 on the Kanawha River and her upper works were ruined. One life was lost. She was rebuilt at Point Pleasant, West Virginia. After being purchased by ABL, she was rebuilt (at Paducah, Kentucky in 1926) and given a set of uniflow engines which were the only such set on the river at that time.

for us, and the old *Richland*. We'd meet her around Pittsburgh, and she was finally made into a dock boat – she's gone now. It used to be up here at St. Joe terminal as a dock boat. And we worked out of Louisville off of Northwestern Street and hauled scrap iron and Sulphur and all of that stuff to Pittsburgh to the Weirton, W. Virginia scrap iron. And the Sulphur went on up to the Allegheny River … to Lock 5 … and was in the glass manufacturing business. It was very slow progress in them days because we only had eighteen mile pools on the low water. That's where the Markland Dam come in here at. So, on a day, why, we were six hours – we would make about eighteen miles – maybe twenty miles in six to eight hours.

LAWLESS: Did you ever have to measure the depth?

HILL: Oh, yeah. In other words, we run a lead line and all that stuff. I lead-lined quite a bit along, especially in fog, low water, and all that – how deep the water is. One of the deepest spots that I found on the Ohio River was along Main Street, Carrollton, Kentucky. It was around one hundred ten feet. And then, off the point down here at the Wooden Shoe. It will run approximately ninety-five feet in the deepest spot, then, this little park right here below Market Street hill or Dutch Hollow, as we know it, it will run out in there at sixty-five feet. When you get up around Cincinnati, this was in the old water, why the water should be only twelve to thirteen feet. And, a lot of times, we'd rub bottom underneath the bridges where the dredge boats had dredged the sand and gravel in the off-fall. It was the shallow – you could hear rattling under the bottom in the barges as you went over it. It was called "brattle hills."

LAWLESS: A lead line was all electronic, wasn't it.?

HILL: Just a rope with some lead markers on it at every foot and that was how you measured water.

LAWLESS: What was "mark one" or "mark twain"?

HILL: That I can't tell you. But just as I say, it was just so many feet. What it would actually be, it was laid off in foot markers of lead mashed onto the rope. So, if it was twelve feet, it was twelve foot – "Mark 12," they would say.

LAWLESS: Now, did they give you a lot of leisure time?

HILL: No. You never had no leisure time. Well, if you were a deck-hand your job consisted of rolling coal to the boilers, which different tow boats took a different amount of coal. But, if three of us were rolling coal, like on the *Arthur A. Ryder*, it took four hundred and eighty barrows of coal in six hours. That's a lot of it, and we normally figured about twenty wheel barrows to a ton of coal, so you can figure out just about how many tons of coal you'd roll to the boilers. Then, what time you weren't doing some wheeling coal, you were making up fleet or else locking. And you were on six hours and off six hours, six days and six nights, twelve hours a day. And, then, if you had any spare

time, you would be on deck sweeping or scrubbing down or painting. And they seen to it that you worked, besides making your fleet up and all of that.

LAWLESS: What does that mean, "making your fleet"?

HILL: Well, in other words, you're going along the river picking up barges. We'd pull out of Louisville and pull six to eight barges. Then we'd get up to Madison or Carrollton or somewhere, why, there's a barge. We'd stop and pick up that barge and tie that up and make that part of the fleet. And, then, we'd get up to Markland Dam. Then we'd have to split the fleet and take half if through the towboat and tie it off. Then block the towboat back through and pick up the other half and bring it up and then put it together. Then we'd go to Rising Sun, which was old Lock 38, and you'd do the same thing there. And every eighteen to twenty miles, you'd have to break up the fleet and make the fleet back up. Then when you got to Cincinnati … then once a month, you'd have a boiler day. That meant you shut everything down, and drained everything, and cleaned out the boilers and the flues, and cleaned out the mud drums and all of that. And that was usually our day off. We'd make the engineer do that kind of work, but we'd have to help, wash down and all of that.

LAWLESS: What were mud drums?

HILL: That is part of the boiler. In other words, your steam drum and your mud drum, which is down at the bottom. In other words, the cold water, come from the hot down to the cold and circulate. Then, if you bag a boiler, that was due to muddy river and excess mud in the boiler on the steam drum, and it would get dry and "bag the boiler." What you call "bag the boiler" and that blowed up many a towboat on the Ohio River. That's the reason why. I mentioned the *Sam P. Suit*, they bagged boilers and exploded and drowned – the fireman and burned several people.

LAWLESS: Were there any river boat superstitions?

HILL: Oh, yeah. You – I can't tell you. You weren't supposed to go to the bathroom over the head of any barge or boat. If you got caught, you were automatically put ashore. Didn't matter if it was dead of winter or where, you were fired. That was a superstition they always believed in.

LAWLESS: Never heard that one.

HILL: That's true. In other words, you were fired if you went over the head. Now, if alongside, it was all right, but not over the head. And there's different things people dreamed up on the river. That was one they strictly abided by on the fleets I was one.

LAWLESS: Was there any superstition – things about ghost stories, or …?

HILL: Oh. You'd hear all that stuff along the river, different things that happened and things. But not really, or at least, I never paid too much attention to it. But I tell you, too busy, and it was one of the hottest places in the summer it was to work, especially on the fleet where I was a deck-hand. Wintertime, the coldest spot you could find. It always got at you.

LAWLESS: The water probably held the cold.

HILL: Oh, yeah. That river was cold.

LAWLESS: What about shanty boats?

HILL: Well, that's like – I'll tell a good one about shanty boat life. I was above Tell City. We was on open river one afternoon late. Realized that we had bagged the boilers on the old steamer *Plymouth*, so the minute that we realized that we had a bagged boiler, we tied the pop-offs open and begin to pull the fire and turned the water on the ash pit to cool the boiler down as quick as possible to get the pressure down. So, we got word up through the speaker tube to the Captain that we had a bagged boiler, and so we headed for shore and the nearest shore was on the Indiana side. And I think we were about three or four miles – can't say how exactly what the mileage was. But, anyway, we went to shore and started to check the towboat and barges in, to keep them from getting away, because we had no power. And ole Captain Schipper was up in the pilot house with his megaphone hollering ashore for the shanty boat people to get up from their shanty boats and get for shore. And we came down through there breaking trees and one thing and another. With the weight of the barges – a barge will weigh approximately three hundred ton – and we had probably twelve or thirteen hundred ton on each one of these barges, and we had about eight or ten barges, and the towboat. We broke bushes, trees, shanty boats – pushed things right out on the shore. And we finally wound up down around Tell City. So, then they had a shop to pound the boiler back up to heat it and drive it back up. We were there about two weeks in Tell City. And then the government came along and reduced the steam pressure again, and we was getting in the stages then when the boilers were getting too bad, to really do the job satisfactory.

LAWLESS: What designated a shanty boat? How come they were called that?

