

Lancaster County Historical Society  
Oral History Project

Interviewee: Lester Herr

Interviewer: Tom Roy

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I: My name is Tom Roy, and I'm talking again this time to another person about April firsts in Lancaster County. This is a continuation or addendum to what April firsts were like in Lancaster County. Our narrator this time is Mr. Lester H. Herr. Mr. Herr, tell us a little bit about yourself first of all.

L: Well my experience with the April first goes back to 1918, being a banker. And since then things have changed considerably of course. The April first in the county banks and I was then an employee of a bank in Quarryville.

I: Now before, I'm sorry to interrupt you, in case anyone who is listening to this tape has not heard the other tape on April first. We'll just encapsualize a little bit. We're talking about a period, and this is very rough, of about 1850 to the mid 1930's. About a seventy to eighty year span which was the day in Lancaster County where deeds changed hands, leases ran out, and began anew, and the city and the courthouse and the lawyer's offices were rushed and busy, and a lot of people came in by trolley and stage coach etc. Now you were working in a county bank in Quarryville? Tell us about your April first. 1918 you say is when you started your experience.

L: Yes I was going to say that Mr. [Arnold] gave you a very clear and precise description of what took place on April first as far as the city is concerned. My experience is of course as a country banker. And we had to get in large sums of cash to supply our customer who was coming into Lancaster, the county seat, to make whatever transaction was necessary in each case.

I: So you were heavily involved in the preparation up to this April first, where big exchange was going on.

L: These people would come in from all sections of the county, lower Lancaster County in this case. And they would put their horse in the livery stable, and in this case it was a livery stable. And they'd take the trolley to Lancaster. After having been in here all day, practically all day and clearing up their transactions in the offices, they would return to their base, which would be Quarryville in this case and this could be up until 12 o'clock at night.

I: You had a long day (laughs).

L: We stayed in the bank until one thirty, two o'clock, sometimes two thirty in the morning, depositing cash, or making [slips for deposits] which carried a rate of interest those days of approximately four percent. The farmer or and in most cases it was a farmer, because a lot of these transactions were for farm people, would either deposit that money in an account, take a distributive deposit, or he would reinvest that money in a day or two to somebody else's mortgage or on somebody else's property. But during that time, we were at the bank, many hours of the day, we'd take time to go to the restaurant, to get a lunch at noontime and a lunch in the evening, not a dinner. We didn't take that much time.

I: You didn't see your family on April first?

L: This continued until about the 30's, and in the middle 20's it started to break off to some extent. And October first became a time when we in the county noticed an increase in business, in real estate transactions.

I: Again kind of the beginning and the end of the agricultural year.

L: And that only lasted for a matter of two or three years when it started to level off. One of the reasons for the leveling off on this thing was that many builders started to build instead of a house for you or for me, he would build three, four, five houses for sale, and these would go back in the early twenties. Two of the outstanding people in Lancaster City who did this sort of thing was Frank Krissler and the Caldwells. Owen Caldwell. This changed the whole thing and it became spread out over the year, not all at one time.

I: Now you outlined some of the differences between the county, and the outreaches of the county. By no means am I being insulting, I live in Akron, which probably didn't exist (laughs) no it did. What were some of the big differences between being "out there", and "in here"? As you say, most of your work was in preparation, but say over the yearly cycle, were there great differences in banking?

L: Not a great difference in the methods. No.

I: Maybe your clientele?

L: Your clientele was somewhat different of course. We had all country clientele, and they had the industrial and manufacturing industry, as well as retail and wholesale. But it was pretty much the same. April first to the county bank was that we worked in the early morning when the people came in and they took their money out of the bank and took it to Lancaster and we worked late in the evening when they brought it back.

I: Before and after. In or out.

L: During the day, we had nothing to do. We could take a long lunch then (laughs). When I came to Lancaster and worked in the then, Union Trust, it still is, there we worked up until 10 or 12 at night.

I: Now there are two things that I want to ask you which one thing you mentioned before was trolley cars, and I want to conclude this interview with you on trolley cars, because I know we'll get into it heavily with someone else. But you mentioned that you began your career in 1918, are you still actively in banking?

L: No, I'm retired.

I: When did you retire from banking?

L: In 1971, I had 56 years in banking, by the way.

I: You started out at age two which makes you about sixty, not really. How old were you when you started in banking in 1918?

L: Seventeen.

I: You were seventeen?

L: I started right out of high school.

I: Did you start as a clerk?

L: Yes sir.

L: Now you're getting into personal history.

I: I was going to ask you a question that relates to banking. As you go back say 1918 to now, who everybody knows computers have come along and micrographics and all kinds of records management, things like that, not there, there certainly was records management as always, as long as their been intelligent beings on earth, but your span, from 1918 to roughly this time, the seventies, what's happened, if you had to pinpoint two or three things about the banking?

L: Of course the complete change in banking was when I started we did our posting of checking accounts by hand and in ink. Later on we did it by a posting machine which was manual then. Now its done automatically by electronic machines.

I: Now when you say pen and ink, you're talking about fountain pens?

L: No, I'm talking about the old [Bic] pen.

I: Not the quill?

L: Not the quill. That's a little before my time.

I: This is the pen that had the little grooves right underneath the pen point, and that would absorb the ink and as you put pressure on the paper would flow down into that little chamber, and then you had to blot it.

L: Oh yes.

I: See now I'm only thirty one, but I remember blotters. I can remember my dad going and blotting the ink. How about the trolley cars? I'm trying to get a feel for, picturing all these people getting on in Quarryville or Ephrata, wherever they had the trolleys. Were they open trolleys?

L: No, closed trolleys. They had open trolleys that they used in summertime. But these were close trolleys they used on April first, powered by electricity of course.

I: Would they add extra cars on April first?

L: No not necessarily on April first. It would happen if there was a circus in town, but not for this purpose. But the cars were crowded, and they ran every hour during the day, from the first car would leave our town at five o'clock in the morning for the city.

I: People that had to come into work maybe?

L: Yes. And the last car to reach our town at night was at twelve o'clock. So we had wonderful cover, wonderful transportation.

I: Mr. Herr, how much did the trolley cost in 1918?

L: Gosh, I can remember when it was forty five cents, and I don't know whether that was 1918. That was was going to, from Quarryville to Lancaster, over about 16, 17 miles.

I: You told me your name was Lester Hans Herr. Is it really Lester Hans Herr?

L: Correct.

I: What relation to Hans Herr, the original?

L: Direct relation.

I: Something to be proud of, and justly.

L: Yes.

I: Thank you very much for talking to us. Lester Hans Herr, on the continuation of April first in Lancaster County. My name is Tom Roy.