

Working on a riverboat
an Oral History

Floyd Clay, Interviewee
Of Princeton, Illinois

Interview Date: July 28, 1975

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Narrator's Name: FLOYD CLAY
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Interviewer's Name: WENDY CHASE
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Q: Ok, you were going to tell me a little bit about where you were born.

A. Cornell

Q; Cornell, Illinois?

A: Yes

Q: And what year was that?

A: 1905

Q: Did you go to school when you were little?

A: I went through sixth.

Q: Through sixth? As I understand what did you do from sixth grade until the time you worked on the riverboat.

A: Well I did, you know, like in the summertime around town, somebody wanted you to go through the shrubbery and you know, rake it out and turn the dirt over in it, you know, and stuff like that.

Q: Did you live with your family?

A: Yes.

Q: And how old were you when you began to work on a riverboat?

A. Well, let's see,--about 24, I think.

Q: 24? What did you do?

A: Worked in the kitchen.

Q: The kitchen.-- How did you get that job?

A: Well, a fellow from home- he worked on it first or he was working. And--but he came home for his monthly vacation. And he just asked me if I wanted a job on the river. Which I took, you know, right off.

Q: And?

A: Stayed on there a long time----a long time. It's a good job.

Q: Did you---how long was it-----do you know?

A: I guess, right off hand, it was over ten years.

Q: Over ten years? Do you like your work?

A: Oh yes, nice work. Working in the kitchen.

Q: What did you do?

A: Huh?

Q: What did you do?

A: Well, there was, like I said, this other fellow from home, he was the head cook, you know. Well, I did, you know, on days I had to peel potatoes and do this and that and so forth. Then, of course, after every meal, you know what happens, don't you?

Q: (laughs)

A: The dishes. (laughs)

Q: Did you---did you ever drive a boat or-----?

A: No, I've got up where the pilots was and sit there, uh, uh, take it away from him for a minute, you know, and that but no.

Q: What was the name of your boat?

A: Crenendato

Q: You stayed on the same boat all the time?

A: Oh yeah, all the time.

Q: What happened in-----why did you quit?

A. Huh?

Q: Why did you quit?

A: Well, I thought I was getting old enough too, and I was married and see you was away from home for thirty days every time you went to the boat. You had to stay thrity days. Well, then when you came back on, the ones who had been working, then , see, well, they'd go home, see, and you had to wait until the end of thirty days until they came back too take your place, See?

Q: What did you do after that?

A: Huh?

Q: What did you do after you worked on the river?

A: Oh, I worked for a shile on the railroad, then I worked for awhile in a brick and tile yard, and then traveled around the country.

Q: Did you have any experience with boats before you-----?

A: No.

Q: What kind of, let's see, what kind of experience did you have? Did you have any special ones?

A: No.

Q: No, never---?

A: Only when big old windstorms would come up. Then it was rough on them.-----
You know, they rock sideways, up and down, like this.

Q: What made it go?

A: Well, they had two motors on it. Burnt this fuel oil in them.

Q; Did they have a wheel in one of those-----?

A: Oh, yes, yeah,-----it was a great big thing, two story high boat.

Q: What route did the boat go?

A: Did you ever hear of the Kingston Mines?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, that was where we got our loads on the other side of Peoria, and went up South of Chicago.

Q: What river?

A: Huh?

Q: On the Illinois river?

A: Illinois river, yeh.

Q: Did you ever have a wreck or anything?

A: No.

Q: Did you ever see another boat that did?

A: Yeh, yeh.

Q: Was anyone hurt?

A: Well, just like you say, the bar broke, see, or the paddlewheel, I call it.

Q: What was the boat doing? Where was--where would it go for thirty days? Was it hauling-----?

