



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



Project Name: *Alexandria Legacies—Potomac Yard Railroad Oral History Project*

Title: *Interview with James Gochenour*

Date of Interview: *May 12, 2007*

Location of Interview: *Alexandria, Virginia*

Interviewer: *Kristin Rugroden*

Transcriber: *Jo-Ann LaFon*

Abstract: James Gochenour was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1933 and has been in Alexandria since 1957. He started working at Potomac Yard in 1960 in a variety of positions all the way up to foreman when he retired in 1995. During this interview, he describes the type of freight that came through Potomac Yard and the various problems that would arise and their solutions. He also speaks of the many skilled workers necessary for the success of the Yard and their job descriptions, many of which he filled during his tenure. Mr. Gochenour is also on the Board of Directors of the Potomac Yard Retired Employees Association and, as such, is very active in its operation, maintaining social contact with fellow retired employees. Throughout the interview, he is very upbeat and positive about all of his memories of the Yard and maintains a very humorous attitude, finding obvious enjoyment in his recollections. His wife, Bernice Gochenour, also participated in the interview.

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Introductions	
Kristin Rugroden:	This is Kristin Rugroden with the Alexandria Archaeology Museum Legacies Oral History Program interviewing James Gochenour of the Potomac Yards and we will be beginning now. Mr. Gochenour, where and when were you born?
James Gochenour:	I was born in Columbus, Ohio, on December 2, 1933.
K.R.:	How long have you been in Alexandria?
James Gochenour:	Since September of 1957.
Early Years	
K.R.:	Why did you come out here?
James Gochenour:	She [indicating his wife, Bernice Gochenour] was here when I got out of the Air Force and that's when we moved here.
K.R.:	Did you meet before you went in?
James Gochenour:	Oh, yeah. We were married in Littleton, Illinois, at the Air Force Base up there.
K.R.:	So, you guys knew each other in Ohio and then she came out here?
James Gochenour:	Uh huh; I met her in Columbus.
K.R.:	Did you meet in high school or just working?
James Gochenour:	Well, I'll tell you how I met her. I was settin' at the house one day—my Dad's house—the telephone rang. My stepmother told me it was for me. I went over and it was my stepmother's son calling. He said, "Jim, I got two girls, no car; and you got a car and no girls." [laughter] He said, "Guess what that means?"
K.R.:	[laughter] Sounds like a match made in heaven. That's cute. Where did you go to school as a child?
James Gochenour:	I went to elementary school in [unintelligible] School in Columbus, Ohio.
K.R.:	For how long did you go to school?
James Gochenour:	Six years; that one. I went to school through the tenth grade.

K.R.:	And what was your very first job?
James Gochenour:	My very first job? Let's see—working in a gas station.
K.R.:	How old were you?
James Gochenour:	17 and a half.
K.R.:	And did you have any other railroad work before you worked at Potomac Yards?
James Gochenour:	No, I did not.
First Job at Potomac Yard and Successive Steps	
K.R.:	How did you get your job there?
James Gochenour:	<p>That's a funny thing too. I went to my father's funeral in 1959. He died toward the end of 1959 and I got a job with a northern Virginia construction company; it was in Alexandria. And I drove a truck around and I'd fuel the equipment, grease it and do stuff like that. So I was in mechanics all the time. And I went to my Dad's funeral in Ohio, stayed there four days and I come back and they fired me for it. And I went through the whole rigmarole. But, anyway, two days later, I got on a bus and I was going to D.C. to get a job with the government.</p> <p>God was driving the bus. And the bus came across Mt. Vernon Avenue onto Hume where Hume ran into Route 1; right there set Potomac Yards. I told the guy with me, "Come on, let's go get a job." He said, "They're not hiring." I said, "Come on." Went in there and asked the lady. She said, "Absolutely." Give us an application; sent us to the doctor; said the man wanted to talk to us in there. He talked to us and he said, "Well, I'll see you gentlemen at midnight." I started as an oiler. I worked at that for approximately three, four, five months, something like that. And then a job came open for a carman helper.</p>
K.R.:	A fireman helper?
James Gochenour:	No, a carman helper. He works on the flap on the cars, freight cars. And I had done the helper's job for six months. Then they put me on as apprentice. I was an apprentice for an amount of time; then I became a carman. And, something happened; I got laid off. Then I went back. They said, "We've got a job for you but it's not in the car shop; it's in the roundhouse."

