

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with L. S. Dove

Conducted by Carolyn Wellso  
June 24, 1985  
Cedar Rapids Iowa

Transcribed by Sue Daugherty

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Mr. L.S. Dove was born in Chicago, in 1890, and moved to Marion, Iowa, in 1895. He had various jobs with the Milwaukee Railroad out of Marion, beginning in 1906 and ending with his retirement in 1955 as Chief Dispatcher.

From this interview we learn about the railroad and something of the early years of automobile travel and lifestyle.

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Interview with: L. S. Dove  
Conducted by: Carolyn Wellso  
Date: June 24, 1985  
Place: Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Dove: This is L. S. Dove, I was born in Chicago, moved to Marion in 1895.

I have lived in this town since that time. My father, Frank Dove, I don't know where he was born, but he went to Mount Vernon, Cornell College, graduated in early 1880's. My mother was born in Maquoketa, Iowa.

CW: You went to school in Mount Vernon? Did you go to grade school and high school in Marion?

Dove: I went to grade school up to and including the tenth grade and after which, I went to work on the Milwaukee railroad in 1906 and worked on that line until 1955, retiring at the age of 65. I was a telgraph operator for the first eight years and a train dispatcher for the next twenty-three years and the last twenty years, I was chief dispatcher at Marion.

CW: Can you tell us a little about the railroad?

Dove: Handling the Iowa East division, at the time we moved to town, this was a railroad town and had about 3,000 population and stayed that [1863] population for years. The first railroad into Marion was 1863, it came from Dubuque to Marion. The next few years, went on to Cedar Rapids. They had built a bridge south of the Marion cemetery and that main line was into Marion at 1881. The depot that is now standing there was built in 1882. In 1936, the east half of the

depot was built on for the clerks and other officials.

CW: Do you want to talk about railroading? What was the railroad center like?

Dove: At one time, this was quite a railroad center, from 1900 till after the second World War, 1945, it was a real good, oncoming railroad, but from there on it started to go downhill like many other railroads on account of competition--busses, airplanes, and trucks--took bankruptcy in the latter part of 1954. Finally, was disbanded altogether in 1967.

CW: How many people worked on the railroad?

Dove: We had--on the Iowa division--we had about 400 employees on the Iowa-east division. As the road grew further, it went west from Marion and to Council Bluffs and Omaha in 1885.

CW: What were the various jobs of railroad workers? Who were the important people?

Dove: We had one superintendent that had charge of both divisions--both divisions of the Iowa division--and two trainmasters and two chief dispatchers and several roadmasters and a chief carpenter that took charge of most of the division and the work. We employed about five hundred men on this division.

CW: Five hundred men out of a population of three thousand? Oh, in the whole Iowa division.

Dove: The reason our tracks were so good at that time, we had a section foreman and six men patrolling and fixing the tracks up at every station. There was an operator and an agent at every station. When I took over as chief dispatcher in 1936, we had 36 passenger trains, 28 regularly carted freight trains. They only handled

about about eighty to a hundred cars at that time--that is, the freight trains. The 35 passenger trains included all the branch lines that were--year by year, we added branch lines to the main line (feeders).

CW: When did refrigeration come in?

Dove: Our first railroad came in in 1863, and as I said, it went on south of our cemetery towards Cedar Rapids, and at that time, we had a big refrigerator kept ice in at the south end of Eleventh Street. There was a brewery on the south end of Tenth Street. That closed up about 1880, just before we came to town.

CW: The railroad provided a lot of jobs for people, it was a real center.

Dove: Yes. This was a center for all firemen, engineers, brakemen, conductors. . . Our west Iowa division, Perry was the railroad center.

CW: Who were the heroes, in the railroad, someone said like . . . what were the important jobs on the train. Talk about the train, you know most kids nowadays have not been on a train and never will be probably.

Dove: The conductor on a train was supposed to be the boss of the train while it was traveling. The engineer and fireman took his signals. The brakeman, mostly on passenger trains, there were two brakemen.

CW: Did they have dining cars? Was most of the food prepared on the train or was it prepared in Marion?

Dove: On our Sioux trains, there was three each way a day. They had dining cars and sleeping cars and at one time, we had a sleeping car going out of Cedar Rapids and that was taken off later on when there was no traffic for it. That sleeping car went down to

Ottumwa and hitched on to the Kansas City Special and on to Kansas City.

CW: You can almost hear the whistle. (Laughter)

Dove: Oh, yeah, we all miss the whistle as it goes through town.

CW: Oh, yeah. Coal. To what year did they use coal and when did they quit using coal?

Dove: We used coal for the engines until about 1930 and then we had oil engines for a few years. The diesels came on about 1936. Do you want any history of me at all?

CW: Yes, go ahead. Yes. Keep talking.