A: Just up and down the river all, you see, was like today you'd have a load of empties, barges on, going down to, well it was Kingston miners-- coal mines, you know, and you set out your empties, tie them off, you know, then you'd go over and get ten full ones. See, they set two and two, like this, see, and there's three fellows that work out there. Soon as they get them up there they tie the ropes, see, then when they get them all tied, they go back and put cables on them like where the rope was, you know, and they have winch and _____. They pump them up see to pull the cable taunt so that --and that's another thing, in the stormy weather, of course, the ones that had to work out there had to be there, but if you didn't have to be out there on those barges when it was storming, it was a good thing to stay away from them, cause, a lot of times those cables snapped. They're pulled up pretty tight, you know, and , boy, when they opened up, be just like a million real fine wires and, by gosh, they'd form a ball like that, and I've seen others get hit with that and, by gosh, it was just like they went all over him with a razor blade, you know, and just cut him with little fine wires.

Q: Did it kill him?

A: Oh, no,no.

Q:Uhm.

A: They did a lot of sewing on him, what I heard. (Laughs) That's really is a very young man. By gosh, that's a good job.

Q: Now it took you fifteen days to go from like Havanna?

A: Huh?

Q: Did you go from Havanna up to South Chicago?

A: South Chicago.

Q: It took you what --- fifteen days?

A: About fifteen days.

Q: What were you hauling?

A: Coal.

Q: Is it a big boat?

A: Huh?

Q: Is it a big boat?

A: Ho, my gosh, yes, I forget how many--well, downstairs, like here was the kitchen, and nexr, the dining room. Then you go on down, there's a big sitting room, you sit in there and read, or play cards or somthing like that, and then beyond that on each side of the long hallway were all rooms. By gosh, there was a mess of them, on both sides. Well the upper deck, too, there was more rooms upstairs than there was down stairs. The only ones that stayed up stairs was the pilots and captain. Well, I take that back, the--uh--oh--the bossman out on the barges, he was upstairs. They always kept them right close, so if they had to be called in the night, you know, so those cables, they snap a lot of times, you know, they snap and where they could get them right off, you know, without running all over the boat after them, you know.

Q: What kind of room did you stay in? Was it big or little or----?

A: Did you ever see these rooms around here?

Q: No, I haven't.

A: Well, theres two beds in every room.

Q: Uhm.

A: Two--uh--

Q: They were like rooms then?

A: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Well, I'll tell you, When you come in the front door of the boat. It'd be just like walking in-uh-right in this building here and-uh- they had four Italian ladies on there that did all the cleaning. Two worked downstairs

and two worked upstairs, and-uh-it's like you'd , say you'd be sitting there, standing there talking to somebody, smoking and knock the ashes off on the floor, and of those Italian ladies would walk right up to you and grab you by the hair like that and shake your head like that. (Laughs) Oh, my gosh, if you didn't, now like say, you'd been out working outside and you came in, now just like a, there's like a -a-place like you come in this front door, you could take your shoes might be muddy and that , you know, she'd tell you. Oh, my gosh, if you let them on and walk through on all them rugs, you know, all them Italian ladies would really snort.

Q; What kind of clothes did you have to wear?

A: Huh?

Q: Did you just wear anything you felt like or-----?

A: Oh, yeh.

Q: Or was there a uniform?

A: No, no uniform. No, but we was traveling for the government. We were hauling, working for the government then that time. (Coughs) And really good work--job.

Q; Did it pay well?

A: Yeh, it was union. I was getting 385.

Q: How--for what was--?

A: Month.

Q: A month, wow! Were there any women on the boat besides the cleaning women?

A: Well, us (coughs) now just like-uh-uh- yous-if- if a- we was married and uh like, you know, we'd go home. We get to go home every month, so many days, see? If you'd want to bring the family back with you and take them for a ride up and down the river, all right. They-uh- had the upper deck, see, to sit around in. They could sit out in where the pilot was in front and look up and down the river and all over, and it was really nice. I mean, it was nice and clean.

Q: Did you.....?

A. Of course, they--the inspectors, they checked those boats pretty often, see.

A: In the first place they check-- bet you can't guess where it is, they check.

Q: The kitchen?