K.R.:	What's the roundhouse?
James Gochenour:	The roundhouse works on the engines. That's the engine part. And I went there and was a helper for awhile there. Then they put me on the apprentice job; I was on the apprentice job for five years and then they told me I was a full-fledged machinist. And I went in there and I worked in there until one day, they decided they were going to lay me off again. Anyway, I didn't get laid off. I got sent back to the car shop. So they sent me back to the car shop and I worked down there for two months. Then they called me in the office. They said, "You're going to be foreman as of starting tomorrow." What I did was I answered the radios—two-way radios—I worked radio control. I had a nice office and I worked that job for maybe a year or so. Then they called me back to the roundhouse. I went back to the roundhouse and I became an ICC [Interstate Commerce Commission] inspector.
K.R.:	What's that?
James Gochenour:	That's government. You do the work on the engines as the government tells you to. [Bernice Gochenour answers—"government regulations on the railroads"]
K.R.:	So you inspect it to make sure it's up to standard—everything's working?
James Gochenour:	That's right. I done mostly monthly work and six-month work. Sometimes, when they do a monthly inspection, that's just an oil change and grease and generally, look it over real good. And then we put it back out there and let it go to work. Six-month work—now, that's changing the oil, re-doing the whole thing. I changed wheels in engines; I done it all. And they tell you to—they say, "Well, we've got to put another two pair of wheels in the engine." Well, I put it on the drop table, take it all loose, drop it out on an elevator, pull it over and the elevator brings it back up; quick, quick, comes the other one, picks it up, puts the other one back down in. We gotta put it back together; when anybody needs the engine, put it back together, ready to go.
K.R.:	Wow. A lot of machinery helping to move because they're big heavy parts.
James Gochenour:	Absolutely.
K.R.:	And how long did you do that?

James Gochenour:	I did that until 1992.
K.R.:	So that was what you did for the rest of the time?
James Gochenour:	At Potomac Yards—yes. And one day, my foreman told one of the helpers to come and get me, said, “I want to see you in the office.” I went over to see him. He said, “I just want to give you these.” Since this was my last day, he give me the keys to the building.
Work in Richmond	
James Gochenour:	<p>[laughter] And, after that, in 1992, they were almost closed down. Maybe they had one or two runs come into Potomac Yards at a time. And, so I went home. I was home two days before the telephone rang. It was my buddy, Tony, from the railroad. He said, “Jim, they want you in Richmond tomorrow morning.” I said, “You didn’t tell them my name, did you?” [laughter] “Well,” he says “they got it somehow.” So, I went down there and I took the lady with me. And we sat down there. She was in the car. I went in the office and the lady I talked to many, many times—I had never seen her. I walked in the door and she looked at me and she saw I had a big hat on and she says, “Are you who I think you are?” I says, “If it’s Jim Gochenour you’re looking for, it’s me.” She says, “Thank goodness.” And she went over to the boss’s office—to the door—and told him I was there. Well, they usually say, “Send him in.” Not me. He came up to me. He said, “We’ve got three days to get you in, you know, doctor’s appointments and all that stuff.” We went through the whole thing. And he says, “Well, it looks like you’ve got the job.” I said, “Yeah?” “Looks that way.” I says, “I got two questions for you.” He said, “What’s that?” I says, “Who gave you my name?” He said, “Well, I sent some papers over to the roundhouse” [coughing and inaudible] My name came up—there were 16 pieces of paper and my name came up with 12 of them. I said, “Okay. Now the second question. What job have I got?” [laughter]</p> <p>He says, “Well, you would like to know that, wouldn’t you?” I says, “Yeah.” He says, “You’re the foreman down here.” So I went there as a foreman. And I worked 11-7 shift two days a week; three days a week, I was a machinist.</p>
K.R.:	And how long did you do that?
James Gochenour:	I done that for three years before I retired.
K.R.:	That’s great actually. As a machinist, did you like working on...

