

Lancaster County Historical Society
Oral History Project

Interviewee: Christian Neff
Interviewer: Ann Wolmuth
Date Recorded: December 7, 2005
Transcriber: Ariel Kornhauser
Date Transcribed: July 11, 2006

W: My name is Ann Wolmuth, and I'm interviewing Mr. Christian Neff on the subject of trolley transportation between Lancaster and Lititz from the turn of the century. Mr. Neff, could you tell us a little bit about trolley transportation at this time period.

N: The original trolleys –or streetcars, as we called them- in those days, operated from Lancaster to Lititz. The first cars only operated as far as [Kissle] Hill. The reason they couldn't run in to Lititz: they couldn't navigate the hill of [Kissle] Hill, on account of the grade. The result was that everybody in Lititz had to travel by horse and wagon to [Kissle] Hill, tie their horses at the hotel, and then go down to the house, which had a waiting room, and board the trolley there.

Three or four years later, they arranged to continue around the hill and on to the Lititz Pike again, and then operated as far as the Borough limits of Lititz. The Lititz [Borough?] council wouldn't permit them to enter the borough, because they didn't want the streets torn up. And the result was that people in Lititz had to walk possibly three blocks to meet the trolley at the borough limits.

W: Did they have waiting rooms at each of the stops?

N: No! It didn't have any waiting room at that point. No waiting room. And they usually waited there about twenty minutes for people to gather in. They operated two trolleys a day: one in the morning, one in the afternoon. After a period of about two, three years, they were permitted to enter the borough limits, and went as far as down to the Reading railroad tracks. And they couldn't cross the tracks, of course. At that point they waited about half an hour for passengers. They then inaugurated a system where they operated two cars a day. Later on, they operated four cars a day. They had what they called a turnout at the northern end of Neffsville, opposite which is now the Brethren Village. And there the trolleys, one would wait until the other one came up from Lancaster, and then he would proceed into Lancaster, and the other one into Lititz.

W: Now, what exactly was a turnout? Could you explain that?

N: Well, it was a spur. It was a spur where the one trolley would get off the main track and wait until the other trolley came out and then they'd go from the spur onto the main line again. At Neffsville, that place had a high up bank, which was the result of winter time, creek [?], the snow drifted and the trolleys were help up there sometimes for two

days, the result that the trolley in Lititz had to stay in Lititz and the one in Lancaster had to stay at the turnout.

W: What would happen to the passengers?

N: Well, they'd make some horse and wagon, or horse and sleigh or something and they'd manage to get to the destination. Or the one car Lititz would run out that far then. Well, they couldn't run out [? ...] couldn't go back again. Well, they didn't have many passengers to get on and travel in the wind and the snow.

W: I wouldn't imagine, if the trolley was stuck for three days at a time.

N: That's right. It was the motorman and the conductor. In those days they used a motorman and a conductor. The conductor would go to the front of the car and pick up the fares, and register each fare, pull the cord that was on the register so that they could prove their cash with the amount of passengers who were on the car.

W: And what would the motorman do? What would his job be?

N: The motorman operated the streetcar. He operated the trolley. And we boys in Lititz used to have great... (when we were old enough), get a hold of the ropes to move the trolley, the trolley pull to reverse it from the front to the back.

W: Could you explain how that was done?

N: Well, it's a long arm on the rear of the trolley, with a little wheel on top of the pull that connected to the wire overhead where you get connection for the power, you know.

W: It was electrically powered?

N: Electrically power operated, with a transmitter- transformer, rather- in the trolley. And it was a great time in summertime, during the picnic season. Many of the churches in Lancaster, and surrounding areas of Lancaster, would come to Lititz for the Fourth of July for picnic season to the Lititz Springs. And particularly on the Fourth of July we had [thousands?] of people come to Lititz. Lititz had fireworks in the evening; the Lititz Springs was lighted up with candles. They had over the Springs, you know? And they had band concerts, and in those days they had firecrackers, and it was a lively Fourth of July.

W: It sounds as though it would be. Could you explain to us how Lititz Springs looked with all those candles?

N: See, the Lititz Springs had foaming water- Lititz Springs, by the way, was owned, and is still owned, by the Moravian Church. And they provided the candles to put in the ([_?_] I can't think of the term.)

Voice in Background: Candle holders?