A: That's right. You see them going around over the four big stoves, of course, they had a metal canopy over it, you know, and they--uh-- underneath, reach up, smear it with their fingers, the fumes of the grease and that. That's the reason you had to make sure you cleaned those every morning like that, and your stoves all off.

Q: What would they do if they weren't clean?

A: Oh boy, they tie you up. Make you go to the bank and tie up.

Q: Really?

A: Yup. Of course, that was during the war, too, see.

Q: Oh, it was.

A: They-uh-they uh- you're short of help, you know, on those boats.

Q: Which ware was that?

A: The World War Two, and-uh-excuse me, lots of times you're short-handed all the time. And so that made the mones who wasn't a deckhand, that's what they called the ones who worked out, you know, and there wasn't, well, they'd just hollar "Hey, you come on, you gotta help, you gotta help." See. Something'd go wrong out there, well, then, see, were short handed, see, so we had to jump in on every job, see to help out, see. That's-uh-like I say, really, and the food, my golly, look at one of those (tinner-duct tinner), listen, dinners, or suppers, or breakfasts. But my gosh, those dinners. You'd think, my gosh, they was a birthday party for somebody. Now I mean, now when I put a meat on the table. Now say it's a roast, you know, they buy about-off the rear end of a cow the leg when they buy a piece, say, about, say, that wide and the that was round cut off, see. Come out, take the whole piece of meat and bake it and then like supper and breakfast and supper, why they might just slice that off for cold meat, see. Where, then of course, any time any body wanted a sandwich, there was always enough of that sliced, see, they could use that to make sandwiches.

Q; Where did the food come from?

A; Huh?

Q: Where did the food come from? Was it from suppliers or was it.....?

A: Oh no. We stopped at different towns up and down the river. They'd stop at, say Peoria this time, well then, they'd miss Peoria next time and stop at the next town and so on until every town, clear to the end of the route. Then when they came back, well, they worked the one shore, you know, They came back then they worked the other side. See what I mean? If they bought anything, they bought from this side,, at different stores, see, so that they all got a chance in, see?

Q; Did you stop at every town?

A: Oh nono. You just... when you left like say going down with your empty barges, you just went until you got there, go right over and get your loads, get them straight and tied up and take right off back.

Q: Did you, did you,---- You didn't stop at night?

A: Oh, no,no, The only time you ever stopped was break-downs-----engine go wrong, bad and you.....

Q: Were any of the people you worked with interesting?

A: Oh yes. Course a lot of them, you know, it was the money part, see. It paid such good money, see, too hold the fellows on, see, onto the boat, see; Of course, like I say, every once in a while they go up hollaring for a raise, see. That'd come up every so often, you know, too, you know. We generally got it too. Excuse me. Got the raise. Like I say, paid darn good....(coughs).... darn good.

Q: Were you married when you took the job?

A: Yes. Oh, say, I went home. Well it all depends. At least, you know, you only got fifteen days, see, until you get around. Now I was getting thirty days but they'd want you to sell 2 or 3 of those days back to them, see. Then you'd only stay home one week, see. And that's the way they'd do that and if you wanted too, well, you'd get the same pay as if you were working right there, see. They didn't take anything out. You just signed over two weeks or three weeks, give it back to

them and you only take the one week, see. It was really good, and my gose, you know every time a boat stopped in town along there, you know. Well, you had the whole town down there. Well, they knew the boys on there, They bought lots of stuff, you know. The boat was going to stay there a hour, hour and half, the boys would all go into town, you know, and see, stuff they wanted, they'd buy it. Well, they got so that you stopped there, like you coming into town and you're going to stop. Well, by gosh, that town knew you was going to stop and they'd have the.... whatever they had in that town, they'd have it all right down there by the river, so you could buy it right there. You didn't have to go into town and buy it.

Q: Were the fellows on the boat your friends?