James Gochenour:	Well, I liked that because I knew what I was doing. And I was taught by some of the best there is. Some of the guys, you know, that retired or died and stuff like that...so...
K.R.:	What was the difference between your job as a foreman—you just oversaw things or did you—
James Gochenour:	That's right.
K	And you didn't do as much hands-on—
James Gochenour:	I've done recording and paperwork and all that stuff, yeah.
K.R.:	More paperwork, less hands-on?
James Gochenour:	That's right.
K.R.:	Were you interested in trains as a child or—
James Gochenour:	I liked to watch them go by, but they didn't interest me that much because I was interested in other things. But I did have somebody in my family who was on the railroad.
K.R.:	Okay, who was that?
James Gochenour:	My grandfather—my mother's father. He was a car inspector for the C&O (Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad). He also ran the wreck.
K.R.:	What is that?
James Gochenour:	That's a crane where they pick up trains that's been derailed and put them back on the track. He done that.
K.R.:	So, it picks it up like if it's been worked on; it'll pick it up and put it back on the track?
James Gochenour:	No, if it wrecks. If it wrecks on the highway—on the road someplace out there—had a train wreck. He goes out there, hooks it up and puts it back on the track.
K.R.:	That sounds kind of fun but a little bit scary.
James Gochenour:	It's not fun. [laughter]
K.R.:	Scary.
James Gochenour:	It's work.

Employment at Potomac Yard	
K.R.:	Sounds difficult. Very difficult. You had a grandfather who worked for the railroad. So what was the date again when you first started working for Potomac Yards?
James Gochenour:	June the first, 1960.
K.R.:	June first, 1960—okay. And we talked about how you got the job; you were on a bus with some buddies and it was your idea. What made you think that was a good idea? What made you just decide to—
James Gochenour:	I don't know. It just came to me. I just wanted a job, you know. [Inaudible comments from Bernice Gochenour.] Yeah, I worked McDonald's for a little while, but not long.
K.R.:	Tried a little bit of everything.
James Gochenour:	I drove a taxi cab in Alexandria. After I got off the railroad, I worked the taxi cab for about four hours. That was for, I guess, 10 or 15 years. [Comments from Bernice Gochenour in background]
K.R.:	Approximately what year was that that you did the taxi driving as well?
James Gochenour:	I'd say [19]63 up to about—[19]63—it must have been about [19]75, something like that.
K.R.:	Now, when you would get laid off, how long were these periods?
James Gochenour:	Well, at one time when I got laid off, it was for a year.
K.R.:	And then, did you just re-apply to a different job or would they call?
James Gochenour:	They'd call me. "Put the man back in." I was semi-retired and then a job would open up and they'd put me back in.
K.R.:	They did that to a lot of people I would—
James Gochenour:	Oh yeah, everybody that got laid off and then were available for recalls.
K	So you'd have maybe like a year off and you would—
James Gochenour:	Right.

