

Mr. John Day

Interviewed by  
Miss Betty Turnell

for the  
Decatur Public Library

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ROBERT H. DUMAS, City Librarian



February 2, 1978

Mr. John Day  
2190 S. Lostbridge Road  
Decatur, IL 62521

Dear Mr. Day:

We have received from Miss Betty Turnell the tape of your recent interview. Enclosed you will find a copy of the transcript made from this recording. It would be most beneficial if you would read it and make necessary corrections as well as making any comments on clarifications that you would consider helpful. Please take note of any necessary spelling changes. Return the corrected copy to the library at your earliest convenience in the envelope provided.

You have our deepest appreciation for participating in this oral history project. The transcript will become part of our Local History Collection. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

*Sharon L. Loe*  
Sharon L. Loe  
Reference Librarian

SLL:cp

*I hope I did the right thing in  
marking this like I did?  
any further help on this please  
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*as Miss Turnell knows I have started  
my biography. 40 pages so far with much  
of this included.*

Interview - Mr. John Day

November 29, 1977

Q. This is Betty Turnell for the Decatur Public Library with our guest today, Mr. John Day. Mr. Day, can you tell us something about your childhood? Were you born in Decatur?

Born → A. No, I was not. I was born on the outskirts of London, England. They called it ~~Thameswell~~ <sup>WAIN</sup> at that time. It was a suburb of London, but of course now it is incorporated into London proper and that was in 1902, April 27th. And it seems as though I was orphaned in some manner or form and I was admitted into an orphanage in London, England, named Dr. Bernardo's Homes. At the age of 13 months, according to my records - that's the way it was.

The story of Dr. Bernardo was this. In 1893 he started a home for lost children so to speak or waifs off the street. He had 9 children in his home at the time. There was a knock on his door one night, and a little boy was out there. He said he couldn't take him, and when he went out in the morning, the boy was found dead on the street. (This is supposed to be a true story. I have it in print.) He swore to God that day that he would never turn another child away and thus became what is nationally known in England and the British Empire at that time and is still today Dr. Bernardo's Homes and that is where I started to live. The children come in there, they multiply there so fast that they have to foster home them somewhere, somehow. I was put in a foster home with two other boys in the village or town of Tunbridge Wells, England. That's in Kent County in the southern part of England. It's about 60 miles out of London, straight south. How long I was there, I do not know, but I do know I started to school there in what they call "Infants' School". I was three years old. We call it Kindergarten here, so to speak. I do recall going to Infants' School with these other children. The older boy I don't know much about. He went to another school, but I and another little fellow, we went to the Infants' School.

Q. Was this a private home or was it another institution, like an orphanage?

A. A private home. These two people, as I recall had a child daughter but no boys. How we came to get there, I do not know but while I was there, the mother died and of course we three boys were sent back to the orphanage for re-distribution or whatever. I don't recall just how long that time was, however, the little fellow below me (we called him Sonny) and when we went back to the orphanage, we happened to be in the same dormitory at night, and he would be crying for me most of the night, as I remember.

So after a while there (I was there about six months before they got another place for me) what happened to the other two boys, I do not know). However they sent me up into Norfolk County to the little village of Feltwell to an elderly lady up there who wanted to take care of me, I suppose. Anyway, I was up there - how long I was there, I don't know, but they took me back to the homes and got me in shape to ship me out of the country like they did the rest of the kids, see? (But I got ahead.) ~~of my story~~ Well, it seems as though when I was in this village, this lady took care of

me in grand shape. I went to school there and at that time the little jacket that people were wearing was called the "Norfolk coat". It had pleats down here <sup>with a side</sup> and a belt. Well, she made me one so I could have it to go to church. She saw to it that I went to church pretty regularly - ~~and here, too, as far as that's concerned.~~

Well, how long I was there I do not know. Eventually, as I said, I was sent back to the orphanage to be prepared to go overseas. What they do is to subscribe to people in the country where we are going for contributions to pay for our passage. It seems as though the next bunch was going to go to India, so they gave me the name of a woman who had contributed enough money to passage a boy to India. They wanted me to write to her and thank her for that. Well, I was only eight or nine years old. I didn't know what it was all about, but I do recall writing to her and I got a letter back but to this day I don't know what happened to it. It didn't mean anything to me at that time.

Well, anyway, they started running us through the doctors - vaccination, inoculation, and all this. I and another kid were scared to death of doctors so we ran away and hid. We hid on a fire escape, up about two or three stories, and they didn't find us until that batch was already processed and shipped out. We finally had to come down - we were tired and hungry and everything else. So, the next batch was billed for Canada so of course we got hooked on that and the vaccination. I still carry the four marks <sup>of</sup> vaccination as they vaccinated in England ~~four marks~~ and they all took. ^

The next thing I knew I was on a train to Liverpool, England, and from there over to Canada and, of course, it was quite a deal for me and all the kids. We had a long train ride to Liverpool from London and then that big ship and everything. It was quite an experience but we were nobody. We had a white tag on our coat that told who we were and where we were supposed to be going. And so eventually we ended up in <sup>in</sup> Montreal, Quebec. We debarked there and went on a train to Toronto, which <sup>is</sup> a branch office of the same home. They have branch offices in all these countries, and, of course, you know at that time in history the sun never set on the British Empire, and we were sent everywhere the British Empire had control.