A: Oh, yes. They was from all up and down the country. Yeh, some from Princeton, up north _____, where the tracks are, two or three from out there and... Well, there was several that lived along down the rivers, too, that worked on the boats, You see, we wasn't the only boat company, you know, on the river, you know. There was others hauled _____ nothing _____ made of oil and stuff like that. All something differnt, see..... Like I say though, a good job. But a lot of them, before thirty days was up they'd want to get off and go home. Well it does when you're riding on there, you don't go fast, you know. It's a slow job. Well, it seems like the end of the month'll never come. (Laughs). You're just sitting there or playing cards or something like that, you know. I would say though, a young fellow that wanted a good job, I guess, that's the place to get it.

Q: Were all the men on the boat like--- they weren't all working?

A: Some's sleeping. Like, see, this afternoon there'd be some asleep. Well they'd change shifts at 3:30. Then they change again at midnight. Just like that, see, and keep on, see. (Coughs) They've got it fixed so nobody is over worked, see. They didn't want that, that overwork stuff.

Q: You were the only cook, though?

A: Huh?

Q: You were the only cook, though?

A: No. There was two of us. Another boy from down where I live. He was on there

befor I was. He came home on his vacation one time and he come and asked me if I wanted to get a job on there, and I said, " Sure." So I went back with him, signed in, that was it. But the one thing I will say, the people along... I won't say in these towns, cause, up and down the river with all those towns have been in those different boats, you know. When the boats would stop there, you know. I've heard a lot of people say, " Oh, gosh, I wouldn't ride that dirty thing." But by gosh, I tell you, like I say, You start knocking cigarette ashes on the floor, you get told right off about that. Sometimes they tell you, " Are you going to get the sweeper and sweep that rug up?" And Boy, when they got mad, you know, they really got mad.

Q: Did you ever just like pick up passengers and take them?

A: No.

Q; Only family?

A: Well, theres times like we'd be going like one way or the other, see, and somebody we knew in a town, you know, well, they'd come out and get on it because it was faster to get them where they'd wanted to go than if was if they'd get on a bus and go, see. Summer months, my gosh, well, you had shore people on there all the time. Not only the boys families, but people forom different towns, up and down the river. Used to get them out of Peoria too. There was two bankers down there and their wives, used to get on it and ride in the summertime. A lot of times, we'd stop in town and somebody'd want to go on down to another town, then they'd just ask if they could ride down to that town, see?

Q: Was it free?

A;Oh, yes. They'd lower a motor boat to get there and get in it and take them to shore, see so they'd stay out in the middle of the river all the time, see? But uh, I'm going back there one of these days, to ride a while.

Q: Are they still running?

A: That's what I mean. I'll have to call and see if they're still running or if

they went back on the Ohio river, see.

Q: What was the name of your company?

A: The Dado. They was awful particular about it. Now like say, you worked and by gosh, you better put clean clothes right on. You couldn't wear the ones you just took off and went laid down in.

Q: Did they give you clothes?

A; Oh no. Got what you wanted. The only thing they furnished, was the rain jackets and the trousers for stormy weather. Was the only thing they furnished. They furnished the meals.

Q: Did it ever leak?

A: Oh yes. But they go right down and plug those leak holes right up. It was what that deck crew, see, was for. On each end of the barge, you see, there is two pit holes on each end. Now every once in a while they go up and down and throw look in and see how--if water is coming in and how deep it is. That's another thing, they had to keep track of, how deep it was. As soon as they got so much water, of course, they throw the pumps to them right away. Electric pumps, to keep them pumping, you know, all the water out. Get it out of there and sometimes you would just have to, when you get to a town, you'd have to set that one barge out, see. It leaked to bad. You couldn't fix it, see. Right away there was a boat company along the river. They'd come right down there and patch the holes all up, get the pumps going, pump the barge all out so when you come back it was ready to go again, see.

Q: Did you ever have to work on the deck?

A: oh, yeh. Everybody did when they was short handed. Just like I say, somebody'd go home, supposed to be back, say in two weeks. Well, They wouldn't be back. Well, it was time for the others to go. So us fellows who stayed on the big boat, itself, we'd have to take turns going out and help. There wasn't much work to it. Only just tighten the cables up, see. Then if you went through a lock, you had to undo all those cables and then you got through the lock, you go back and pull them

all up tight again. It wasn't really, wasn't really what you call hard work, like I say, a young fellow, he makes good money.