K.R.:	You're very industrious. [laughter] Did you know anything about Potomac Yards before you got the job?
James Gochenour:	Absolutely not. I didn't even know it was there...didn't even pay attention to it. When you drove along the road, you don't pay any attention to things like that. I also worked the piggyback ramp over there.
K.R.:	What's that?
James Gochenour:	A piggyback ramp is...did you ever see a tractor trailer up on top a flat car of a train?
K.R.:	Yes.
James Gochenour:	Piggybacker is what picks it up and puts it on the train.
K.R.:	So, it's like a crane type?
James Gochenour:	It's a crane thing but it's not a crane. The thing goes over the top of it; it hooks—the shoe hooks underneath one edge of it; then the other things come down and then he clamps it in. He picks it right up in the air and puts it on top of the car.
K.R.:	And you operated that?
James Gochenour:	No, I've operated it, but I wasn't loading trucks at the time. I was a mechanic. Everything at Potomac Yards, I could run.
K.R.:	So, if they needed you to do something else, they could call on you and they would know you could do it. That's great.
James Gochenour:	One of the best men I ever knew. He was national superintendent at Potomac Yards. So one day, I went home and the telephone rang just about 5 minutes after I got in the house. It was Bob. "Jim, you got to come back." I said, "What's up?" He said, "They turned number two over." [laughter] That's number two piggybacker.
K.R.:	So, they turned the piggyback over or the—
James Gochenour:	What they did is once they got the truck up in the air, the load shifted in the truck and took the machine right with it.
K.R.:	Did anyone get hurt? [head shaking by Mr. Gochenour] Oh, good.

James Gochenour:	And they come down there. And Bob and me were talking and he said, “Well, let me run this by you. We got two cranes one on each side and when we straighten this thing up, we’re going to have both of these [inaudible] and one of them will be letting down as the other one picks it up and put it right back on its wheels.” “That sounds like a winner to me.” [laughter]
K.R.:	I think it’s very interesting—all that large machinery.
Bernice Gochenour:	Is that a packer—in the back?
James Gochenour:	It’s a packer because it picks them up and packs them up on top of the flat car; that’s why they call it a piggybacker.
K.R.:	Well, what did you use to pick it back up?
James Gochenour:	Cranes.
K.R.:	Trains?
James Gochenour:	Cranes. We had two rental cranes come in to pick it up.
Apprenticeship	
K.R.:	[Pause] Your apprenticeship was at the railroad?
James Gochenour:	Four years of it. Maybe five years.
Bernice Gochenour:	Ten hundred and fifty hours I think.
James Gochenour:	Anyway.
K.R.:	Your departments covered mechanical, electrical, engine service?
James Gochenour:	Engine service.
K.R.:	Maintenance of way on the track? Did you do that?
James Gochenour:	No, I did not do that. That was track people that done that.
Bernice Gochenour:	You worked the wreck train.
James Gochenour:	I never did go out on the wreck train, but I worked on the crane part of it—fixed it or something; I would do that. We had a wrecker do that.
K.R.:	And what are you calling it?

James Gochenour:	Wreck train.
K. R.	Like what your grandfather did.
James Gochenour:	Absolutely. Only we were using diesels at that time; we weren't using steam. He was using steam to do his.
K.R.:	That's amazing. [Pause]
James Gochenour:	Oh yeah. They gave us schooling. I had schooling for air brakes stuff like that. I passed that; I got a diploma for that.
Bernice Gochenour:	[Reminding him—unintelligible]
James Gochenour:	That was the piggyback people. This is kind of funny. So here I am, standing at the packer ramp and he asked me who I am. I told him. He says "Oh yeah, I heard about you." "I hope it was good." He said, "Yes, pretty good." "I want to ask you something," I said, "Where's my hat?" He said, "You'll have one this evening." Their company hat, you see. I was making a hat collection. [laughter]
K.R.:	Did you get it then?
James Gochenour:	Yeah, they had a meeting in the office; they gave everybody a hat—even the girls in the office. The girl says, "You're supposed to give us female hats." [laughter]
Job Responsibilities	
K.R.:	I guess if you could explain in detail what you did for each of the jobs that you had while at Potomac Yards?
James Gochenour:	Well, the air jobs—you take off the mechanical parts and replace them with new ones.
K.R.:	Just when they get worn out or broken?
James Gochenour:	No, at certain times. Happens every six months I think it was.
K.R.:	And what exactly were you replacing?
James Gochenour:	Air valves and stuff like that. You see, when the engineer is running along the track, he's got two different kind of brakes in there. One is called the train brake and the other one is called the independent brake. Now the independent brake is the one that stops the engine. If you've got engines on, you use the independent brake but if you've got a train behind you, you use