HILL: Well, it was a boat that people lived on. In other words, it was how they got the name. These people didn't have the money to live in town. They lived on the river, and they fished and they hunted and trapped along the river. It was their home. It was their meal – no money. They worked their living on the river. The river provided them their living in general. Another thing, also for winter, they would go in the summer time along the river and pick up coal that rolled off the barges. And chunks of coal in them days was round like a ball, big lumps, and you would find it anywhere along the river.

LAWLESS: What would make them round?

HILL: That's from rolling on the bottom, the sand and gravel grinding the coal, knocking the rough edges of it and making it perfectly round. You could find small chunks of coal today, but beings this coal on the river today is so small, you don't see any lumps of coal today like we used to. And it would fall off the barges every time the towboat would bang or bump against it or knock against something it would knock off some. They would have it rounded up just like a railroad. You would find it around the railroad the same way, and people would gather that up along the river. And, another thing, was Ivory soap. They used to dump the excess of Ivory soap from P & G up on the Mill Creek and you'd find pieces of Ivory soap cakes floating in all that stuff.

LAWLESS: And that's how they'd get their soap?

HILL: Yeah. They'd get their soap and they would fish with it. They would use it for fish bait. Catfish would eat it.

LAWLESS: That would bobble up and down, wouldn't it?

HILL: Yeah. Well, you see, they would put that on a hook, and on a trot line and also used to muscle along the river. Muscles were used for buttons and an awful lot of muscling went on down around Rising Sun and … which was down around Gravel Hill and Forty Winks, down around there. Don't know whether you ever heard of that place.

LAWLESS: No.

HILL: It was down about, below North Landing, about two miles below North Landing towards Patriot. Down around Big Bone Island and in that area. There was a lot of that went on back in the early [19]'30's. That was when I was even younger than being on the river that I run onto that. They were made into buttons for shirts and there was an awful demand in them days. And people would catch them by the ton and sell them. And then the insides were taken out of the muscle and they would use that for fish bait along the river. It was good catfish bait.

LAWLESS: Now, what about your entertainment. Remember any calliope music?

HILL: No, not too much. Mostly it was packet boats hauling what-you-call-it … about the only … was listening to the old colored boys when they used to pull in down here at the wharf boat. They would be packing furniture down to the bank and something else up, and they would be a-singing, and the boss a-hollering, "Keep it moving, keep it moving right on the line." They were always in a hurry. They would have cattle on them dern things, cotton and everything else on the old packet boats on the river. But no, not too much calliope music. Once in a while you'd have the old showboats. The old *Majestic* would come up or a couple of them. One was the *Cotton Bell*, she was in here at one time. The *Majestic*, the old *Liberty* used to push the *Majestic*. The last time I seen her, she

was a wharf boat, up on the Little Kanawha River which was in Parkersburg, West Virginia. That was the last time I seen the *Liberty*. And the *Richfield*. She was towing out of Pittsburgh up around Weirton, West Virginia. The last time I seen her, she was a dock boat up at the St. Joe Terminal. And the *Inland*, it belonged to the American Maritime, she sank up around Pittsburgh, somewhere, above Weirton, in there. Hit a rock, drowned the engineer; don't remember his name. They were working on her and exploded her at Pittsburg on north of the Monongahela River, at the point at Pittsburgh. And old man Foster was chief engineer. He's dead and gone now. Matter of fact, he was the engineer up her at C. G. & E. Miami Fort plant there for … He was on the *Tal* and *Chaperone*. The *Chaperone* sank that now is the Johnson party boat. He was the engineer on the *Island Queen* when it blowed up. Frank Foster[7] is gone now. He came from Pennsylvania, somewhere. His boy is with I & M today – Franklin Foster.[8] And he lives in Lawrenceburg, and he was just a kid when I met him. But I knew his dad and also "Red" Childers was a pilot with us. He used to take over and pilot on the old *Plymouth*. Most of them guys are gone, and old man White was in the dredging business. He was out at Charleston, West Virginia. Last time I seen him, he was down at Chevron's plant next to C. G. & E. and done some dredge work for us. But that has been quite a few years back, and I 'spect he's dead and gone now. And then there was a pilot by the name of Jimmy Almsye. He was quite old and we was up to Lock 10 at Steubenville, Ohio, and he attempted to run that lock and not flank it. Tore up the fleet for ... but I recall that we didn't have any barges sunk. But we was awful lucky. Knocked a hole in the gasoline barge. Had to stuff half our bed clothes in it to keep from sinking it.

LAWLESS: Now, were any of these people from Lawrenceburg or Aurora?

HILL: Well, Captain Schipper was, and later Danny Hogan and Jerome Hogan. Most all of them were just up and down the river, different places. Captain Schipper made his home here until he retired, and he retired in Florida. I don't know when he passed away, but I know he's gone. And I understand Danny Hogan is in Florida now and he was captain of the *American*. That was in later years and ran over the river long after Captain Schipper left.

LAWLESS: Did some of you boys work – Aurora boys – on the river like you did?

HILL: Well, Danny Hogan did and Jerome Hogan. And I was trying to think. There was different ones, but that was years ago. I can't really say on that. But, when we went to school, even as kids, there would be a towboat going up the river. We would make an excuse to get over by the window to sharpen our pencil so we could see the towboat. Teachers had quite a time with the river competition.

[7] Dearborn County Obituaries, database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (www.lpld.lib.in.us : accessed 7 Apr 2022); citing Register 21 May 1970; entry for Frank G. Foster; d. 16 May 1970.70 years old; Vevay, IN. Chief Engineer of the Belle of Louisville river steamboat. Son: Franklin Foster, Aurora, IN.

[8] Dearborn County Obituaries, database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (www.lpld.lib.in.us : accessed 7 Apr 2022); citing Journal Press 24 Jan 2003; entry for Franklin Stokes Foster. D. 19 Jun 2003.

LAWLESS: You remember the flood here?

HILL: Well, I remember quite a few floods. I can remember the 933. We had quite a bit of ice and stuff. The river wasn't frozen over, but very close, in 1933, and fairly high water. And then the [19]'37, I remember it. I boat ride around Aurora. I got off the tow boats – no, hadn't got on towboats yet. I was around all over Aurora, and I coppered and got kangaroo court martialed around there for pulling a couple capers, but other than … But the route to get into Aurora from top of Trester Hill to the Market Street hill, up to the school yard, but that put you about two blocks of Hillforest, that you came down the alley down here into town – that was about the only route we had. You went up there just like you were going up to the apartments today, then you went across the school yard and up the alley in back of George Neff's home on Dutch Hollow and out by the Kuhlmeier house, then you went up over the hill and that brought you out to Trester Hill on top of the hill. The roads were all blocked down to Cochran. That was the only route you had out of Aurora. Main part of Aurora to get anywhere. I don't even think there was a route through Sutton Orchard across to Schippers. It was a dirt road, if it was. It would be almost impassable. We brought semi's down through this other way and up through them alleys.

LAWLESS: That must have been quite a thrill for them.

HILL: Oh, that was a hard ride.