N: Well, it was a white candle holder. Large candle holders. And they revolved. Everyone would revolve differently. The flow of the water would ... the one would operate in one direction and the other one the opposite direction. And that was lined up, the Springs were lined up from the beginning head of the spring to Broad Street. And the candles in those days were made of wax by the members of the Moravian Church. And the wax candles burned longer and were less subject to wind than the candles are that we use today. And it was quite a beautiful sight to see those things. All the lights were turned off and the spring, what few they had, and they only had these lights over the springs. And they waited until about nine o'clock at night to set off the fireworks, and then they had the fireworks on the baseball diamond. And that was quite a picture.

W: I should imagine it was. You said the various groups came out by trolley often times.

N: They came out in those days for picnics, for those occasions, they used almost all manner of transportation. They had open trolleys in those days. They had a [?] platform to get on, but you sat in an open trolley all the way.

W: If it would happen to be dusty or inclement weather, would there be awnings that you could pull down?

N: NO! No, no nono no no, no protection. [It was for your own...]

W: So if it started to rain in the middle of the day you [___ it]?

N: You take a chance on that. And that would happen sometimes. Some Fourth of Julys were moist. Some were nice. But I lived right on Broad Street. The trolley passed my house, and I didn't miss many of the sights.

W: No, you'd be in a good position to see everything.

N: Yeah. I was.

W: Did trolleys ever run further than between Lititz and Lancaster? Did they ever go to Elizabethtown or someplace like that?

N: Well, later on they branched out and ran to Quarryville, to Ephrata, and to New Holland, Mount Joy, Elizabethtown, Manheim, and later on the traction company, the Lancaster traction Companies would be called in and connect it with Hershey. And the Hershey line ran to Ephrata; they bought that line. And it ran from Ephrata to Lancaster. And I was privileged when that transaction was closed by the head of the traction company, it had a round-trip to Hershey. Mrs. Neff and I were fortunate enough to be invited to accompany a group of people on that trolley.

W: Could you tell us about that?

N: Well, we had a caterer on the trolley and when you got to Hershey we stopped there for a couple of hours. And we were fortunate to have Mr. Hershey come to the car and greet us, because he knew some of the people on the car: friends of his when he lived in Lancaster and operated his chocolate business in Lancaster.

W: How long would that trip take by trolley?

N: I think we left here about 9:00 in the morning and we got back to Lancaster by 4:30 in the afternoon.

W: It was a nice day for you...

N: It was a nice day.

W: ...It was a full day.

N: Mr. W. W. Greist, who was president of that traction company, and our congressman, accompanied us on this trip.

W: Who was the congressman at that time, was it Mr. Greist?

N: I said he was...

W: ...He was the congressman.

N: Yes, that's right.

And he was the Republican leader in those days, too. And for quite a number of years...

W: ...Did you ever drive the trolley? Did the

N: No. Oh no.

W: Did the young fellows ever ...

N: No, no.

W ...want to take it out?

N: Oh. No, no. You weren't permitted. We weren't permitted to do that. The only thing we were [tape momentarily shut off] ... bring that trolley pull from the rear end to the front, or from the front to the rear end again. You can't have it in the front, you have to have it in the rear of the trolley on the wire. You know.

W: Would that mean that the trolley could be driven from either end of the trolley?

N: No. Well, yeah, that's right. Oh yes! Yes, had to be. When we'd get to our destination, we'd have to swing it around again so that they could head back to Lancaster.

W: Now, in the winter time, how was it heated?

N: They had a baggage compartment on the first car. They had a baggage compartment there, where they could carry baggage, a small amount to some of the shops in Lititz. And there was a [?] they had a stove in there, to heat the trolley. [?], as I recall, there wasn't an oversupply of heat, but there was enough to take the chill off the streetcar.

W: I don't suppose a little stove would throw much heat. Was it a coal burner or a wood burner, do you recall?

N: Well, I think originally it was a wood burner. Wood burner. And some coal later on, that's right.

W: You said, "the first car". How many cars were usually connected together to make a trip...?

N: Only one. Only one car...

W: Only one car?

N: ...there were never more than one.

W: Never more ...?

N: No, no. They didn't have the power to operate two at that time. There were times when, especially going over Kissle Hill, the streetcars moved rather slowly. Round the...

W: I should imagine. Did anyone ever have to get out and help push it up...

N: No.

W: ...a hill? Were...

N: No.

W: ...there any ...

N: No.

W: ...grades that ...

N: No.

W: ...steep?

N: No.

The one other feature that, especially on Lititz Pike, whenever a trolley approached a horse and wagon, some horses had to be held or led past a streetcar that, that streetcar had to stop!

W: They were afraid of the streetcar?

N: They were afraid of the streetcar, anything moving.