	the train brake. On the air line between the cars, well, that's got 90 pounds of air in it. And if the engineer pulls the handle on the train brake, the main reservoir has 120 pounds in it. So the engineer, he pulls this handle and it brings it in and things are divided into two places. The air comes in here and pushes it over 'cause it overwhelms this other part over here. And it pushes over there and the more it pushes over there, the more it pushes the brake shoes against the wheels to stop the engine—to stop the train. You've never heard of that before, have you?
K.R.:	No. [laughter]
Bernice Gochenour:	You got a face full.
James Gochenour:	Oh, many times.
K.R.:	What did you say? You got your what?
James Gochenour:	Face full of junk. [laughter]
K.R.:	What—like?
James Gochenour:	Air and stuff like that. The dirt and stuff flying.
K.R.:	So the other brake would actually try to stop the wheels?
James Gochenour:	Yeah. 'Cause it's stopping the train. That's how they stop the train. When you hear that “sssss,” that's air coming out. So, if he releases that train brake, the air in reservoir goes back out and the 90 pounds of air on this side pushes it back. And that releases the brakes on the wheels. You see?
K.R.:	I see.
James Gochenour:	Do I know anything about trains? [laughter]
K.R.:	I obviously don't know very much at all. Now what about when you were doing the inspections?
James Gochenour:	Well, you make sure you get oil in the wheels—what they call the journal oil-ring—that's underneath. About so big and so wide and each one of them weighs a hundred pounds. And I picked them up in my hands and put them up underneath the engines—while I'm changing the brakes. Each one of them weighs one hundred pounds apiece.

Safety Issues and the “Safety Dinner”	
James Gochenour:	<p>We had our safety purposes over there too. Each one of us had a little plastic card—red—it had a name on it. And we put that on—if we were working on an engine, we would take that tag up there and put it on that [unintelligible] handle. If somebody came up there and saw that red tag on there, he gets off the train. He says, “I don’t want to get on there. I don’t want to be on there.” Nobody’s going to get on there. He says, “We got somebody working on that engine,” He says, “Get away from it.” Somebody could get killed if you don’t. We had what you call safety locks—just a padlock is what it was. And we would go along and throw a chain over the top of the handle for the switches. We’d line it up to get away from where we’re going to be; then we’d throw that thing on there and lock it. And nobody else has got a key for that but the mechanical people. That’s the only one that’s got a key for that lock. Nobody can take it off. If somebody had the lock on that thing, they would call us on the radio saying, “Are you done? Can I take the lock off?” All the locks had the same key—everyone of them. That key I had, it unlocked every lock.</p>
K.R.:	How many people had those keys?
James Gochenour:	The mechanic people.
K.R.:	How many mechanics were there?
James Gochenour:	I guess we had around ten laborers and five or six plumbers—they worked on the hoses and stuff like that. And, then we had the electricians; then you had the machinists.
K.R.:	Did you ever do any electrical work?
James Gochenour:	No. I left that to the electricians. [laughter]
K.R.:	Yeah, let them take care of it. [laughter]
James Gochenour:	<p>It’s just like the electricians—if he had a job that a machinist had to do, he’d call the boss on his radio and say, “I need a machinist.” They would send me or one of the machinists back there. [Inaudible comments from Bernice Gochenour in background.]</p>
James Gochenour:	Yeah. I don’t know if you want to get this on there or not, but every three months, the railroad would feed us...people’d bring the food in you know and they’d cook it over there and it was some kind of good eatin’.