LAWLESS: That would be your bus lines, too.

HILL: That was everything that we had. Just one route up to Dutch Hollow Hill, and out and up to 50. And the just took and moved everybody away because on account of supplies. We couldn't get supplies, so they just boarded them out to Dillsboro and Versailles or wherever they could send them. And we patrolled and had fire patrol on the river and done what we could do. There wasn't much we could do with water way up to the second stories in most buildings downtown. Matter of fact, the National Guard had their headquarters over here at the Presbyterian Church, and the school, the Catholic school, that was the cafeteria or canteen, whatever you want to call it. That's where we went to get something to eat. And, also out at Cochran, why, it was way up and [?] Hollow was under. And, matter of fact, the river got out at Meyer's grocery. That was right below the old coffin factory. Actually went across the road at what they call Meyer's grocery and that's awful high when you think that water went across there and you had to wait in that boat place.

LAWLESS: Was there much of a warning for the people who lived here to get up to higher ground?

HILL: Yes. They had plenty of warning. But people, they had been used to moving everything to the second floor, and they figured well, that would handle it. But nobody ever dreamed that it was going to keep on coming, just kept on. And everybody got caught with their supplies and stuff on the

second floor. And then it got to where you couldn't get to it. No place to go with it, and raining and sleeting and snowing and doing just a little bits of everything. Down around about freezing. Wasn't much you could do except lose it. And the boats were moving, trying to keep ahead of it, hoping that it would stop, but it never did.

LAWLESS: It just kept coming?

HILL: Kept a-coming. People would move to places where they thought they were high enough. Still keep coming, something that they had never seen.

LAWLESS: The reason why I mention the busses. I had heard that they had brought in Red Cross – brought in busses?

HILL: Oh, yeah. They transported, or, anyway, they could haul them away. And they brought boats in and supplies in and would pick up people in boats that stayed here and worked. There were some people who lived on higher ground that didn't have to move, but they had to have food and stuff, too. …bow on each end of it, like you've seen on the nose of a barge, and they just had a house built on top of it. In other words, they put a floor across the top of the guns, and then they had two or three rooms in it. And they always had a pot-bellied stove between the woods and along the river band and the coal. They just tied it up to the trees and there they lived. Done their was[h]ing in the river – everything.

LAWLESS: Did you ever see a shanty boat fire?

HILL: No, not really. They just cut a hole through the roof and had it flashed like an old style chimney. Oh, once in a while one would burn, but very seldom.

LAWLESS: Were they ever crushed by the ice in winter?

HILL: No. I never seen any of them crushed. No. I can't say that I did, but they were just like the old wooden hulks of barges and towboats. Sure, they've been crushed along the river. And, then, what they used to do, they used to beach them. For winter, they would wait until near the end of the year, when the weather would start to get cold, then when the river came way up, they would float them in as far as they could, close to share as they could, then tie them off. And then, when the river got ready to drop, they would go underneath of them and put blocks under it. Block them up and they would let them settle down on blocks, then they would jack them up and level them off and set on blocks up in the shade away from the river as much as possible. Try to get out of the ice and things. That's the way shanty boat people lived. And all across the creek, along there by the box factory, that was shanty boat town, all up in there.

LAWLESS: What years are we talking about? Do you remember?

HILL: Oh, we're talking the [19]'30s, late 30s. When I was on the river, we was still in the paddle wheeler and steam boat time. In other words, it was just a-going from the steam boat to the diesel "all-fires." In other words, that's the coal fired boats along the river.

LAWLESS: What years did you go to work on the river?

HILL: It was 1938, and just like I say, they were going from the steam boat to the diesels. The *George T. Price* and the *Duncan L. Bruce* were the first oil fired boilers. After they hit the wheel at Gallipolis, Ohio, and swung into and blowed a cylinder and tore the wheel up, I think that's when they switched her over to oil fired boilers, in other words, fuel oil. And that's the same way with the *Island Queen*. She was oil fired, and they had gone away from coal fired. And the *Richland* – it was a coal fired boat, and the [?] it was … we're talking about coal fired steam boats, like the coal fired railroad engine versus the diesel. It was just on the change. What they'd do whenever one of the boilers went bad on one of them boats, then they would try to switch it over, if it was worthwhile. And, another thing, at that time, there was an awful lot of wooden coal barges, and they were on the change from the wood to the coal in barges, the same way with shanty boats. I've seen shanty boats built by "Pinky" Brooks, Jerdy Goodpasture, and different ones like that.

LAWLESS: Have you ever been on a shanty boat?

HILL: Oh, yes, yes. I fished off the end of [?] Goodpasture's at Hogan Creek.. That was years ago, back in the [19]20's.

LAWLESS: What kind of furniture did they have?

HILL: Oh, just ordinary chair, table, stove, and cook stove. They used little laundry type cook stoves, mainly. Have a little old oven of some kind, kerosene oven. And they would have a garden back up on the bank. They would raise some beans and maybe a hog back on the bank. And fish.

LAWLESS: Livelihood came from selling the fish?

HILL: Well, some. Yes, they used to sell on Ulrich's corner for ten cents a pound, fifteen cents for catfish.

LAWLESS: Did you ever have fishmongers that would drag the fish through town on a rope?

HILL: Well, they brought them up there. Yeah. I can remember them being at Ulrich's corner, selling fish. They seined, they had nets and all that kind of stuff, plus a trot line.

LAWLESS: Could you describe some of that equipment?

HILL: Well, you had your hook nets, then wing nets, your nets and hooks, then seins, and that. To seine that was different. You set a net, tie up to shore and run the wings out. The sides of the net in the river and maybe the river would be raising and these fish would swim up along the shore and swim right in and hit the what-you-call-it and go to the center where the net was and go on up in the throat of the net. And there they were trapped. Then they would go out there and trace them and pull them up in the rowboat, take the fish out, and reset the net. But then seining was a different story. In other words, you put the seine on the back of the deck of a rowboat, and you had one guy stand ashore or a couple of guys stand ashore, on the upper end. And they'd take out right straight across the river and then they would run a circle, a half-moon circle, and come back to shore. Then the guys would get ahold of the lower end of it and pull it on in. And they would pull from both ends, and they would bag it and bring it on in. And the fish would get in the center of the bag and then you'd take the fish out and put it in your fish box. That was a big, old wooden square box with a lid on it. And then they would anchor that out and that would keep the fish alive. And then the next morning, they'd take the fish, go up to Ulrich's corner and sell fish. And that was your refrigerator and everything, see.

LAWLESS: I was going to ask about refrigeration.

HILL: The same way with things like the home brew and that. They always put that down in the hull of the shanty boat, and the boat would leak some. So there was always some water down there. They'd just set it down in there, and the water kept it cool. Probably drank river water, creek water – that didn't bother them. Took their bath in the river – everything was river. They didn't go up town to get it. Made their own home brew out of river water.

LAWLESS: They were fairly self-sufficient, then?