So how long I was in Toronto I don't know. It was another place just like in England - a big dormitory and a lot of kids and so one day, of course, they called for me and fixed me up with papers and had a guardian to go along with me and went out into Ontario to a little village called Inglewood, and we detrained there. There were some people there to meet me, but I didn't know who they were - I was only ten years old then. And after the papers were all signed, they took me in the horse and buggy to the farm.

I had to stay there. The orphanage has jurisdiction over you until you're seventeen and I was only ten years old. So we got there and everything was this and that. Like a kid everything was interesting to me. But much to my regret, I soon found out that it wasn't going to be a bed of roses. There were two bachelor brothers and a spinster sister. They were the remnants of a Scotch family of twelve. The others had all married and gone away, and these three were on the homestead farm. The younger of the brothers was thirty-eight years old - thirty-four or thirty-eight - and it wasn't long before I found out that he was pretty mean.

So he just beat me for any occasion. They had to get me to school right away so I walked to school and it was about two miles <sup>away</sup> ~~along the way~~ up here they called it sections - in Canada it's called concessions and you walk across a concession to another road. The hundred acre farms are backed up to each other. You have a hundred and I have a hundred. *etc.*

Anyway it's across the fields and through the woods to the school - so I was pretty well admitted - kids are kids and they all get along - but I was always hungry. I just never got enough to eat.

Q. Even on a farm?

A. Even on a farm. They had pretty much control over their spinster sister and told her what to give me or what's what. Lots and lots of time I went to school with just four little biscuits - like cup biscuits - two bites in each biscuit and I was pretty big. So some kids got to noticing it so they shared their lunch with me and that got back to these guys who were raising me. Now they were deacons and elders in the Presbyterian Church and that didn't set good at all so ~~they~~ <sup>the</sup> really beat me on that deal and said, "Don't you ever do things like that again."

Well I survived - ~~I survived~~ - and I don't regret anything that's ever happened to me.

Q. Mr. Day, how long did you stay on this farm?

A. Well, I stayed there as long as I was supposed to, regardless of the problems that I thought I was having, but as soon as I knew that I could be relieved, I took off.

Q. Was that when you were seventeen?

A. I was almost seventeen. ~~I was almost 17.~~ One of the neighbors wanted me real bad to work for him. He had had several of us boys in years past, in fact, he had three of us, but they don't stay forever and he had an opening for me and wanted me so I went over there and I was there with him for about three years and a half and I farmed there with him but like the other fellows I got tired of farming and I wanted to spread out.

So I went to a small town about twelve miles from there - about 8 or 9000 people. They had a tannery there. I went there and I got a job there at 35¢ an hour and I was on my own.

Well in the meantime I had bought a Model T Ford. Of course, you had to have wheels even in those times. I stayed there the whole winter and in the spring I spread out again.

So one of the boys who used to work for the last man I worked for - George Kirkwood, ~~he~~ was working for the Canadian National Railroad in Sarnia, Ontario, and he wrote to me and told me to come on up there - he'd get me a job there. So in May, 1922, I headed for Sarnia, Ontario. Before I went there <sup>no</sup> he was in the express office and he got a little too handy for having packages disappear and it seems as though he was taking this stuff and selling it. He was fired from there before I got there, ~~and I didn't get to them at that time.~~

*a job*

So I had to scrounge around and get a job pretty quick. I finally got a job at a bridge works not too far from where I was staying and this was all steel. I didn't know what it was all about, but I started in there as a mechanic's helper and I was on my way.

Well, eventually something happened there and I didn't stay there too long. I got another job. I got a job at what they called The Great Lakes Navigation at a little village outside Sarnia - Point Edward is what they called it - where the lake steamers came in there to be loaded and unloaded and of course, it was all manual except for bringing it up out of the hold - they had the hoists for that, of course.

These ships came in loaded with stuff from way up in Duluth and ~~all~~ around Pillsbury - I've handled so many bags of Pillsbury flour - gosh! Well, outside the freight house, they would have four lines of box cars lined up. They would unload the boats onto these various box cars. It was a 48 hour job all the time going and coming seven days a week. You could work as long as you wanted to. There was no over time pay but it was pretty good pay. But when the lakes freeze up then that job's done.

So you've got to get another job. It so happened that where I lived there was an engineer on the Canadian National that ran the train from Toronto to Sarnia. That was his run - a little over 200 miles. That train was the "International" that ran from Montreal to Chicago. His run as I said was from Toronto to Sarnia. Then it went ~~under the bridge~~, under the water in the tunnel <sup>of</sup> the St. Clair River to Port Huron, Michigan, where it was picked up there and brought on around to Chicago.

Well, he had a Model T Ford but he couldn't drive it. He was scared of it. I asked him one day, "What in the world is the matter with you? You're scared of that little car and you drive that locomotive eighty miles an hour?" He said, "John, listen. That locomotive is going to stay on that track, we hope, but that damn Ford will go anywhere." Those were just his words.

So when he was gone on the road, I'd drive it for his wife and what have you. So I said to him, "I'd like to have a ride with you some day on that locomotive."

He said, "~~I tell you~~. You come out to our last stop" which was a town like Taylorville, about thirty miles from Sarnia - "You get out there some way and you watch and if there are no officials aboard, I'll let you know and you come on up."