Q: Did it seem like a long trip?

A: Well, yeh, it does. It did to me, anyway, see. One end to the other then back to the other one. Seemed like a long ways. You was really glad when you got there. (Laughs). (Coughs). Like I say, you really do make the money. You're fed good, like I say, and all your clothes are kept washed out, you know dried and ironed.

Q: Did they do all that by hand?

A: Those Italian ladies did it in the evenings see. They'd do the washings and one bunch would jump in and do some of the ironing, well, they had some of those rollar irons, too you know. But of course, they had the others, too. One bunch would run them through the rollars, see, while the others used the irons, see. It's one thing they was awful particular about. It being clean. I'll say, you're going to pull in to a little town and you was going to go to town. Well, you'd better look down like that at your clothes, cause if you didn't and they was dirty you'd never gett off the boat. They wouldn't let you off. Most of them wore white tee-shirts, you know and just a pair of trousers. Still..... here at night, say like tonight whoseever bunch of boys supposed to go to bed and get up at midnight. They was supposed to drop there trousers and dirty clothes right outside the door. One of those Italian ladies come along, pick them right up and take them right to the washers, see. They wouldn't have to come in your room and wake you up, see. Supposing I'd say I forgot to put mine out. That's when they'd come right in and want to know where your dirty clothes was.

Q: Did they wash your families clothes for you?

A: Yes, that's one thing you always had cleanclothes.

Q: Was there electricity?

A: Huh? Yeh. They generated their own electricity on the boats. Big power plants there.

Q

Q: Must be really a big boat?

A:

It was! I haven't got any pictures of that. Well, I have back home but it was a great big boat. There was one, just one and it came down the Ohio River and it was a big son of a gun. The one we had was the biggest one up this way. You think so if you looked and seen all the window lights in it, you know. And you know they had to be washed. And had air conditioners in the rooms. We worked all winter. All you could hear was the banging and the cracking of the ice.

Q: Did they have ice cutters on them?

A: Yeh.

Q: Was the ice ever too thick?

A: No. They always broke it, Well, they'd put... if it was right to a certain spot, they'd put in to the bank and set those barges, empty barges out. They'd take one with them and put a v-shaped plow on it, see, and, boy. Go quite a ways until they didn't have to use it anymore and then come back and get the rest of the barges and go on again. Then there was a lot of those little towns along the river. They didn't want boat men to come into town.

Q: Why?

A: Well, they claimed boatmen always came to town, they drank too much beer. (Laughs.)

Q: I see. You have tattoos on your arms, Were those put there when you was on the boat?

A: Some of them. ---Like I say, though, For a young man its a good job. It'd be a good place to go. A good place. Get plenty to eat and everything. They burned fuel oil in them.

Q: Is it a paddlewheel?

A: Oh, yeh.

Q: I didn't realize they were still in use during World War 2.

A: Well, I often wondered why they kept that on there, cause they were always hollaring some of them was always getting broke off, you know, hitting something in the river.

Q: Was it a wood bottom?

A: Oh, yeh. My gosh, I bet it was that thick.

Q: Did you ever have problems with your boat? Did it break?

A: Well, the engine trouble. Have engine trouble. Always had two motors on there, see, and they'd travel on one just the one motor. Of Course, my gosh, you'd be just like that. You'd just be like dragging your feet. You wouldn't hardly going anyplace. They'd keep it going. They'd go as fast as they did, fizing the other one. Soon as it was all right, they'd kick it right on. Then they might kick the other one right off and clean it up, see. Put it back on, start it right up again.

Q: Was the wheel the only thing that made it go?

A: Oh, they had another thing on there like a whirling (laughs). I just suppose you'd call it a but they very seldom used that. Well, they did in the winter time. I'll say that. The other one would get broke up, you know, in the ice. Ice would pop up, you know, and ram it and break it.