Dove: I learned telegraphy at home. When I went to work for the Milwaukee as a helper at Eldridge Junction. Stayed there for about three months. Then I started to work at \$145 a month, 12-hours, nights. I worked that job about a year. Then two or three other line jobs for another year, then I went to Oxford Junction which was quite a job at that time. I was 18 years old working the hardest job on the division as an operator. Then they called me up to Marion and I went to work as a train dispatcher which I worked for 23 years. Then I was promoted to chief train dispatcher and car distributor in 1918. In 1936, and I worked that job (Tape stops) It was in 1936. 1936. And I worked that job till I retired in 1955. At the time that I started to work on the railroad, the average age of a train dispatcher was 45 years, but I wanted that job and I got it and I'm still alive at 95.

CW: You went for it. You're not going to give up, in other words.

Dove: (Laughter) I'm shootin' for 100.

CW: Do you want to talk about the early cars coming in? What was

Marion like in those early years when you were a boy?

Dove: In Marion, at the time we moved here, there was a Daniels Hotel on Main Street--Seventh Avenue (my voice is going to be bad) . . .

CW: That's all right.

Dove: . . . on Seventh Avenue. We used to go to dinner on Sunday there. We'd get three course meals for fifty cents every Sunday. That was our outing. There used to be a Metzger Hotel up near the train-yards. Up in Marion, we had the big yards here, 16 tracks in the yard and 2 switching engines working all the time. We had the track that run between Marion and Cedar Rapids that done some switching over there and brought the cars up and back.

CW: Did you have the roundhouse?

Dove: We had the big roundhouse here that held about twelve engines.

CW: Tell them what a roundhouse is. People nowadays don't know what a roundhouse is.

Dove: A roundhouse is really a round house but it's wide enough so that the engines can pass each other at the doorway. While an engine was in there, they'd fill it up and the mechanics would all work on it.

CW: What about the turntable?

Dove: The turntable--they'd back out and turn an engine whichever way they wanted it to head.

CW: Can you talk about the dirt streets in Marion or the first cars coming in? The early horse and buggies?

Dove: My first ride on an automobile was in 1908. I had my own automobile in 1919. My wife had a car about the same time. We both drove. She drove till she was 85 and I drove till I was 94 in the 1900's

never having had an accident.

CW: What church did you go to? Tell about that.

Dove: We went to the Methodist church.

CW: Did you know Dr. Jayne and some of the early ministers? Not Dr. Jayne, but Dr. . . . Can you tell about the Methodist church and the services, revival, and so forth?

Dove: The first Methodist church they built was on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Tenth Street. They had that for about seven, eight years and then built another church on Twelfth Street and Sixth Avenue. Then they got too many people coming so the year we came to town--1895--they laid the cornerstone for a new methodist church and in 1896--June--they had the dedication. The church is on the corner of Twelfth Street and Eighth Avenue.

CW: How often did you used to attend church? Did you go to church once a week?

Dove: I used to go to church Sunday school and church in the morning, Epworth League in the afternoon and church at night every Sunday.

CW: And you were all good boys. (Laughter)

Dove: Do you want any history of my wife and I?

CW: Sure. We can do that.

Dove: Mrs. Dove and I met when I was working at Oxford Junction. Another boy and I had the first moving picture outfit at that time in the town of Oxford. We handled that for a couple of years along with a traveling merry-go-round which a man run for us. Then we got out of that business.

CW: You did that? Had the first moving pictures? Tell me more about it. What was it like?

Dove: I can't remember that.



CW: But you were the first one?

Dove: First one.

CW: How did you get it?

Dove: Just like they do now. Lease them.

CW: Lease them. That's interesting.

Dove: We were married in 1915. She had been born and raised and married in the same house. After our marriage, we came to Marion and moved into a house that we built before we were married and lived in that house for 67 years together. No divorces. I finally decided I couldn't live there alone after she passed away in 1891 at the age of 91. I should say, 1981.

CW: Were you active in anything else in Marion?

Dove: I wasn't active. I didn't have time to be active in any Marion doings at all.

CW: Did you ever see the Cherry sisters?

Dove: I saw the Cherry sisters perform. My friend Roy Leidigh and I are three months apart in age--went to school together, he's three months younger than I am. We practically lived in this town all of our life.

CW: Did you ever see Grant Wood?

Dove: Saw Grant Wood several times. Saw him painting up at Stone City when I was taking a trip over the railroad.

CW: Did women have help in those early days? How did they do their laundry?

Dove: We had a wash board--for laundry, you had the wash board and tubs, stationary tubs, generally in the kitchen. Or generally in the cellar. And hung our washing out on the line. If it was a bad

day, we'd hold the clothes over and hang 'em out the next day.

CW: That would have kept women at home, didn't it? It kept women in house. Couldn't run around when you had that to do.

Dove: My wife's folks all went out west in a covered wagon, part of them. I've got furniture here that they brought from Pennsylvania.

CW: So they came from Pennsylvania to Iowa in a covered wagon.

Dove: Pennsylvania. The state of Pennsylvania to Maquoketa.

CW: Do you remember anything about the first World War? Were there troupes trained through Marion in the first World War?