So I did that three times. I was very fortunate and got on every time. I watched every move he made until we got to Sarnia. So I knew just about how to run a locomotive.

So finally I went down to the railroad to see if I could get a job and lo and behold I got a job at what they called "the round house". all steam engines. When these steam engines come in they have to be serviced - this and that - the fires shook up and the clinkers out of it. So I and another guy, a mechanic who had been there for sometime <sup>in 1915</sup> - a mechanic's helper - we had to shake these fires out and get them ready. *for another trip*

Now, if the engine was going right out on another train we didn't have to do much - just shake the fires and see if it had enough sand and what have you. But if they were going to stick around a while, we had to knock the fire clear out.

I was on the 3 to 11 shift. I was there about three weeks and one night we couldn't find the old guy who was running the engine. We called him the hostler. He was too old to be on the road so he just moved the engines here and there in the yard.

This particular night there were nine engines waiting to be worked on. We had worked on two and it was coming onto nine thirty. We had only worked on two units and I thought, "My gosh, we're going to get in trouble" so I said to this guy, "We'll get in trouble on this." But he said, "No you won't. That guy isn't here to move them and we can't help it."

But as time went on, I got yancy and I got up in there. I told him, "I'm going to move this engine off of here and get another one up on the pit. (Ash Pit)"

He said, "You do and you'll get fired."

Well, nineteen or twenty years old, I didn't know anything. I didn't see why I'd be fired.

So I got up in there and I pulled the throttle. The thing started to roll and I looked out the window and got so far, then I put the brake on and braked her.

Then I went and got another one and brought it up. These were big engines, see - real big engines and I no sooner got it stopped on the pit than here comes the old hostler, just raising cane.

Just as the guy said, you'll get fired. The next afternoon, I came in and no time slip. I went to the clerk and asked him - I said, "There's no time slip." He said, "Your name Day?" I said yes. He said, "Superintendent wants to see you."

So I went to see the superintendent. He said, "Day, you broke one of the most important rules on this railroad." I said, "I did?" He said, "You sure did." He said, "What if that engine had got away from you? Either one of them? You know you would have done untold damage." I said, "I realize that, but it didn't happen." He said, "I know that Day, but I've got no alternative I've got to fire you. You broke one of the most important rules on this railroad."

So I was fired. But he never did ask me how come I knew what to do in such a short space of time so I never did tell him.

Q. So that finished that job. But what did you do next?

A. Well, the old saying is - if you're hungry, you'll look for a job - of course, I wasn't hungry, so to speak, but I knew I had to get another job. So I went to the Imperial Oil Refinery in Sarnia. It was quite a place - an oil refinery - even in those days. So I got a job there as a laborer. And that was taking a team of horses - with another guy - and a big dump wagon and going all around through the plant - like Staley's here - and picking up the debris and what have you to take to the dump. When I wasn't doing that - they had small tankers that sailed on the lakes. When a ship would be shipping oil, they would come back and want gasoline or naphththa or something else, so we laborers would have to go down in the hold and clean it - and what I mean, clean it. The foreman - he was a big Irishman by the name of Flaherty - and he was ever watchful that we would never get overcome by fumes and of zourse you could never smoke down in there. I wasn't smoking in those days anyhow. So he often hollered down and asked if we were OK and if we didn't answer OK, he was right on the ball. It was a dirty job - Oh, my - especially if it had had oil. They'd throw down a bale of rags and in no time that bale was used up. It was something else. I managed to get through the winter and made a pretty good job of it. Also in a refinery like that, there's a lot of coke where they make the gasoline in these stills. They clean them out and it's coke. Well, they sold the coke to the employees at a reasonable rate because that was real good fuel. So that was part of my job too - to deliver this coke to various homes in the city of Sarnia. Well, that petered out. Like everything else, when <sup>they</sup> you get short of money, they cut off the force.

In the meantime - Sarnia and Port Huron are just like Detroit and Windsor - and lot of traffic on the river. On Sundays in Canada at that time everything was closed - everything - theatres - anything you might think of was closed. All you have to do is just sit around and watch the boats go up and down the river. That was my pleasure at that time to sit on the side of the river and watch the boats. Now that river is about a mile and a half wide at that point and you could see so much activity in Port Huron, Michigan, where everything was wide open. All night, half the people in Sarnia and outside of Sarnia - they would come in from the country - would go over to Port Huron on the weekends to buy what you want or go to the show or anything. There were two ferry boats running all the time across that river. You would pay so much for the boat and if you wanted to take the car, you'd take the car and over there you'd go where you wanted to on Sunday. It was quite the thing at those times. Eventually they built the new bridge - the Blue Water Bridge - I was down here by that time in Decatur. It's one of the busiest bridges on the border between the United States and Canada. I have been over it many times since then.

So I decided I'd try Port Huron, Michigan, for a job. Unfortunately, it was in the winter time when I came over. I looked at the papers, looked at the want ads. There was a foundry south of Port Huron - they called it ~~South Park~~ ~~There was a foundry down there~~ - Holmes Foundry. I went down there on a Thursday. The guy said, "Come in in the morning. I think I can put you to work." So I said, "How about starting today at noon?"

He said, "What's the matter, you superstitious?"