K.R.:	That sounds like fun.
James Gochenour:	Yeah, every three months. It was called the “Safety Dinner.” One day...[Side A ends and Side B begins] ...He says, “Man, you’re eatin’ good today.” I said, “How good?” He says, “Filet mignon.” [laughter]
K.R.:	How did they do that again?
James Gochenour:	They were catered to bring the food in. Down in Richmond at CSX I was working for—if it was a hot day like 90 something degrees outside, first thing you know, here comes this truck up the road, pulls over in front of the roundhouse, opens its side up. He’s got ice cream, Coke, and everything in there. He says, “Here you go, boys; it’s all free.” Company bought it. [laughter]
K.R.:	All right! So, well, they took care of you a little bit, huh?
James Gochenour:	Oh yeah [laughter] We were doin’ pretty good.
K.R.:	Yeah, sounds like it. Sounds great. [Bernice Gochenour speaking in background—unintelligible] Oh, that’s all right. A lot of these questions we are actually answering. What I’ll do is, I will transcribe it; then I will send it to you and you can look at it and you can change anything you want. And then we can do it again until you are satisfied with the end results.
Roundhouse Activities in Richmond	
James Gochenour:	We had our own truck—the roundhouse had its own truck and sometimes we had to go someplace and fix an engine or something, you know; and when I was boss, I’d say, “Hey, Mike, come on and get your truck; get the keys.” “Where am I going this time?” “Gotta run down there. One is running rough down there. Go down and see what’s wrong with it?” He says, “I gotta have an electrician with me.” I said, “Take Jim with you.” My two men would go down there. Then they told the crew on the engine down there. “We’re the roundhouse people.” The engineer said, “Fine.” Got up off his train; cut off the engine. They would not be on the engine when a mechanic is on there. No way.
K.R.:	How far away would you have to go to fix some of these?
James Gochenour:	It all depends on where it was at. Sometimes they’d stop on the road someplace and they would call us and we’d have to go down there.

K.R.:	Now what would be the farthest that you would go?
James Gochenour:	<p>From Richmond? I don't really know—to tell you the truth. They'd call me and tell me what's happening. Anyway, when I was boss down there, the telephone rang at 2 o'clock in the morning. He says, "Jim, is that you?" I says, "It's me." He says, "I got a problem." I says, "Who is this? Is this Calvert? Where you at?" He says, "Philadelphia." I says, "What's the problem?" He told me, he says, "Well, when you get on there and you pull the car out instead of the engine getting faster, it's getting slower." So, I told him what was wrong. I said, "Now you got your train control on your front engine. You got to have that. Let your engine in the front idle and let the other engine behind you bring you home. What you can do—all you do is set a switch in the cab. And, if it's 20 degrees outside, you'll need the heat on that engine." He said, "Okay, if you say so, that's the way it is." And they come on home that way. A train control—they got it now in the trains—they got a little pick-up bar on each side of the front of the engine and one on the back. When you're going this way [unintelligible] and when you're going the other way, the other one picks it up. It's got a little about 9 volts of electricity—or something like that—running through the track. And if there's something on the track maybe 20 miles ahead of him where you can't see it, that train control and the lights in the cab will go down. It goes from green to yellow, from yellow to red. If it goes into red, the engineer stops. He's got something dead ahead of him and he don't know what it is. That's what they call train control.</p>
K.R.:	So, if they know that there's something ahead, so they stop it and do they call somebody else to come and look at it?
James Gochenour:	<p>Oh, they call somebody else. But we had a train control on that engine. We had another thing in there—what we call a dead man pedal. A dead man pedal—the engineer sets up on that engine up there—he puts his foot down on that pedal—there's 25 pounds of air on that pedal. If something happens to the engineer—he has a heart attack or something like that, and his foot comes off that pedal, that pedal will automatically throw that train into emergency brake—stop it! That's why they call it a dead man pedal.</p>
K.R.:	So, he always has to have his foot on it.
James Gochenour:	Always has to keep his foot on it—as long as his foot's on that, he can go anywhere he wants to.