HILL: That was it. They were. They would survive. They would sell a few fish to maybe buy a pair of shoes, something like that, in their day.

LAWLESS: Did they raise children on the shanty boat?

HILL: Oh, plenty of them – that was a good supply.

LAWLESS: Did they leave the boats to go to school?

HILL: Oh, yeah. They would force them to go to school. They would have to go, sure. There have been many a shanty boat kid that went to school here in Aurora. Oh, yeah. And they fought every inch of the way.

LAWLESS: Did the town kids fight with the shanty boat kids?

HILL: Oh, sure. Usually the shanty boat kids won, because the high society kid, he had too dressy of clothes and he wasn't supposed to get them messed up. But he would get them messed up with the shanty boat gang.

LAWLESS: But they accepted you on the shanty boats?

HILL: Yeah. I knew all them people. I fished with them and hunted with them. I run into them today, different ones around town, the old shanty boat gang. Lot of them gone, awful lot of them people.

LAWLESS: Who are some of the people still living that grew up on a shanty boat?

HILL: Well, one of them [?] Baker. He knew all them people, too. He lived over in there and not too many of them left. Well, people in Aurora, the shanty boat people – the older people knew them, done business with them, and everything else. There ain't too many of them around anymore.

LAWLESS: What do you attribute to the fact that no one lives on a shanty boat now?

HILL: They have changed the laws and everything else. Jobs were more plentiful. That was the depression, in other words.

LAWLESS: You mentioned about the same time, there were the hobos?

HILL: Well, that's depression. You see, you are talking depression and that's the reason. As the economy got better and jobs got better, why, more or less, then they upgrade theirself. That's like I can tell a good one. During the [19]'37 flood, Governor Gates[9] one time went down to Evansville and how come? To get away from the nickname "river-rat." I just want to show you that we was talking about and how things changed. Governor Gates went down visiting Evansville after the '37 flood, and he got to talking to one of those old river rats down by the river and he says, somehow or other, a discussion came up between the difference of river-rats and refugees. He said, "Well, Governor, I'll jist tell ya. You know us river-rats always lived along the river and ever time it rained, it got up in our house, but you know since it got a little higher up in town, you can't call them river rats. You call them refugees." See, in other words, it got just a little bit over the line, so they had to change it. It wasn't "river-rats." That's what they were known as. The shanty boat people were known as "river-rats" because they lived in the low end of town. And, usually, they were flooded out quite often. They had to move and their shanties or trailer or whatever they had – shanty boats – they would be working on it, trying to get to floatin'. And that was over here in what they called "Utah." That's over here where the terminal is today. Most of that area on that low end was shanty boats and all that kind of stuff. And down by the railroad track, along the river bank and the wharf

[9] "Ralph F. Gates," Indiana Governor History (www.in.gov/governorhistory : accessed 7 Apr 2022); Governor of Indiana January 8, 1945 – January 10, 1949.

boat was below the mouth of the creek, at the foot of Second Street, or approximately along there, below Hogan.

LAWLESS: Was that known as "gas landing" at one time?

HILL: Yeah, I think that was. That would be before my time. And, then, there was a lot of coal barges and Opp Coal Company up above where the terminal is today, where that crane is, that was the Opp Coal Company. They had coal barges in there, and the box factory used to get barges in when they first used to unload barges up there years ago. A lot of this is gone today. The wharf boat was discontinued after the [19]'37 flood. It landed, if I remember right, it was up about where the "Applewood" is. That's where it wound up, right around there. Gus Gerlach built a building right there at the end of Second Street. That is gone now. Just right off the end of Second Street. And, in later years, why, we played "nosey poker" there, and one thing and another. That was our "hooky" place.

LAWLESS: I was going to ask you about that. There was – the pastimes, you said you didn't have much pastimes?

HILL: Oh, we played marbles. Mainly we played marbles, flew kites, built our own kites and flew them. Always around March, we would fly kites here along the river front, here along Dutch Hollow and that. George Neff,[10] he'd build box kites and things like that. We was always flying kites, playing marbles, touch football, shinny. In wintertime, shinny was a big game on ice on the creeks.

LAWLESS: Is that what you played with a ball?

HILL: No. We didn't have no ball. You used a Wilson milk can, a little bitty small milk can and any club. Your shinny club consisted of an old sycamore root, a knob on it but rough on the shins, built a fire out on the ice on each end, draw a line and the guy that crossed that line, well, that was shinny. Well, that's what you call shinny – and fish, hunt. Hunting was separate, but that was our pastimes. Try to get a job putting in coal for somebody. Carrying coal, I tell you, up some of these hills and up some of these steps on Fifth Street and Conwell Street, you earned your money. Cut wood - do a little bit of everything.

LAWLESS: You worked all your life on the river, then?

HILL: Well, actually been around. I can't say I've worked on it, but I've been around that river. I've swam in it, from about six years old and up. Been on it and in it and everything else.

[10] Dearborn County Obituaries, database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (www.lpld.lib.in.us : accessed 7 Apr 2022); citing Press 7 Dec 1955; Register 22 Dec 1955; entry for George Silas Neff. B. 24 Aug 1893 d. 18 Dec 1955. 62 years of age. Aurora, IN. Associated with Neff Shoe Store, Aurora, IN. Business founded by his father. Son of John and Margaret Frankman Neff. Retail shoe merchant.

LAWLESS: Have you had other occupations besides working on tug boats?

HILL: Oh, yeah. I was in the Marine Corps, and I worked for Schenley Distillers. I went to work for Chevron Oil Corporation, which is Standard Oil of California. That's when I finally wound up - when I took sick. I was around the river all through Chevron time, off and on, always down around the river.

LAWLESS: Did you hear your parents talking about the brewery or distillery here in Aurora?

HILL: Well, my Dad talked about the 1918 ice and all of that. My brother was born during the [19]'17-'18 ice. I've heard my Dad talk about the old railroad bridge which they tore down here, had removed. They had it floating off the what-you-call-it from turning around sideways and turning over. Now Earl Huffman wrote some stories on that – that bridge. Then they put it back up on afterwards, and crushing houses and everything else.

LAWLESS: We have some pictures of it crushing river boats or more in Cincinnati, big ones like the *Delta Queen*.

HILL: Well, now, the old wharf boat survived that, and it was settin' about where I was telling about. It was terminated somewhere around the "Applewood," maybe a little further down river. I don't know. Might have been down where the Moose is today, along there. Along the wall is where it wound up. Might have been around the ferry boat, I don't know. That was before my time.

LAWLESS: Do you remember your folks or your Dad talking about any stories of gambling hostels and that nature here in Aurora?

HILL: Well, my Dad, when he first came around here, he lived at Wilmington. And he used to meet the train to pick up mail and stuff like that, but my Dad worked for Public Service Company here. That's light, water, and gas. He worked around the old gas plant. Now, I can remember the old gas plant that Nathan Chatham worked there. And he fired the retorts and as boys, we used to go down there in the wintertime. That was a place for us to loaf. And the old Dearborn Bakery, that was another place.