I said, "No, I'm broke." I just had 27 cents to my name - that's all I had in the world. But my board and room were paid up in Sarnia until the end of the week



So he said, "Go out in the yard and see if you can find Charlie Cunningham. Talk to him and maybe he can put you to work."

That I did. He put me in a gondola railway car full of pigiron. Now if you know what pigiron is, it's quite something. He says, "I'd like to have this car unloaded today."

I didn't know anything about the tonnage or anything like that then but it happened to be a 40 foot gondola - not too big, as they are today. So I started in throwing pig iron out. After a while, he came back and started to talk to me. He wanted to know who I was, where I was from, ~~all~~ ~~this jazz~~. So I told him. After I told him I had only 27 cents to my name, he pulled out a five dollar bill and said, "Here, take this - this will tide you over until Saturday. We pay on Saturday."

I said, "No, I'll be all right. My board and room are paid up and I've got my pass on the ferry boat good for a week."

"NO," he said - "take it - you might need it."

So I took it. We were paid on Saturday and I was going to move over to Port Huron.

But I found out he was a Mason. I'll always remember the ring (which *was* *like* I wear right now, too). ~~I remember the ring he had on.~~ I didn't know what Masonry was in those days. He came from Texas himself - a big tall, slender guy, about like I am right now. He said when he came up from Texas, guys who hadn't seen each other for a long time would slap each other on the shoulder and say, "Hi there, you old so and so! You say that down in Texas, you've got to run or be fighting one or the other if you know what I mean."

So I never did forget Charlie and he was the first guy who gave me a break in the United States. 27 cents on! So I was there for quite a while and then I got laid off or I quit, one or the other. Anyhow, the next winter I found myself working for a cement company, making cement, which they made in Port Huron, Michigan, and loaded into boats to be shipped all over America.

This particular winter they were building more silos to hold cement in storage and I got a job there. They built these in the winter time. Back in those days they did not have chemicals to put in concrete, like we do now, to keep it from freezing. What they did was to put a scaffold all around it and safety bars and canvas. Then they had a steam pipe all around inside of that to keep the concrete warm. And every day it was my job, with a wooden trowel, to smooth all the rough spots on the sides of those silos. That took care of my winter that time - warm at that!

I don't know whether I quit or was fired, laid off or what, but the next place I found myself working was for an automobile factory, which was farther south than Port Huron ~~or South Park~~ - in a place by the name of Marysville.

Q. What year was that, Mr. Day?

A. This was in '24 - 1924. They were building a car there called the Wills-St. Clair. Whether you ever heard of it or not I don't know. This man Wills - C. H. Wills - was a chief engineer for either Chrysler or Ford, I don't recall which. But he invented the overhead camshaft and he wanted them to use it in their automobile, but they rejected it. He said, "OK - I'll just build it myself."

So he built this factory at Marysville. He had all the materials shipped up by truck from Detroit. Now I say shipped up by truck. Those old trucks in those days were chain drive with solid rubber tires. They did pull a trailer with the same rubber tires and he had to have all that up to this factory in order to assemble it.

The first job I had there was putting on and balancing balloon tires - that was way back there. Those balloon tires were something in their day, of course. So this Will-St. Clair turned out to be a very popular car for the rich people. The cheapest car at that time was a roadster for \$3800 FOB I put the tires on for quite a while and then I heard there was a chance to go to the paint shop. I heard there was a lot of over time there so there I go. I worked there for quite a while and finally worked myself down to the final end, where the cars go out the door. Before they get to the door, they go through this and that and get a scratch here and a scratch there. My job was to touch up these patches. I had maybe fifteen colored paints. It was quite a job, but I noticed a lot of cars came to Bloomington, Illinois. I couldn't imagine a town with the name of Bloomington - just an odd name. The majority of cars went down to Florida. There was a big boom in Florida in the 20's. A lot of them went to Argentina. They were loaded - crated up - and shipped by boat to Argentina.

In 1925 it kind of slacked off. They weren't selling so well and the rumor was they were going bankrupt. ~~so~~ - incidentally, I got married on the 25th of June, 1925.

Q. Where did you meet your wife, Mr. Day?

A. In Port Huron, Michigan. She was a Canadian girl. We got married the 25th day of June. We bought a new Chevrolet roadster between us - a new car at that time. The rumor was that they were going to fold up, which they eventually did in 1926. Anyway, my wife's uncle at that time was an official on the Grand Trunk Railroad, although I didn't know it until after we were married - I didn't know this either at that time <sup>that</sup> he and three other officials were brought down to Decatur to the Wabash, from the Grand Trunk Railroad in Port Huron, Michigan. So <sup>when</sup> he came back up there to visit and we were talking about the place folding up and all, and he said, "OK, come on down to Decatur, and I'll put you to work."

He was at that time superintendent of the car shops here in Decatur. So over the 4th of July, 1926, we came down to Decatur. I came through Bloomington, Illinois. And what is now Route 51 was then Route 10 and we got to Decatur and of course we stayed with them for a while until we got rooms.

So the 5th day of July, 1926, I went to the Wabash hospital at 8 o'clock in the morning to be examined, and by ten o'clock that morning I was in the steel plant, bucking rivets.