Q: Was the wheel on the side or in the back?

A: In the back. Yeh-- I've heard a lot of them wanted jobs on there but like I said, when the was was on, help was hard to get. But, by God, that's when they got on they'd been making a lot of money. Well they probably wouldn't be on there now, but like I say, I was making 385. Well, they always want to keep breaking new men in, see. Incase something happened to one, there'd be someone they could get right off, see. He wouldn't come on like a greenhorn, you know. He'd already been on the boat, rode them, learnt the (laughs) stuff on the boat, see..He'd learnt it, see, and that's the one when they go right over the wall, see, the one closest to the boat, well, he'd get a phone call, right away.

Q: Did you have any really young boys?

A; Oh, yes. Especially during the summer months. They'd work probably like 2-3 weeks, to a month before school started, then they'd get off. They might want to go some place or there folks might want to go someplace and they'd get

off, see, cause school would be comeing right up, too, you know, and ...Used to be a big place down the other side of Peoria, I think it was, but it was all foreigners, but there was a school down there that you Italian, you could learn every darn thing like that in this school down there by Peoria. For all foreigners, you know. I knew one fellow ther, one Italian fellow that worked on there. You just didn't know what he did say, when he said it, you know but like that he went to that school. But he was as smart as a whip, when he came out of that thing, yes he was. Really smart. We used to whichever way we was going, up or down, we'd always spend half a day in Peoria. That would give you a chance to run here and get stuff you couldn't get in other stores along the river, you know. Well, then you could run around there and get what you wanted.-- and the boys, say they was coming to a town and the mate told them--probably tell them we wasn't going to stop there. Oh boy, You ever heard a mad bunch. Cause they wouldn't stop, see. They'd say "Well, we'll stop on the way back, see." Oh, no, stop now.---- But like I say, we had riders all the time...Well, we had mostly men riding quite a bit in the winter time, too.

Q: About how many men worked at a time on one shift on the whole ship.

A: Well, counting the pilot and the first mate, three of them, that'd be three of them, counting the first mate and the pilot and of course the captain. He was there and then he was gone, you know, and your deck crew, that's three and then the kitchen part, of course. You wasn't doing any night work. You was getting up early in the moring though, I tell you that. (Laughs)

Q: All in all, would you say it was a pretty good experience?

A: Oh, yes, I would. If you ever get a chance, you always get on, see. If you could make one of those trips with us, by golly, thats the reason why, like I say, in the summer months and that you had riders all the time, see. What I mean different bunches. You didn't have to wait for anybody, you know what I mean, or run into town and say anyboady want to take a ride or that, cause when the

boat..when we started pulling in, they'd be rite there. By golly, and they'd no more than stop and tie the boat off and my gosh, they'd have suitcases in their hands and right on, see. But all they got to do is to go sign in, see. That ther're on the boat, see, and so forth, a few different things like that, see.

Q: Well, is that about it?

A: That's about it. Like I say, if you ever get on one of those, you sure want to take it.

Q: O.K. Thank you.

A: There's quite a few, used to be anyway, nice boats out there. I've heard women say those dirty things, I wouldn't get on them. You ought to see them. Like on our boat, you'd be sitting in back, you know, when they'd get on and walk in, see. Like I say just like walking in here, you know. Just that clean, you see. They'd be surprised, you know, cause they'd see the guys out on the deck and they'd be dirty and greasy and that- I supposed that's where they got to figuring dirty boats, see. Dirty clothes was taken care of right that night. Had ten of those washers on and five dryers.

Q: And four women to run them?