LAWLESS: Where was that located?

HILL: That was on the corner of Second Street. That building is gone today. In other words, the old Dearborn Bakery went out during the [19]'37 flood.

LAWLESS: There was one old person that you mentioned, an old timer, that knew a lot about the flood?

HILL: That was Wonder Brooks,[11] living today. And he was marshal in Aurora at that time. Wonder Brooks is still living today and he is around Aurora here. You see him down Second Street quite often.

LAWLESS: We didn't get to finish that. You mentioned he was a marshal?

HILL: He was a marshal, yeah.

LAWLESS: Was your family directly affected by the flood where you were living?

HILL: Well, partly, yes. I lived on a shanty boat for a while myself. Actually, I did. That was when times were pretty bad. Well, I'll be honest with you. I can tell you this much - about I never mentioned this too much. But it started out that my Dad had quite a bit of money. And my Dad worked for Public Service and that, and had quite a bit of stock and he owned a place. I can't tell this as being the truth for sure, but I heard this. The house that we owned on Park Avenue, at that time, as near as I know, was removed from where they set the gas tank on Main Street by the Main Street bridge. It was tore down, and they set the gas tank there and that house was moved to Park Avenue. Well, in the meantime, that was when Stoll's had a slaughter house on Park Avenue, and that was right across from it. And when I was a little tiny boy, I used to go over to the slaughter house. I knew Newt Funk, which was Leonard Funk. I was named after him, and Leslie Hofstetter. And I used to go down to the slaughter house and get pig tails. In the meantime, them guys would wrap link sausage around my neck – I was about four years old – and then they would kick me in the fanny and send me for home. And so, then, my Dad developed double pneumonia and almost died, then sold that place and bought a place out on Sherman Street out in Cochran which was up back of Hyde's Grocery. Now, that's another thing that's gone. That was years ago. Well, in the meantime, now, I didn't want to say – you aren't recording this, are? …

LAWLESS: How old were you when you lived on a shanty boat?

HILL: Well, I was around twelve or thirteen.

LAWLESS: Did you have other brothers or sisters?

HILL: Yeah. I had a sister. She lives at Rising Sun, but my brother lives at Lawrenceburg.[12] And my brother that passed away here a while back, and my other brother that lives at Moores Hill. Gradually, I worked for Tom Ward, down here, one thing and another. Worked around the garage

[11] Dearborn County Obituaries, database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (www.lpld.lib.in.us : accessed 7 Apr 2022); citing Journal Press 24 Sep 1985, Register 26 Sep 1985; entry for Wonder Brooks d. 18 Sep 1985.
[12] Dearborn County Obituaries, database *Lawrenceburg Public Library* (www.lpld.lib.in.us : accessed 7 Apr 2022); citing Journal Press 23 Apr 1991; Register 11 Apr 1991; entry for Leonard L. Hill d. 10 Apr 1991. 71 years old; of Aurora, IN. Funeral Apr. 13, Filter Funeral Home, Aurora, IN. WWII Marine Corps veteran. Wife Juanita; brother Stanley Hill; sister, Letha Cartwright.

around Speckman's, and that. Everybody worked, and my Dad passed away while we lived on the river, on the boat.

LAWLESS: Where was your boat moored?

HILL: It was tied right in the mouth of the creek, on the lower side.

LAWLESS: Hogan?

HILL: Yes, right there. Tied right there at the corner of the bridge. And it sank during the [19]'37 flood. Went on down the river, went on down. Then we moved to a trailer and lived in the trailer. My mother died in the trailer – you couldn't talk to her. I went into the Marine Corps. I come back. I wanted to build her a new home, but no, no. She finally died up here by the old Farm Bureau in a trailer. And she used to come down to the barbershop and houses. Henry Ohlmansiek were pall bearers for her. In other words, she was well known and well respected. I don't think she had an enemy one in the city of Aurora.

LAWLESS: You said she had worked cleaning houses, etc.?

HILL: That's right, that's right. She took over when Dad passed away and everything, like I said.

LAWLESS: You really had a strand of bad luck there, but it was brought on by …?

HILL: Well, the depression. Everybody had it. You can't say one person. It was just the misfortune – the dealings have always been. In any family, you run into the same thing – a lot of these things …

LAWLESS: How close together were these moored – the shanty boats?

HILL: Well, across the creek on the opposite side were the ones of Lottie and Blue Goodpaster. On our side, every so far apart. Nobody said anything. Now the laws are changed. You ain't allowed to have them. The sanitary end of it, the river was a bathroom. Today, you can't even go out there on account of pollution, and this and that and another.

LAWLESS: Did your father build the shanty boat?

HILL: No, he bought it.

LAWLESS: Did it have two rooms or three rooms?

HILL: It had three rooms. Most all of them had two or three rooms. You had mainly bedrooms and then your kitchen. It was your living room-kitchen and that. Some of them were bigger. Some of

them would be forty feet long, some fifty feet long. It all varied all according to where they got the timber to build them. And they built them right along the river bank, usually built out of white oak, if possible. The side gunnels were. The bottom was oak, and they would be caulking and everything, getting them ready for flood.

LAWLESS: You said most of them leaked. Were they in pretty bad shape?

HILL: Oh, well, they had to leak a small percentage. If they been sittin' on shore, they'd dry out. And they soak 'em up. They'd pour water in them just like you would a barrel. In other words, you let a barrel set out two or three days, it'll leak, then you put liquid in it, then you put liquid in it. Then it swells back up, tightens up. They just drive cork and oakum, cotton and oakum in it. And even on the tow boats, they used to take ashes a lot of times and dump over the dead end from the boiler and that would seal up a lot of the crack so it wouldn't leak so bad.

LAWLESS: Most of these shanty boats didn't have any kind of motor, did they?

HILL: No. They just marooned it and tied it up to a tree. And they used rowboats to pull it. Very seldom would they use a motor in those days. There may be an old "one lunger," as we call it. They put them in the smaller boats. An old stationary "one lunger" – with a paddle on the back of it, like they would a steam boat with a paddle. But, other than that, that was about the only thing they had. They didn't have the money to buy a motor, and usually about all the tools they had was a draw knife and a hatchet mainly, and that was it. And maybe a sledge hammer for drivin'.

LAWLESS: Nets and all for fishing?

HILL: Yeah. Well, their wives knitted them, but used to be quite a feat. They would go up and buy so many skeins of line and knit their seine or knit their net.

LAWLESS: What kind – rather large needles did they use?

HILL: They built their own needles. They made them out of wood.

LAWLESS: Fairly good sized?

HILL: Well, no. They weren't too large. I'd say about ten or twelve inches long and maybe two to three inches wide.

LAWLESS: Did they whittle them out themselves?

HILL: Oh, yeah. They were whittled. They were made and whittled.

LAWLESS: Oak?

HILL: Oh, it all varied. Whatever they – just enough to hold their string. They would shove it through and knit it through and tie it, tie knots.