Of course, my line was a painter really so eventually, I got to be a painter on the Wabash ~~and was there for quite a while.~~

- Q. So that began a long career with the Wabash Railroad, I presume. How long did you stay with the Wabash?
- A. I was with the Wabash until we merged with the Norfolk and Western, which was in October 16, 1964. In 1958, after being a painter at the car shops, both box cars and coaches. I painted the Bluebird many a time and the Cannon Ball - I got a chance to be a foreman over in the locomotive shop in the paint shop. So I accepted that. That was in November, 1958 and I stayed there until I retired on November 28 - that's today actually - in 1969. It was on a Tuesday. The pipe shop foreman and I retired at the same time.
- Q. You must have enjoyed your work there. Is that right?
- A. You betcha. I wouldn't take a million dollars for anything I've done and had.
- Q. Can you tell us why the Wabash was such a great railroad?
- A. In my opinion the Wabash was a great railroad because of the personnel. Now I don't care what some people might say - "That's bunk." No, it's the personnel that makes a railroad - or anything - even your home and your family. It's personnel - the attitude of the employees toward the company and toward one another - I don't regret anything I've ever said or done with the employees or whatever. Incidentally, when I went over to the locomotive shop from the car shop, there was a painter over there who used to work at the car shop who didn't think too much of me. He was on the paint gang. He said, "Jack" (they called me Jack - Jack Day). He said, "Jack, you may as well start being a heel right now." That wasn't the word he used, but that was the gist of it because we're going to make one out of you, and I'm going to help them."

Well, the day I left, he came over to me and said, "Jack, we never got that job done." I said, "What do you mean?" I knew, but I wanted him to spell it out. He said, "You know what I'm talking about." I said, "Well, I'll tell you, Harlan. In the first place, I've traveled around a bit and I consider myself a man. I'm a church man, a deacon, and I'm a Mason. Now if those ingredients don't make a man out of anyone or keep them from being a heel, as you say, why, there's no hope."

Well, that's the way it was at that time. And of course, other fellows have come to me and said I was more than they expected.

Q. What do you think of the railroads today, Mr. Day?

A. The railroads are having a hard time, like any other company that has employees. Now, when I came to Decatur, it was ten hours a day, six days a week. We thought nothing of it. Many a pay day, my pay was \$45 - maybe a few cents more - for two weeks. We had money to burn in those days. They're getting more than that a day now, each man. There is too much <sup>union</sup> we've got to have unions, understand but they are too big and powerful today. Look at your coal mine situation. They're too big and powerful. I started working at the Wabash for 39 cents an hour. Today that job pays \$7.18 plus fringe benefits. Now just think, the company has to pay all that and they do not get the production that they did in years past. I know that because I was a supervisor ~~and I know~~. That's really what's happening to the railroads. They are being torn apart. ~~Too much~~. Years ago a hundred miles was a day's work for the road men. Well, what's a hundred miles today? A hundred and 13 miles from here to St. Louis - that was a day's work. Well, they do that now in two hours. <sup>or 30</sup> So that's what is hurting the railroads and other industries. Look at the steel workers - my land, they're folding up! The unions have just got too big for their britches.

Q. It seems as if the road beds are a problem, doesn't it?

A. Well, what brought that about is this. With the steam engines - if you know anything at all about a steam engine and I'm sure you do know something - a steam engine has those counter-balanced wheels and those side-rods, see? OK - that's where they get their motion. They are heavy on the rail - they pound on the rail. Whenever that counter-balance comes down, it's a pounding on the rail. They had to keep them up then - they had to. Now, the diesel runs like an automobile. It just glides along. The ties are rotting out, but they don't take much interest in the ties - and that's how they start to go. The rail will give where there's a bad tie and that just continues and continues until it's fixed. I don't know whether you have seen trains going through here or out of Decatur, but I have seen them. On a double track where they'd be swaying, the cars would touch each other on the tops - almost - some of them probably did, there is that much sway. On the part of the railway the idea was - as long as they'll run, we'll run.

Q. What about passenger trains? Will there ever be any future for passengers again?

A. I never thought I would see the demise of the steam engine let alone the passenger train. Never in my life did I ever dream of that. However, they are both gone. And Amtrak, as hard as they are trying and as much as it's costing, in my opinion it will never make it because they are at the mercy of the railroads. Now, if they had been thinking years back when the government spent all that money for trans-continental highways, if they had thought then what they know now, I would think they would have worked up <sup>cars</sup> these tracks, and kept these inter-city trains because they've got the ~~motors~~

on these 55-mile an hour on super highways where you can go 80 miles an hour just like that. The cars are built for it - they're just sitting there now <sup>The highways</sup> waiting for someone to tear them up or what have you - it's a shame they've got it down to 55 because after all, it's not the fault of the automobile - it's the nut behind the wheel. These automobiles are the safest things ever created. You can drive for days and hours and never feel tired - just like riding in a Pullman. So actually if I had the money and I was in the White House, ~~if~~ they would just take one side of all these highways and lay a railroad track and have the inter cities trains - other than the railroads - they'd have their passengers, I think.

Q. Mr. Day, let's go back a bit. Tell me, did you ever go back to England?

A. Yes, I did. I'd been in the National Guard here in Decatur for a long, long time. I joined the National Guard in April, 1927 and was with it until we mobilized for World War II. I was hoping then that we would get to go to England but unfortunately the 33rd division went to the Pacific Theatre.