A: Yeh. The ladies would come upstairs and bring all the clothes that was throwed out, you know, on the floors. (Coughs) Well, she would probably do the wash (coughs) like this morning and then the other lady would do it like tonight, see? The other bunch of fellows that way you could never say you never had clean clothes. Cause they were awful strict on that. You were running around Those Italian ladies was too. You was sitting in a chair and maybe the front of your clothes would be greasy, they'd grab you by the front of the head or the hair, you know, and yank you right out of the chair and say, "You expect me to clean that chair?" They'd be soft chairs, you know. Oh, boy, they'd get mad. It's like, you know, some of the boys would make their beds up when they'd get up in the morning. Well, and I've seen them come in, to me the beds looked all right, but those Italian ladies, they'd look like that, they'd reach up and grab

them covers and throw them back on the floor, straighten up the sheets and start putting covers back on. (Laughs). Real particular. And there was one lady on there. Well, she wasn't too old, anyway everytime her turn come to go home she'd cry, yup.

Q: Why would she cry?

A: She'd say, " I ain't going to have any fun. You boys won't be here to tease me." (Laughs.)-----I forget where that was down the river. That Italian town was. Well, anyway, that's where a lot of them came from. Nobody there hardly but Italian people. You know anybody that works on the rivers?

Q: No, I don't at all, only you.

A: I'd never say you knew somebody.----You can call them and tell you want to take a ride.

Q: O.K.

A: I've seen so many down there that you couldn't take them all. Of course, they'd always call the boat ahead of time, see, and ask them when they came by if they had room for, say, maybe like two, three, or four. Well, if they did, they'd tell them. Of course, they'd be right there, waiting to get picked up, see. My gosh, They'd have a list sheet about that long with all the names on it. Now like when you got on, say you got on, well, they'd check you off, see. Then they wouldn't have to be thinking who was on last time and all that, see. Check off, they'd know you'd been on and made the trip, see. It was no sign you could make another one in maybe two or three months, see. Set right back on and made the same trip. You'd of liked it. Ill tell you. Same way with me. You'll see a lot of things you never expected to see. Different things you know. Well, you couldn't see them unless you got off some road along the river, you know and walked down along in through there. At one time, you know, there was down by Peoria, I think it was, I remember right, they had that Indian Burial grounds in that country someplace. You know, they was digging that up. yeh.....I remember that. I know the captain... a lot of times we'd have to tie up down in that territory, waiting on other boats coming up through the locks, see. And the captain'd say, " Don't you never take

a shovel when you get off this boat." He was afraid the guys would see the Indians that were dead.-----My gosh, you go into that Indian place there where the Indians was, and my gosh, all the stuff they had hanging up. They always give you a handful of those arrow heads, you know. Give you a handful,--of course, they had other stuff to sell like blankets, stuff like that. Well I will say this, If you ever get a chance, don't turn it down, cause you'll wish you hadn't and like I say, things you probably never expected to see, pop up on one bank or the other bank,see.

Q: Well thank you for your time.

A: And my gosh, I don't know how many,.but all the fellows all had cameras, you know, and they was always snapping all these pictures...all these things to show other people, what was up and down that river, see. You'd see people in the summer time with a pretty sized boat, motor boat, you know, with sleeping quarters on it like maybe two pr three and they was going up and down the rivers looking for different things.

Q: O.K. Just a minute I've gotta change sides.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

A; Well, I don't know what to tell you.

Q: Well...

A: I will say though, there;s really a lot to look at, up and down the rivers.

Q: Did you just travel the Illinois river?

A: Oh, no, the Ohio.

Q: Where did you go when you were on the Ohio?

A: Well, went down through into St. Louis.

Q: Oh, where was your..did you still go out of whatever town it was, the same boat?

A: Oh, yeh.

Q: Down to St. Louis on the Missouri?

A: Yes, seems like they wouldn't get on another boat and work it.

Q: Were you still traveling from the Kingston Mines down to St. Louis?