LAWLESS: Was there a special technique?

HILL: Oh, yeah. I can't do it today. I know what it looks like. They get them perfectly square. And the way they tied that, I can't do it.

LAWLESS: Did the knots have a particular name?

HILL: No, not that I know of. I have seen Nettie Theis or Nettie Brooks knit them many a time and all of that. Watch hour after hour. Just like a quilting party. Just set there and knit away on a seine or a net or …

LAWLESS: On their boats or would they do it on shore?

HILL: They'd do it on the boat, on shore and all around. Hang up on the trees to dry. Put lead lines on 'em. Knit the lead line, webbing. It was a craft that was only known along the river. If you look at a hammock, that's what they look like, the way they were knotted. And if you can figure out how they start.

LAWLESS: Are there still any ladies alive, or men, that would have made their own nets?

HILL: Oh, there probably is. But I don't know of any that are in Aurora. They would be very few and far between. I don't know of any off hand right now, would even know how to start to knit. And then, they tarred them. That's another thing they would get, I don't know where. They got the pitch and that. They got pitch and they would put it in an old what-you-call-it, and build a big bonfire and get it good and hot, lower the nets down in it, dip the hooks down in it. No, the old boys are gone. Used to fix down "Texas" way, different ones are all gone.

LAWLESS: "Texas" was this part?

HILL: Yeah. Down by the Wooden Shoe – down along 56 (Rt. 56).

LAWLESS: You mentioned the Wooden Shoe, the point of the Wooden Shoe, I want you to go back and tell me …

LAWLESS: You said the nets were quite large.

HILL: Oh, yeah. They would have four foot hoops or bigger, and they tarred 'em or pitched 'em so they would keep from rotting in the water and that. And some of them nets, the wing nets, they would take them out and put a big anchor on, a big rock on the head end, to hold them. And the fish swam up there. Then they would go out there with their grab hook in order to keep the game warden from finding them. They wouldn't put no buoy on them. And they would take them out there and lower them down in the river, and they'd mark the bank somewhere where they were at. And sneak out there at different times, hook them with a grab hook and raise them. Actually, they were not supposed to fish in the Ohio River, but they didn't have the money to buy a license.

LAWLESS: You said some of the nets were quite large and they lowered them from a pulley?

HILL: Oh, yeah. They stretched them out. They would be six or eight feet long, you see. And they would just pull together real close. There would be six or eight hooks, one after the other, and there would be space of three feet or maybe two feet between each set of hooks to hold around like that. When they stretched it out, it would be real long – maybe eight or ten feet long.

LAWLESS: They lowered them like a big kettle?

HILL: Yeah. And to tar them. That was but to fish, they would stretch it out up the river like an accordion, then anchor the tail end of it down the other way, reach out towards shore. Then that way it would be stretched out a long way. Then they'd get the fish in there and, heck, they'd swim up in the tail end of it, and there was a throat in there. And after they swam through the throat, they didn't have sense enough to swim back out. And it would be too small. In other words, it was tapered like a funnel, and when they swam in there, they were caught. If you look at a minnow trap today, it's the same way. The minute he swims in the bottom side, and after he gets in the trap, he can't get out and that's what the fish did there. That's the same thing. Only they were wooden hooks. They made their own hooks, usually they made their hooks out of oak. And what they'd do, they would get a green sapling, about the size of a tobacco stick, maybe a little bigger, and they would bend that. They would soak that in water and heat like steam, and keep a-bending that and bring it into a perfect circle, just like a barrel. Then they would start in knittin'.

LAWLESS: What did they use for webbing, hemp or …?

HILL: Well, most time, they'd use cotton, regular cotton fish staging, and they'd know that. They'd buy that by the skein, so many pounds, and then they would knit up their nets with that. They would mainly do that in the wintertime when they didn't have nothing else to do, and they might have an old battery radio, and they would get a car battery, and they would have an old Maytag motor and a generator off an old car of some kind, or some kind, to charge their battery. And they'd have their "one lunger" out there banging away and charge up their battery so they could listen to Amos 'n Andy or Little Orphan Annie. Coal oil lantern, and usually used a lantern instead of coal oil. You talked about fire. The reason they used lanterns, they could always hang them on a nail, and it was

fairly safe. Where, if you had a coal oil stove, and they were on the river, either had to have a ledge all the way around your table because a coal oil lamp would turn over and maybe burn your shanty boat. So they would use lanterns. An old kerosene lantern, and then later they went to the gasoline type. Aladdin lanterns and stuff like that. But, mainly … the old original was just an old kerosene lantern and that was their light. That's the way they even studied for school – the kinds. In other words, that's the way they were brought up. And then they wore hand-me-downs.

LAWLESS: Was it pretty cold on the shanty boats?

HILL: Well, they wasn't no insulation, I'll tell you that. But they got used to it.

LAWLESS: How did they keep body and soul together in the winter time? Did they ice fish?

HILL: No, no. They just more or less stored up for it. That's all you can say.

LAWLESS: This coal and wood they gathered up on the banks, did they try to sell that?

HILL: No, not very seldom. If they picked up coal, they used it theirself and they cut the wood from the drift and that. Then they'd go out and work and they'd fish as long as there wasn't ice in the river. They'd fish and seine with their nets.

LAWLESS: What kind of fish?

HILL: Carp, catfish, stuff like that. Wasn't too much bass, mainly carp and catfish. Suckers, sometimes. Catfish sold for fifteen cents a pound. Carp ten cents and you had to clean it and that was a heck of a job. But I never sold fish myself. And then, they had their gardens. Like I say, one thing and another.

LAWLESS: So, the banks were not the property of anyone?

HILL: Well, nobody ever said anything to anybody. They owned or give somebody a dollar for the ground. Nobody really cared too much. And then, as boys, we built shanties along the river, and that was another place to play hooky. Oh, we burned shanties down one time – I'll never forget. I wasn't in on it. We had an old boy by the name of Ray Carlton. And that was down at the foot of Broadway Street, had a big old shanty built out of tin and driftwood; had a big barrel for a stove. And the boys were all down there that morning, playing hooky from school, playing cards, "nosey Poker." Anyway, Ray Carlton lost for some reason, he got mad, went home and got a box of shot gun shells, 12 gauge, climbed up on the shanty roof and throwed them down the chimney in the barrel. It exploded, burned the barrel, burned the shanty down and set the river bank all on fire. Had to call the fire department over and they give him six months for the destruction of property.

LAWLESS: What were these shanties like that you kids would build?

HILL: Well, it was just a bunch of posts, stood up. Some posts nailed together out of used nails and stuff like that. And they put a roof over it, tin, wherever we could get tin, to make a shanty – what we called a shanty.

LAWLESS: They were smaller than the house boats?

HILL: Oh, yeah. Lot smaller. About the size of a room big enough to get in. They were a lot of shanties built along the river them days. Just anything to do.