I did go back to England in September, 1959. I had one son and he was working with Douglas aircraft in Santa Monica, California. He'd been with them some time. He was sent over to England to help set up the Thor missiles, which they were doing at that time. And he was staying at Mildenhall Air Base in Norfolk County, which was just about three miles from the village of Feltwell, where I was last staying. So I wrote and told him that was where I was last staying - I didn't think he knew about it - and so he went to town on his own time. It's a little village about like Blue Mound, maybe not that big and he ran across two ladies who said they went to school with me there - and of course he told them about me and so nothing else would do but I had to come over there and have a visit, even if he had to pay for it. Well, I wasn't going to let him pay for it so I told him I would come over. I was the supervisor at the locomotive shop at that time and I had to square it up with the officials. They said I could have the last half of September. So the 18th day of September I got on an airplane at O'Hare Field and pretty soon I was in London, England. Jack was there to meet me. He had a friend with him who was working with him out there. We went around to different places and got a hotel - I stayed at the Mount Blanc Hotel. I stayed in London four days. He had to go back to work on Sunday evening, so he took the train up to Mildenhall ~~and I stayed in London four days~~. I wanted to look around. I went to where I used to stay in the orphanage - and of course I went to Hyde Park, where they used to stand on soap boxes - and they still do, to this day and argue this and that. And of course I had to ride the subway, which they call the "tube". It was quite easy to get around. Everything comes back to you. I was ten years old when I left there and I remembered quite a bit of it.

The second day there I was standing on the street and four ladies came up to me and asked me if I knew what time the next bus left for Soho. Well, Soho is a night spot, and I told them I was sorry ladies that I just got in there myself. Right away they knew they weren't speaking

to an Englishman although I can throw that lingo out if I want to. And they were from Boston and on their way to Rome. We visited a bit, but that was it.

I rode around London and then I took the train to Tunbridge Wells. I went to the little school where I was an infant. I had with me a certificate that I got at that time from the County of Kent Education Committee. I had had an 87% attendance out of 100. It was a pretty nice certificate - Jack has it now, out in California.

I went to this school, opened the door, and there sat a lot of children just like me, back in 1908 and 9. ~~There sat these children.~~ At that time I was hard of hearing. I had a hearing aid on my eye-glasses. The kids were noticing that. I could see them pointing to it.

Usually you hear of the school master in England. This happened to be a school ma'am. I told her who I was and why I was there. I showed her the certificate. It was signed by the school master at that time, Mr. Kirby. She said, "I'm sorry that you waited so long because Mr. Kirby died in April," and this was in September.

From there I went down to the railroad station and the yards to see what I could find out about steam engines. I took some pictures of the steam engines - they were still running there.

One interesting thing about the railroads in England that I didn't know then but I know now - they have no headlights on the locomotives. It's run by signal. Everywhere you go in the whole country - it's signals, and I thought it was unique.

And also, every railroader will know what I'm talking about - they do not, even yet, have only a few automatic couplers. It's pin and link. You raise the link up and hook it and put the pin in. It's something else!

But these steam engines over there - they have 80 foot drivers, possibly 84. And they have so many tunnels in England - they'd be anywhere from 3 to 5 miles long, some of them. And also - there are no grade crossings. They have a time schedule and they keep them, that's what they do.

So I came back to London and I got ready to go up tte where Jack was. I didn't know too much about their trains - they've got first class, second class, third class. It depends on who you are and what you are where you can ride. I didn't know that. Anyhow, I got on this one train and the coaches there - you don't go to the end to get on, you just open a door anywhere to get on. I found out afterwards why that is so - they have so much commuter traffic there. If they waited for everyone to get to one end or the other, they'd never get where they want to go. So there might be five or six or seven doors on one car - both sides. And they just open the door and jump out.

I was sitting there and I was talking to a fellow who was going up to Cambridge. When he saw I was from the States, he got to talking and he

said, "I have a daughter who was an exchange teacher in Vermont. He was quite interested in me and I in him. Well, he got off at Cambridge but before we got there, along came the conductor. He looked at my ticket and said, "What are you doing in here?" I said, "Am I on the wrong train or what?"

He said, "You're in the wrong car."

He wasn't in anyway nice either. I thought, "at least you could be sober about it."

Anyhow, he said, "you either go to another car or pay me 3 shillings. "Well, 3 shillings was just 75¢. I said, "I'll give you 3 shillings if that will help you any." I thought, "If you can be rough, I can too."

So when he left, the fellow who got off at Cambridge said, "He didn't have to act like that." I said, "Well, no, I didn't think he did either, but anyhow, that's that."

So I got up to Ely, the junction, where I would have to get off the train to go to where Jack was. Now I went to the Bachelor's Officer Quarters - BOC - and I stayed there all the time. I was there for a \$1 a day, board and room. Jack was stationed there, to. We got along pretty well. We started off Friday afternoon with a company car, a little Austin. Jack got intrigued with the cathedrals. He wanted to see the cathedrals. So we took in some cathedrals. We went to Bury St. Edmonds, a very popular town in Norfolk County, but before we got there we passed through a little town - I can't hink of the name right now. Anyhow, it seems to be the home of the author of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." And the houses in that town are crooked. Now whether they were built like that on purpose or the people didn't know any better, we don't know to this day. I had my picture taken there by a crooked house on Water Street.

