



H. PERRY DAVIS INTERVIEW

I was born on a farm near Pocomo City, N. C. Only a swamp separated our farm from the town, and the railroad tracks that skirted the town were just across the swamp. I would lay awake nights and listen to the whistle of the locomotives, and the clanging of their bells -- sweetest music I thought I had ever heard. Whether it was the passing trains with their bells and whistles and clatter on the rails that put the wanderlust into me, or whether it was just born in me, I can't say. All I know is that from the time I knew anything I wanted to go places and see things. I wanted to get on one of those trains and go as far as it would take me. I thought I'd like to be an engineer at the throttle of a locomotive, sending it thundering through the darkness and careening around curves. Or I would be a brakeman walking the tops of rolling freight cars with the wind flopping the legs of my trousers.

"I lived to realize my ambition. I railroaded from the time I was 16 until I was 28. I worked first

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and last on the Central of Vermont, the Bangor & Maine, the N.Y. Central, the Northern Pacific, the Union Pacific and Santa Fe. I saw every state in the union but one. I started as a yard man, when I had to lie about my age to get a job. I worked up from brakeman to freight conductor, and when I walked off my last railroad job in 1919 I drew \$300 for my month's pay. I saw life in Chicago, St. Louis, Denver, San Francisco and Seattle. I lived for months on Frisco's famous Barbary Coast, met Jack London there....

Person Interviewed: H. Perry Davis, Elizabeth City, New Jersey

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American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project,
1936 – 1940. www.loc.gov/ammem.

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