LAWLESS: Was there any boat building here in Aurora, such as Cincinnati Marine Ways?

HILL: No. Other than just shanty boats. That were built by individuals and no powerboats. But I see out here by Milton, there used to be a guy by the name of Whitney, I believe, a few years ago that built boats. Read that stone out there, on 262.

LAWLESS: Yes. I haven't read the stone, though.

HILL: It's on the left hand side, going across the bridge. Going across from Dearborn County into Ohio County in Milton. Right off in the weeds there and gives a several names on there. I think it was a flat type boat, brought down Laughery Creek. I ain't sure just what he built back in there, but you got a sign up here at the foot of Second Street about boat building. I think that's the same guy, or is that James, maybe, that's Pinkey James. But, anyway, the stone is carved out there at Milton on Laughery Creek on 262, where you cross the bridge going to Rising Sun.

LAWLESS: So, you were living on a shanty boat during the [19]'37 flood?

HILL: No. That was before the [19]'37 flood.

LAWLESS: How old were you during the [19]'37 flood?

HILL: I was approximately sixteen.

LAWLESS: Were you working, then, on the river?

HILL: No. Right after that I had gone on the river, [19]'37 –'38.

LAWLESS: What was life like on your shanty boat at the time when the heavy rains kept coming and coming?

HILL: Well, it worked on it, get it floating, keep moving up as the river raised. Kept trying to stay into shore and kept going up and up. Then, when the water started to fall, then you had to make the trek out, get outside the railroad. That's the way the shanty boat people, unless they had a lot of something they owned on the inside, where they would just go right straight up in the air. And then when it come time, they would come back down. And then they would try to set down on blocks, because, you see, if you let the bottom of the shanty boat set down on mud, then it would rot it away. So, that's the reason why they set it down on blocks and blocked it up.

LAWLESS: So, they didn't sit out on the water too much?

HILL: No, no. Mainly, they got on shore. Maybe, sometimes in the summertime, they would leave them. Come early spring, they'd put them in.

LAWLESS: Mostly they were on dry land?

HILL: Yes, that's right. Right along the shore on dry land. And they would try to get as high as they could in the winter time because they didn't like to get out there to tie that rope. So, what they would do, they would just work 'em up and down the shore that way.

LAWLESS: I always thought they had them floating out in the creek.

HILL: No, no. Most of the time they were on shore.

LAWLESS: How much warning did your family have before your boat was washed downstream?

HILL: Oh, you had plenty of warning. In other words, you knew it was leaking. Unless it was leaking too bad, then you just go. Everything off and let it go. That's all you could do.

LAWLESS: What made your family decide to get off the boat?

HILL: Well, my Dad died right before the [19]'37 flood. And then the hull was getting rotten. One thing and another and indications were – just like a car – to get rid of it.

LAWLESS: You weren't actually living on it when it started to float away?

HILL: No, no. We had done moved off. It got to where we couldn't do nothing with it. It sank.

LAWLESS: Have you talked about how high the water got here?

HILL: Did you see that mark on Shuck's building, when they were cleaning that paint off that building next to Shuck's?

LAWLESS: No. Was that the high water mark?

HILL: That was the [19]'37 flood marker. On there when he steamed that building off. They were going to put a copper what-you-call-it on there, but …

LAWLESS: A marker?

HILL: Some kind of marker on it.

LAWLESS: The 1913 flood, my mother was born during that flood. That was another bad one, but I understand that was more up north than down here.

HILL: Well, I didn't know anything about the 1913. That was way before my time. I didn't know too much about the [19]'18, other than I heard my Dad talk about the ice and that's when all them boats in Cincinnati and everywhere were crushed.

LAWLESS: We have discussed … how they moved out and all the roads were blocked off except this one over here.

HILL: This alley. That used to be the old Southside School. You went up this alley, right there next to the Mary Stratton Park, and up through the school yard behind George Neff's house, and then out through the alley on to Dutch Hollow and then over the hill. That was the only outlet from the main part of Aurora during the [19]'37 flood.

LAWLESS: Could you go east at all?

HILL: No. That was the only way out. Everything else was closed, other than by boat.

LAWLESS: Where in town were you living at that time?

HILL: In the trailer at the foot of Conwell Street. That's above Aylor and Meyer. On the street then, you moved out away from the flood water.

LAWLESS: Did the flood water get that high? It probably didn't.

HILL: No, not quite. It was in the Catholic Church on the floor. The nun's house was next to the Catholic Church. That's between where they built that new – the school set back on top of the wall. It was in the nun's house, and I think it was on the floor of the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church, which is right down here, was the National Guard headquarters. And the firehouse was all under water. See, all of Third Street was completely under, including the post office. The post office was the old warehouse where Johnston's was in, and Leslie Hofstetter had an

implement place. And in the back alley was a marble playing place. Because it had a roof over the back alley and that's when we played when it rained. That was our marble playing place. But that Third Street was completely under water. Second Street was completely under water. Second Street at the railroad crossing had between four and five feet of water over the railroad at the B & O. See, the creek had met the river and gone across, now Third Street, all the way up through there, clear up had water. And then Fourth Street was up to the Catholic Church, and Fifth Street, it was just over that hump going down to the river. Didn't quite make it up to that church. It was just over the top of the hill. And when I show you the pictures, I'll show you the pictures of them tanks. And you see them, that wall coming down Dutch Hollow and will give you an idea of how high because these pictures were taken over here by Dutch Hollow. And I think I have one from off the top of the hill, looking down this way on the river, but I have several. I have pictures of box cars floating over there, where the new bank is to be.

LAWLESS: Your electricity and water and everything was shut off?

HILL: Yes. Everything was dead. Well, you couldn't have any electricity because you were out in metal boats and one thing and another, and rooting around. And if you reached out and got a wire, you was gone. Not too much electricity in them days anyway.

LAWLESS: But your natural gas for heat was cut off, too?

HILL: Well, yeah. Everything was cut off. You didn't have anything, drinking water, or nothing.

LAWLESS: I understand that a lot of people came up to these cisterns for water at Hillforest?

HILL: Well, yeah. They had their wells and one thing and another around. And cisterns were ever they could to get water. But there wasn't too many people here. Like I say, everybody was pretty well gone. It was just, oh, there were a few.

LAWLESS: Lived with relatives or friends?

HILL: Yes. They just moved out and went to different places. All out on the hills out behind. Left their furniture. Lost everything they had. Start over …

LAWLESS: They refer to "Black Sunday." What happened on Black Sunday?

HILL: Well, that was when the Miami River run out and the Lawrenceburg levee broke and everything. Raising three feet an hour at that time, the river was. She was just jumping.

LAWLESS: Do you know how high it eventually got?

HILL: I think it was 81.3 feet. I ain't just sure. I think we had a little more water here in Aurora than they did in Cincinnati. I know this – the river went on standstill. I don't remember, 3 hours or 6 hours, when the levee broke. It took that long to fill Lawrenceburg, old town and Newtown. It stopped and then started raising again.