So all in all it was quite an adventure to be over there. We went to Feltwell to see these two ladies, but one of the ladies was on what we call vacation - they call it holidays. They do it in Canada, too. So I only saw the one. I didn't see too much of the family either. Her boy was in the Air Force in England during the war in the Battle of Britain. He lost his left arm in the Battle of Britain as a pilot. And he could tell us some of the history of that area that was unbelievable. His penmanship was so beautiful - the light stroke and the dark stroke up and down - we wrote back and forth quite a bit. I was hoping I could get a piece of parchment paper and have him write the Lord's prayer on it, but I didn't get that done.

Q. But you really enjoyed going back to England.

A. I should say! There I was up in the air from O'Hare - ten hours. It took five days years back to cross the Atlantic - but in ten hours I was in London, England.

IN-1912

Q. Mr. Day, you must be really enjoying your retirement. Are you?

A. I sure am. I'm still painting.

Q. Well, you're not painting locomotives now are you? What are you painting?

A. I'm painting the Wabash flag for anyone who wants it. I have all the patterns. You will recall that all of the passenger trains used to have a drum on the back car signifying what train it was - like the Bluebird, the Banner Blue, the Cannon Ball, or what have you. Not only the Wabash, but other railroads in the country. Of course, when the Wabash was turned over to the N & W the taillight signs were done away with. The paint foreman at the car shop was told to dispose of all the Wabash materials. I happened to go over there one day and lo and behold! the patterns were going to the dump. I grabbed them and still have them to this day. I have 32 Wabash patterns up in my attic of taillight signs. Now I also have specials. They had a lot of specials with the flag in the middle - a Shriner Special, or a ~~7-8-10~~ Dealer Special, or a Buick - or what have you. I have them up there. I started making the flags on small pieces of plexiglass for my friends. I sell quite a few of them. They are 8 x 10 - I sell them for \$5. If they're bigger, they cost a little more.

Q. These are railroad buffs who like to collect items?

A. That's right. Anyone who has had a part of the Wabash - their father, their grandfather or what have you.

Some fellows from Moberly wanted to have a flag painted and also the date they went into service and the date they retired with their name underneath. So I've made quite a few of them. Now I can make that flag from 8 x 10 up to 28" in diameter. I've got all the patterns. I do it on plexiglass. We used to do it on plate glass but they get broken so easily. You've got to do it upside down and backwards - so you've got to know what you're doing but the end product is just beautiful.

Q. Well, it must be very satisfying I know you have some other interests too. You write poetry, don't you?

A. Yes, I wrote poetry. I don't know when I got started - I suppose back in my days of romance I got started. It isn't too much trouble for me. If I've got a good subject, I can write a pretty good poem. I rewrote the Cannon Ball.

Q. Why don't you give us a verse or two of that? Can you do that?

A. Do you want the whole thing?

Q. Might as well!



A. The Cannon Ball

This was written on the 14th day of March, 1971.

I { There's a train that's still a running  
And it's serving one and all  
'tis known throughout the country  
It's the Wabash Cannon Ball.

II { She rolls right through the prairie  
In the state of Illinois  
With her soybeans and corn so tall -  
Yes sir, it's the Wabash Cannon Ball.  
She starts in old St. Looey  
Through the woodlands by the shore  
of the muddy Mississippi with its history galore  
It pauses in Decatur  
For an engine change and crew  
Going on to Danville, the next stop would be Peru.

III { To Ft. Wayne and then Detroit.  
That's as far as she can go  
She used to pull the mail  
Through rain, heat, hail, and snow  
She's had her share of hoboes -  
Some were short and some were tall -  
But they had one thing in common,  
For they rode the Cannon Ball.

IV { Many a man has pulled the throttle  
of this famous train  
And when he had to leave her  
His heart was filled with pain  
But he knew she'd keep on running  
For he has heard the country's call  
To save this thing of beauty  
The Wabash Cannon Ball.

Q. Why, that's really lovely - and it does bring back a lot of memories, doesn't it?

A. I'll say! It certainly does.

Q. You have other interests I know - the Masons, for example.

A. I joined the Masons in 1954. I never did forget the guy in Port Huron, Michigan - Charlie Cunningham. I was leaving for Tucson, Arizona, on a vacation - the wife and I - and a brother Mason handed me an application and said, "John, I'd like to have you fill this out if you will."

So when I came back, I had it filled out and I gave it to him. And I'll never regret it.

After I was raised a brother Mason I told the story of how it all began, which all candidates have the privilege of doing when they become raised to the 3rd degree Mason. And of course I went from the 3rd degree over to Springfield to the consistory a 32 degree Mason and a Shriner. We do great things. It costs - so what? You can't take it with you. The good things the Shriners do can never be duplicated in any way, shape, or form.

Q. And you have all that good companionship etoo.

A. Yes, I play in the band. I'm not a musician. I can't read a note of music, but I've played the bass drum since 1958. Two things you've got to have in a band are a bass drummer and a trumpet and of course, I keep the beat. I'm musically inclined. First I was in the Home Guard in Canada. I joined a Kiltie outfit there and for about three weeks I got to play a snare drum. I was real tickled about that. I often wished I could have kept my kilt.