Dove: We had lots of troupe trains through Marion the first World War. People would call me up and want to know when that train was coming through and we couldn't tell them. One of the camps was here for the men to work at--South Eleventh Street.

CW: There was a camp in Marion?

Dove: Yes.

CW: There was a camp in Cedar Rapids, too.

Dove: Big camp here.

CW: South of Eleventh Street. Did they live in tents or barracks?

Dove: Tents. Well, some barracks. Both. Had tents and barracks both.

CW: Do you remember any Presidents?

Dove: Well, I, at one time I could name them all. There was 31 Presidents . . .

CW: Have you seen any? Did they come through on the railroad train?

Dove: Yes. General Eisenhower were here along with J. Kennedy the same day at a country corn picking outfit.

CW: That's right, they did.

Dove: Nixon. I met him. Johnson. I saw him when he went west and then

he died in California and his funeral train come through Cedar Rapids, had a big crowd there.

CW: Which Johnson? Johnson?

Dove: That's wrong. What President was that that died out in California?  
[There follows some off-mike conversation, transcriptionist unable to pick it up.]

CW: Do you want to talk anymore about the changes from the courthouse to now? Do you see any other changes or anything that you can talk about?

Dove: The first pavement in Marion was about Eighth Avenue from the church corner--Twelfth Street to Twenty-second Street. That was Eighth Avenue, they called it Pucker Avenue because all the rich people lived on that avenue. All the big homes were on that avenue Let's go up to Pucker Street. (Laughter)

Lillian and Dorothy Gish were cousins of my wife. She had two governors, cousins, of Oregon. One Senator from Oregon was a cousin. Their folks all came out there in a covered wagon in 1840 to 1842.

[More off-mike conversation]

CW: Can you remember anything else?

Dove: I kept a diary from the time I started to work, is it all right to put that in?

CW: Definitely, put that in.

Dove: Then I threw them all away in the rubbish.

CW: You threw them all away? When?

Dove: Moving. I said, "Nobody's going to want to read this stuff". I had two pasteboard boxes that big full of diary books.

CW: I wish you'd given them to historical society.

Dove: I should have. I've been scolded enough.

CW: My grandfather was born in 1881 and I have all of his little day books. Oh, that's a shame, I bet you've been scolded.

[TAPE ENDS WITH NO OTHER COMMENTS]

INTERVIEW TOPICS  
CEDAR RAPIDS: THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

## I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1,4 --When were you born? Where?
- 1 --How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids? (Marion, Iowa)
- 1 --What are your parents' names?
- 1 --Where did you go to school?
- 5,6,7 --Are you married or single?
- 1,2,4 --Did you raise a family? How big?
- What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

## II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

## A. Technology in the Community

## 1. Transportation

- 1-4,5 --Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
- Trolleys (the Interurban)
- 5 --Horses and First Automobiles
- 9 --Mud roads and the seedling mile
- Hunter Airport and the first planes
- Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

## 2. Communications

- Newspapers
- Radios
- Advertising
- Telephones

## B. People in the Community

## 1. Amusements/Recreation

- 6 --Motion Pictures
- Cedar Rapids Parks
- Dances
- Carnival Week
- Chautauqua
- Community Theater
- Little Gallery
- Symphony Orchestra
- Circus
- Greene's Opera House
- Amusement Parks (Alamo)
- Camps
- Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)

## 2. Famous Characters

- Cherry Sisters
- 7 --Grant Wood
- Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
- Marvin Cone
- 8 --Presidents

3. Lifestyle
  - Life before air conditioning
  - Winter Activities
  - Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
  - 8 --Clothing
  - Toys
  - Saloons/Taverns
  - Farm Life
4. Family Life
  - Household Help
  - Women's Roles
  - Childrens' Activities/Behavior
  - 5,6 --Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)
5. Ethnic/Minority Life
  - Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
  - Indians
  - Segregation of Blacks
  - Jobs Available

C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community

1. Education
  - Cedar Rapids Schools
  - Coe College
  - Mount Mercy College
  - Cornell College
2. Government
  - City Services
  - Streets/Roads
  - Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)
3. Medical
  - Hospitals
  - Patient-Doctor Relationship
  - Broken Bones
  - Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
  - House Calls
  - Home Delivery of Babies

4. Business and Economy
  - Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
  - 3 --Local Brewing Companies (in Marion, Iowa)
  - Retail Businesses /Department Stores
  - Professions
  - Banking and Finance
  - Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
  - Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
  - Farmers Market
  - Mills on Cedar River
  - 6 --Buildings Erected
  - Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
  - Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)
5. Attitudes/Values
  - Children/Discipline
  - Sex/Petting
  - Charity
  - Divorce
  - Work
  - Working women, Voting Rights for Women
  - Patriotism (World War I)
- D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community
  1. Catastrophic Events
    - Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
    - Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
    - Bank Closings (1933)
    - Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
    - Public Library Murder(1921)
  2. National Historic Events
    - Womens' Suffrage
    - 8 --World War I
    - Roaring 20's
    - Prohibition
    - Great Depression



