

DuPue Police Officer
an Oral History

Lonzo Harrison, Interviewee
Of DePue, Illinois

Interview Date: January 18, 1976

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Narrator's Name: LONZO HARRISON
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Place of Interview: ROUTE 4, PRINCETON, ILLINOIS
Interviewer's Name: DIANE HARRISON
For: STARVED ROCK LIBRARY SYSTEM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Q: What's your name?

A: Lonzo Harrison.

Q: Where were you born?

A: Greenville, Tennessee.

Q: Do you remember anything about Greenville?

A: Quite a bit.

Q: Like what?

A: I went to school down there for three years.

Q: What were the schools like?

A: They were one room schoolhouses where we had all eight grades in the same room.

Q: Did they teach all -- did one teacher teach all the same courses?

A: Yes.

Q: How old are you?

A: Fifty-nine.

Q: Do you remember anything about the railroads in DePue?

A: I can remember when the gates, or the crossings, were guarded by a man, he'd walk out at daytime with a stop sign when the trains were coming, at night he walked out with a red lantern to stop the traffic. From then it moved to semi-automatic gates where a man was in a tower and he'd lift -- the train would put the gates down and the man in the tower would raise them after they cleared the crossing. When they got rid of that then they put in totally automatic. My dad worked on them for years and I worked there a couple of years on those gates.

Q: On the gates you worked on?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you get interested in being a police officer?

A: Oh, it comes back to working on a railroad, I was down in Bureau with this lantern out there trying to stop traffic and I nearly got run over with a couple, three cars. I said, "I wish I was a policeman in this town, I'd stop these guys from doing that." And the guy that I told this to happened to be the police commissioner in Bureau, so he offered me the job and I took it.

Q: Did you have to go to school?

A: No.

Q: It just came automatically to you?

A: It's just like everything else, you go through the college of hard knocks to learn it, and that's the way you get your education, by trial and error.

Q: How long have you been a police officer?

A: Twenty years.

Q: How had DePue changed, do you remember anything different about it?

A: Well, it seems like that in the old days, no, not the old days but a few years back, people tried to help each other a lot more than they are doing now. One thing I can remember that everybody in DePue was blood-typed so you knew their blood type -- they go to the hospital all they had to do was call up and people in DePue would donate blood to help them out. Now it seems like they pass somebody by that's in trouble -- they don't even -- somebody else will help them -- they don't seem to want to help themselves.

Q: Did you go to school here in DePue?

A: Yes.

Q: After you left Greenville, Tennessee?

A: Yes, I went to grade school and high school in DePue.

Q: Was it the same like in Greenville?

A: No, here you had one room for one class and one teacher, just like a class.

Q: Do you remember any of your teacher's names?

A: Oh, Mrs. Elms, no Mr. Elms, Mrs. Payne, Mrs. Osmond. . .

Q: How many kids were usually in the classroom?

A: Around 30 to 35 I would imagine.

Q: Do you remember anything about the old policemen that used to be here, any names that you can remember?

A: Well the first one that I can -- I don't remember, but we have it on record, was a J. B. Litchfield who was sworn into office in 1871. We have the papers, he took the oath of office in the police station and in this oath of office he had swore that he had never fought a duel or challenged anybody to a duel. This is a little bit changed now because we don't have to do that. Then later on we got into Erven Floyd, Mr. Harvey Simkins, Robert Croissant, and on down to the fellows that worked under me.

Q: Do you remember any experiences when you were a police officer?

A: Well I think one time when I really got scared was I got a call from a subject to go over to the American Legion building _____ that her baby was choking to death. So I went over there and sure enough the baby was choking and she said that it had swallowed a piece of hard candy. The only thing I knew what to do was to pat it on the back and I grabbed it and turned it upside down and I must have really whoopped it because the candy came out of the baby's mouth and flew clear across the room and

A: hit the wall. Then I set the baby down and he looked at me kind of funny and I asked him if he could drink a drink of water. So we got him a drink of water and he drank it, and a piece of bread and he ate that, and we told him to wash it down with some more water, so he did that and I knew the baby was all right. But I said the next time call a doctor, don't call me.

Q: Anything else?

A: Another funny thing that comes to mind was -- I was looking through some of the old records that we have down at the police station and when the city had ordered the jail cells and they were shipped to DePue by rail they found out there was some damages done during transit. So they had wrote the company and told them that the jail cells were damaged during transit, so they wrote back a letter and said that they were sorry that they were mis-handled like this and they were enclosing a check of 60¢ to cover the damages. (laughter)

Q: Is there any other experiences?

A: Well another one that was funny that I thought was -- one day I was home and a couple came in and asked me if I could marry them. I said, "I don't know what police covers but it sure doesn't cover marrying people."

Q: Do you remember who the couple was?

A: No, I don't.

Q: Is there anything else?

A: Getting back to funny things that happened afterwards, but they weren't at the time -- I was with my dad in this tower by the railroad watching the crossings and there was a train coming from the east headed west. The gates went down and a car came on the tracks and they got all excited, there were six girls in it, they stalled the motor, they all jumped out.

A: Three went to the front, three went to the back, and they were pushing against each other. There was a passer-by, he went over and jumped in the car, started it up and drove it off. The train was going to stop anyway so there would have been no damage if they hadn't had gotten the car off.

Q: Do you remember anything about the streetcars?

A: Yes, I can remember when they used to come through DePue and this by Sullivans, where Sullivans live now, that was a bad crossing, come out of there and it went on farther west down to High Street. They used to have what they called a "Y" there, they would pull in up High Street, there's a bridge there now, but at that time was a big ditch was open and they could pull in there then throw the switches and back up toward Bureau then they could go back to LaSalle-Peru way, or if they didn't want to turn around they'd just keep right on going and go to Bureau over to Princeton. They ran on the electricy, so there was an overhead power cable with a rod on a spring with a pulley and this pulley would roll along this wire to furnish the juice for the motors of the streetcar. Every once in a while those pulleys would bounce off of the wire and the motorman would have to get out with a wooden stick, pull the cable, or the rod back down and put it back on the cable again, so he could ge juice to keep going. The motorman was the engineer, the brakeman, the ticket-taker, and everything rolled into one.

Q: Do you remember how much it cost to ride on this?

A: I'm pretty sure it cost a dime to ride to LaSalle but a nickel to go to Spring Valley.

Q: Did you used to ride on it?

A: A few times.

Q: Do you remember anything about the sports in DePue?

A: Well it's something that very few people in DePue probably remember except the oldtimers, but DePue has had a few champions and near champions. To mention a few champions -- Mr. and Mrs. Walt Drennan were both National Champions in duck calling competition. There was a fellow by the name of Arrio Soldati that was a pretty good boxer, he boxed Joe Louis in two matches, Joe Louis didn't knock him out, he stayed with him both fights. We also had George Meagher who is Dr. Meagher now, was one of the national greats in broad jumping and the only one that could beat him at that time was Jesse Owens who became famous in the Olympic Games for winning the broad jump. And we had a few baseball players, Mike Schroeder played with the House of David, Stanley Spolar pitched in the minor leagues. All in all DePue is pretty well represented in sports.

END OF SIDE ONE

END OF TAPE

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PLACE Home of
Lonzo Harrison
DATE January 18, 1975

Diane Harrison
(Interviewee)

Lonzo Harrison
(for _____)