Q. What tartan was it? Do you remember?

A. I do not. I don't know that much about it.

Q. Well, do you have any other hobby you'd like to mention? Your family?

A. I just have one son. He now lives in Arizona and he works in Nevada. He was with Douglas Air Craft for 23 years in aero space. When they got caught up on that, he along with hundreds of others was discharged. He now works for a combustion company that makes the electricity for Los Angeles and Orange County in Nevada, across the river from Arizona. He's a railroad buff too. He's got a Wabash bell off a steam engine - 2900 - and a pot-bellied caboose stove. He's been offered \$500 for either the bell or the stove, but he will not part with them.

I keep busy with my neighbors. I'm always doing something for my neighbors.

Q. What do you think about Decatur? Do you have any thoughts about the city itself?

A. Decatur - I've always liked Decatur. Just recently I finished six years on the parking and traffic commission which put me in touch with many of the problems of Decatur, especially in the parking and traffic department. Decatur is to be pitied in a way right now. I feel sorry for Decatur due to that big shopping Mall going up at Forsythe. It is one of the sad parts of the history of Decatur. Kresge is leaving across the street; there will be empty stores in Decatur. I can't see anything else. However, we have to move on, they say that's progress. But knocking down that high school, I can't see any progress there really, but that's the way it goes. It has always been my belief - what is to be will be. No matter what it is.

Q. But you think Decatur has been a good place for you to live?

A. Oh, yes, definitely. As I said before, I got into the Guards, enjoyed every bit of it. We've had our problems - called out on duty several times. 1937 we went down to Shawneetown where they had the big flood. The river had overflowed 13 miles. You can't imagine those things here nowadays, but that was the case at that time, and you can't believe it. In other words, you can talk to children nowadays about steam engines and they can't visualize them because they've never seen them. Everything is up in the air now. I was coming back from California one time by myself. I got the last seat. Here I was a Shriner and they put me between two priests. So I said to those two guys, "Well, I guess I'll be on good behavior this time." So the one guy said, "Well, we won't bother you." And they didn't. I tried to converse and I said, "It seems like all the passenger trains are up in the air now" and he never said boo! So I just went to sleep.

Q. Well, you really are an inspiration to people who are looking forward to retirement or maybe some of those who are dreading it. You seem to have been enjoying not only your life, which was very full and very rewarding, but you seem to have been enjoying your retirement too.

A. Very much so. I've been blessed with good health. I had a heart attack four years ago this very day and it was pretty severe, I guess. They didn't know if I'd make it or not, but the good Lord doesn't take you until He is ready, and I made it. I have perfect health now.

Q. The Lord has other plans for you then.

A. *Yes I believe He has*  
~~I don't think I mentioned that after being robbed of going into the service in 1941 joined the Civil Air Patrol then, an auxiliary of the Air Force. I joined it in an administrative capacity. I had been supply sergeant for the Guards for ten years and I knew a little about paper work and finally I got to be a squadron commander and then on to group commander. We had five squadrons and I got to the rank of captain, which gave me the privilege of anything the Air Force had. So I enjoyed every bit of that. I did a lot of flying but never did become a pilot. This Par, doesn't seem to belong there at all.~~

Q. You certainly have had your share of wonderful experiences and we thank you for sharing them with us.

A. It has been my pleasure.

Q. You have been listening to the experiences of Mr. John Day, recorded for the Decatur Public Library. This is Betty Turnell.

from John Day  
for Miss Tunnell

## Waifs in England Have a Friend in Dr. Barnardo

BY MAVIS COLE

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

LONDON, Nov. 6 — It may be a sleeping babe carried in by a midwife, or it may be a lanky 15 year old boy marched in by a policeman but every day, on average, five abandoned children enter a Dr. Barnardo home somewhere in Britain.

Surprisingly, the number is exactly the same as it was 60 years ago, despite the growth of the welfare state and an unequalled national prosperity.

### A Motto Still Lives

Dr. Thomas Barnardo was one of Britain's most successful social reformers. A Dublin-born evangelist, he was appalled by the number of ragged, hungry waifs cadging a sparse life in London slums. In 1866 he opened a children's hostel in London's east end. One day he turned away a boy, saying he had no room. A few days later the boy was found dead of starvation. Dr. Barnardo decided that would never happen again. Without knowing where the means would come from, he put up a sign saying "No destitute child ever refused admission." The motto still lives. In 40 years before his death,

he rescued 60,000 children. By now, on the eve of the centenary, the number exceeds 167,000.

Dr. Barnardo relied on human kindness. Today, with 8,000 children in its care and 3,000 paid employes, the organization still depends entirely on charity to meet its 10 million dollar a year budget.

### Educate the Children

Many things have changed since Dr. Barnardo opened his first hostel. In the beginning he tried to separate children from their surroundings, gathering them into large, isolated groups. Today the emphasis is on homeiness. Children are scattered in 110 places thruout Britain, often a cottage where a group may live like a large family. The organization tries hard to place children for adoption — 230 were found permanent parents last year — or to find places with paid foster-parents — about 2,000 are so living now.

All children of school age go to government schools but Dr. Barnardo's has its own schools for mentally or physically handicapped children and special technical schools for older boys and girls.

11-7-65