W: Did that ever cause any accidents?

N: Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge.

That same thing applied to automobiles, the first automobiles. Some horses had to be...

W: Yes, I've heard about that...

N: ...held or led past, or the automobiles had to stop!

W: Did the horses ever become used to the trolley? I know they've become used to the automobile.

N: Well, really, there, there weren't that many, not as many trolleys as there were street cars, and I don't think it- I don't recall it was any great difficulty there in that respect.

W: I recall that last time you told us at one particular portion of the road would drift shut because of the lack of a snow fence.

N: Well, I mentioned that earlier ...

W: Well...

N: ...but that's Neffsville where there are trolleys for Brethren Village, you know? Where that turn out (you call it a turn out)?

W: Yes.

N: That's where they drifted shut.

W: Why was there no snow fence there?

N: The owner of the- When the traction company cleaned it right away there, the man claimed that he wasn't sufficiently reimbursed for his land [??] wouldn't allow him to put up a snow fence. Consequently, after that the passengers suffered, not the traction company, the passengers suffered not the traction company...

W: ...Yes, I can see that.

N: But he admitted his displeasure against the passengers, not against the traction company.

W: Yes, being stuck for two days is not fun.

N: That's right. And when did I ... I had one... I should mention our trip to Quarryville as a boy. And boy we would go to Kissel Hill and board the trolley to Kissel Hill, and take a trolley to the square in Lancaster. And we'd walk from the square to West King Street, West King and Water Street. There, that was before the streetcars operated to Quarryville. There we'd take a train which had one passenger coach, and two or three freight cars which delivered freight on route between Lancaster and Quarryville. When we go to Quarryville, my uncle would meet us and take us to his farm, which was six miles from Quarryville. So that was a day's journey, too.

W: Yes, it sounds like it would be...

N: ...Bright in the morning until, well, after... we'd stay down there for what they'd call "supper" in those days. We'd probably get home at seven or eight o'clock at night, and that was a long day.

W: I'll bet it was...

N: ...But very eventful.

W: But I imagine that it was very pleasurable for you.

N: Oh, it was.

W: Well, your recollection of the trolley seems to be a fond one.

N: Well, (*quiet mumbling, then tape cuts off and resumes moments later*) ...Story was told to me in later years, which I can't confirm, that an inspector was on a streetcar one day, which was done frequently for good relations and to find out the trolley crew was operating properly and in the interest of the passengers. Streetcar conductor took up the fares one day, and when he got back into the car the inspector said, "Jake! You took up twenty nine fares. There are thirty passengers on here." And Jake says, "Well, I'll count." So he went to the front of the car and started to count, and when he go back in the car he says, "By gosh, you're right! One's got to get off!"

W: *(laughs heartily)*

N: [I didn't say "by God," you know.]

W: That's a funny story. And, I do thank you for telling it, so it's on the tape.

N: [I don't know, but it's rather disjointed]

W: Well, I have thought about that often, and been amused. And I'm glad you put it on the tape for us.

N: Well, I'm glad to do it for you. [And it helped you in the pleasure]

W: Well, thank you. Is there anything more about the trolleys you'd like to tell us?

N: At one time ... From the beginning, let me s... From the beginning of the origin of the streetcar, [municipal] company sold stock. Tax[ing/and] stock, which was widely held in Lancaster County. And investors were advised to buy and own it, and they were paid substantial dividends, or interest, for their stock. Wasn't a question of whether they could buy any stock, but the question was, "How many shares could they get from the lines?!" And here it was considered a very fine asset for investors.

W: So the trolley was really big business around Lancaster County?

N: Big business! And in later years when the automobile and the trucks, especially the trucks, came into full use, you know, the streetcar, getting less and less business, and the stock became less and less valuable, and in latter years the stock became almost worthless.

W: So the car and the truck really stuck the demise of the trolley car.

N: That's right. That's right. The cars and the trucks. Yes, that's... Many people, some people, well, nearly everybody who kept their stock...

W: ...Eventually lost the money.

N: ...Eventually lost everything they'd invested in.

W: That is unfortunate...

N: ... That was....

W: ...very much like what has happened to the investors of some railroad companies.

N: Same thing! The same thing, absolutely! It's...

W: ...I want to thank you very much, Mr. Neff, for telling us about he trolley. I certainly appreciate it.

N: I hope it might be of a little interest.

W: I can assure you it will be.

N: ...Speaking after a good many years, some memory, [and memorized these] gone, but I think in the main, I've given you the high points...

W: ...And we appreciate it. Thank you very much.

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