LAWLESS: Did you know anyone that lived in Newtown or Lawrenceburg at that time?

HILL: Well, I knew people. But most all of them are gone now. They only lost one life there. That old man died of a heart attack or something before he got away.

LAWLESS: Have you talked to people that were over there at the time?

HILL: No. I really haven't.

LAWLESS: That must have been something, to have it come gushing …

HILL: Well, that's it. They were expecting it, you see, So, they got out. In other words, when it gets so high on the levee, you either have to get or else. And then you know it will be about a matter of an hour. You can't go very far in an hour. And the only place you could travel would be on top of the levee and hope it didn't break under you. Now, you [?] to think about that. That's a true statement.

LAWLESS: The ground would be pretty spongy with water?

HILL: Yes. Already spongy. And you're just hoping it don't break out from under you.

LAWLESS: While you're crossing it?

HILL: Yeah.

LAWLESS: That was about the only way out of town?

HILL: That would have been the only way out of Lawrenceburg. You see, when that low place fell, the cars were left. And you would have had to swim or hang on to a board or whatever you could. When it broke, that was it. Anybody down behind that levee was caught.

LAWLESS: They've rebuilt that levee.

HILL: They built it higher, to withstand the [19]'37 flood. Higher. But we will never know if we will get another flood that high or not.

LAWLESS: Would it be possible now, with the different dams, the Markland Dam …?

HILL: That dam deal, I don't think that has anything to do with it because the higher you level, it fills up just the same. Slows down the current as much, dirt settling in it. These levees are all being built along, and you're trying to channel that water in a more narrow channel. But the only thing is, they have built all these other dams and all like, up on these creeks and rivers and one thing and another. Like Versailles Dam. That helps slow down the run-off, and ponds and things like that where it takes the run-off. At the rate they're cutting trees and stuff, woods has a lot to do with weather. If there are no trees, the dirt washes and one thing and another, and forms gulley's.

LAWLESS: Do you think we might be due for another bad flood someday?

HILL: Well, I don't know. I have wondered on that. There's possible – because now you take Markland. They can control water up to about fifty-two feet. Pretty soon it is going over the dam or go around it, so how much can you control? They can control an awful lot of it, but it still depends on this. The [19]'37 flood, the reason we had so much problem with the '37 flood was, we had floods from the middle west that had gone down the Mississippi River. O.K., the Mississippi River was already at flood stage. So, then, when all the rains came east, the snow and everything on the Ohio, when all the floods came east and snow started melting on the Ohio, water came down and went over the top of the water which had already backed up on the Mississippi. So, then, in turn, the Ohio couldn't go nowhere. So, it had to back up. So, that is what caused the flood up on the Ohio. And it could happen again. Supposing that you would get severe winters with a lot of rain and run-off on the Missouri and the Mississippi and the Illinois Rivers, and everything. And they would go to flooding in the south, and then your levees had a lot to do with it. And levees broke down there and flooded thousands and thousands of acres. But we could still have the same thing that happened down there. So I don't see why we couldn't have it on the Ohio. I'm not going to say it can't be.

LAWLESS: Aurora doesn't have a levee?

HILL: No.

LAWLESS: Why did they decide against this here?

HILL: Well, I think you'll find that due to the fact that it ain't protecting enough people, and you got the creek dividing and you would have to build a levee around the main part of Aurora from one hill around to the other hill, the same way on the opposite side of the creek, then you would still have the west side which is an island settin' out there. So, actually, you could build one to protect the far side of the creek where the terminal and the box factory is, follow around the creek and build a levee all the way around and go up to the old Aurora city park. Then you'd have to do the same over on the main part of town, unless they put a flood gate across the creek like they got the Mill Creek barrier dam, they call it. But, then you got to pump this water to get rid of it because there would be

water coming down that creek and immense amount of water comes down the creeks. It could be done that way. You could put a levee and run it around that way, but then you would have to run it up into the hills up to "Chiptown" or up above the box factory and run it down along the river and all the way down into town. And then, these hills are slipping, so you got a chance that maybe your levee would slip. The soapstone underneath is still a-moving.

LAWLESS: We got cracks at Hillforest. I know we're slipping down the hill.

HILL: That's right. The town is going down and out at the same time. And this is what we're seeing. And a lot of that is caused by, I felt, from Markland Dam raising and lowering when it comes to barges. They went into the rollers down there, and they lowered it down into the low pool years ago to get them barges out from the 26-27 flood mark, down to the 13 flood mark. That was the original pool, 13 some. Now it's running 26-27, so there's quite a bit of difference there. And that water was more or less stable. It stabilized the ground, and that was it. And then the higher you raise it, and the waves and that, and the boats and stuff going by, is causing erosion, causing slippage. And it will take some time before all that will stabilize itself again, equalize the pressure.

LAWLESS: Are they still raising and lowering it that much?

HILL: Well, no. This was from that accident happened that they dropped it way down. But the water not helping stabilizing the ground because it starts slipping and the ground is heavier than the water. So, that is the reason slippage comes.

LAWLESS: 56 out here. They have to keep resurfacing that section.

HILL: That's right. That's sliding and that is the ground is heavier than the water. But maybe sometime it will equalize so that the pressure of the water is as great as the pressure of the slide. That will stop it from sliding. But then, erosion is eating away at it.

LAWLESS: That's true. It remains to be seen what the future holds.

HILL: Oh, yeah. I have seen a lot of changes.

LAWLESS: After the flood, the people came back. Was there a feeling of neighbor helping neighbor?

HILL: Oh, yeah. They always did help one another.

HILL: I started in to kidding you, one thing and another, pretty soon, "Well, I need a shave." You said, "I ain't shaved anybody in twenty years," and I said, "Well, get your razor out and get started."

LAWLESS: Only person I ever shaved in the last, at least ten years, was Cowboy Bob, and he just had "peach fuzz." And I wouldn't consider he had a … You've had an interesting life, and there's a lot of interest now in everything we have talked about – your shanty days, the flood …

Hill: Well, I tell you, I will make a statement. I will say that I feel that in them days, we had good teachers, that we could say were teachers. And when you think it over, I only went to the sixth grade of school. And I would have to think Blanche Rushworth, like I stated, because she started me out in education, and how does a person make it if you hadn't them people to start you off right. And I feel this new education today, a lot of it, has been very poor.

LAWLESS: Yeah. They don't get the basics.

HILL: That's it. And we were taught, we got the "board" put to us, at the same time. We learned.

LAWLESS: And then, parents today don't give children basics.

HILL: No, no.

LAWLESS: You don't have any sense of family togetherness.

HILL: That was it. There was a difference there. But what I'm saying, though, when you went to school, you learned something. You were either going to learn or they were going to "board" you to get it, but you learned. I tell you an awful lot of education learned up there. Down here at the Catholic School, they learned all of this stuff. In other words, you didn't "shyster" like they're doing today. That is, buy your way along. Have to be ready to go – "not recording"?