A: Yes, that place up there in South Chicago was just about every barge you pushed in.----You gotta say that-oh, golly- they had barges coming out of there just loaded with coal, tied off to the banks. Just loaded and you'd say to yourself, I wonder what they're going to do with all that. My gosh, the next time you seen it, there wouldn't be very many left there they use it all up. Well, it was a steel mill. That's what it was, a steel mill..... and then when the flu got so bad, a lot of towns along the river wouldn't let boat crews land, you know. There'd be some town that hadn't had the flu yet, they say if you let them come ashore, that's what they'll bring with them, see. But I'll tell you one thing, if you got sick on those boats, they had a nurse and assistant nurse on them boats, and if first the nurse would check you and bet you it wouldn't be very long, she'd go to the captain, see, she knew all the hospitals up and down the river. She'd say, " you want to take him, when we get there?" See. Do it, too. Wouldn't do you no good to say, "No, I don't want to go." Cause that's where you're going. The reason they did that, see, they'd want to keep the same crew on all the time, you know. What I mean, not breaking in new ones, see. That way they knew that a crew member come on he knew what to do. He didn't have to be with the bossman all the time, this and that, see. He knew just what was going on and what he was supposed to do. And the boss didn't have to stand there and tell him to do this, do that, see. They knew that was what they was supposed to do. They went right ahead and did it.....and they watched all them boats pretty close. Like I say, suring that flu. The towns, of course, didn't want the boys coming in cause they weren't just there, they was up and the river, you know. And in different places, it was heavier than it was other places. You know, that's the reason they didn't want them to come on-into town, see, bringing more of that into towns.---- Cause, you know, a lot of them was pretty bad off

Q: Well--Thank you for your time.

A: You're welcome.

Q: You've been terrific help.

A. If its any good. (Laughs)

Beverly Mann
Transcriptionist

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I hereby release all right, title, or interest in and to all or any part of my tape-recorded memoirs to Starwood Lib. Syst., subject to the following stipulations:

PLACE

Roosevelt Square
Princeton, Ill

DATE

July 28, 1975

Floyd Clay.

(INTERVIEWEE)

Wendy Chase

(for Starwood Lib. Syst.)

INTERVIEW DATA SHEET

TC-0424 CLA

This section is to be completed by the Interviewer.

NARRATOR Elroy Clay ADDRESS Loosevelt Square, Princeton, Ill PHONE 5-1144

BIRTHDATE 1905 BIRTHPLACE Cornell, Illinois INTERVIEWER Wendy Chase PHONE 875-3757

DATE(S) AND PLACE OF INTERVIEW(S)	REPORT
July 26, 1964	Report of Sgt. P. J. Condon

COLLATERAL MATERIAL Yes ☐ No ☒

TERMS

TERMS 1/95

This section is for office use. Write the date in the larger columns and check the smaller ones to record each process.

[illegible]

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS

Floyd Clay Memoir
(narrator's name)

Interviewer's observations about the interview setting, physical description of the narrator, comments on narrator's veracity and accuracy, and candid assessment of the historical value of the memoir.

Note: Use parentheses () to enclose any words, phrases or sentences that should be regarded as confidential.

Interview setting - small conference room with myself, the interviewee and a young man who also asked questions. Mr. Clay seemed to respond better to a male than to a female.

He looked in good shape for a man of 70, however he had no front top teeth.

He seemed to have more to just say than true information.

He seemed to have his dates correct and he was alert and responsive.

He used a lot of physical motion and said "like that"

July 28
(date)

Muddy Chase
(interviewer's name)

INTERVIEW CONTENTS

NARRATOR'S NAME

Floyd Clay

TAPE NO

TIME

SUBJECTS

to

1. The tape was on the blue part. Wendy Chase at Roosevelt Sq. later viewing Floyd Clay

2. On July 28, 1975

to

3. Cornell, Illinois

4. 1905

to

5. through sixth

6. 24

to

7. over 10 yrs.

8. Crenandato (?)

to

9. Wind storms

10. A person in the room decided to help me interview,

to

11. at his own will. His voice is heard several times

12. throughout the interview.

to

13. Kingston

14. Sewing saw him

to

15. Havana

16. Rooms - 15 X 15 ft approx.

to

17. Italian

18. World War Two

to

19. There foot was "that wide"

20. A shut off the tape recorder and he kept

to

21. talking about how many days he worked per month.

22. Dado

to

23. A shut it off and he kept talking "they was real particular

24. Changing Sides