K.R.:	Interesting. That's a grim name but I can see why they call it that. [laughter] Other than electrical, it seems like—
James Gochenour:	I did mostly mechanical things. Electrical—I let the electricians do that.
K.R.:	Right. So, as far as mechanics go, you did inspection and you worked on the engines and you were foreman—
James Gochenour:	Foreman. [Bernice Gochenour in background talking about CSX, but unintelligible.] Oh yeah, we had to bring a barrel of oil in; set it up, and put an air pump on it and pump the oil up into the engine. That's what we done in Potomac Yards. When I got to Richmond, all I had to do was pull a hose down and put it in there, let it run until it got real full [laughter]. [Bernice Gochenour in background "...the man came in. What do they call them?"] What?
K.R.:	Oh, like consultants that come in and see where you can downsize...yeah. I don't know.
James Gochenour:	Every time a guy come in there with a suit and tie on, you know and everything else, I'd get on my radio and say, "Suit just went in the house." [laughter]
K.R.:	Everybody watch out. [laughter]
James Gochenour:	They wanted to find out who it was you know—[laughter]
Different Jobs, Wages, and Promotions	
K.R.:	So, can you tell me again like the different jobs you had and maybe the time frames that you had them?
James Gochenour:	I was an oiler first for about three months.
K.R.:	That's right. An oiler for three months and then—
James Gochenour:	I was a carman's helper. I was there for about three years or something like that. Then a car inspector.
K.R.:	How long did you do that?
James Gochenour:	Car inspector? Oh, approximately 5-10 years—five, six years, something like that.
Bernice Gochenour:	[In background] Radio man.

James Gochenour:	Radio control. I was only in there about half a year [Bernice Gochenour continues talking in background] And—I had a real good time—I had a real good time. [unintelligible comments by Bernice Gochenour in background]
K.R.:	At that time is when you started doing mechanics? And the apprenticeship?
James Gochenour:	Uh huh.
K.R.:	And then after about four years—
James Gochenour:	Five.
K.R.:	Five years, you were—
James Gochenour:	I was an apprentice.
K.R.:	And then you were a machinist. And you did that for—
James Gochenour:	No. The rest of the time, when I was a foreman at CSX, I was only foreman 2 days a week. [Bernice Gochenour talking over him in background] I got laid off up there and they got me a job at FGE [Fruit Growers Express].
K.R.:	What were you doing there?
James Gochenour:	I was building railroad refrigerator cars. I was down there for about three months until they decided they wanted me back. What was nice about that job at FGE—all I had to do was walk out the back door of my house and walk through the yard and walk down on the railroad and I was right there.
K.R.:	[laughter] So convenient.
James Gochenour:	We lived in an apartment house up on Duke St. [Bernice Gochenour prompting in background] Now, it's some kind of a—I don't know what it is—has one store in it now.
K.R.:	Do you remember what your wages were?
James Gochenour:	Yes, I started off at a dollar thirty an hour. I ended up, I was getting sixteen dollars and something an hour being foreman; fourteen dollars and something an hour being a machinist.
K.R.:	So you started at a dollar thirty-nine?

James Gochenour:	Thirty-five.
K.R.:	And then it went up just a few cents for a little while?
James Gochenour:	That was the unions down there. I didn't have anything to do with that. They said we wanted a raise in pay and then would argue that themselves.
K.R.:	Well, that's quite a jump, but over time—[chuckle] And do you know if that was considered a good wage compared to other—
James Gochenour:	At that time, it was. Yeah, real good wage. When I retired—she never worked since the day we were married. [Bernice Gochenour talking in background] She gets a pension too.
K.R.:	Well, they take care of you. That's great.
James Gochenour:	Oh yeah. Every year, once a year, the General Manager over there at the Railroad Retirement Board in Baltimore—he comes over and has dinner with us and tells us all about it, you know—what happened this year and what happened that year. [pause] He comes in here and says, “Man,” he says, “It's just like coming home.” He says, “I'm with the people I like.” [laughter]
K.R.:	Now, when you were getting your promotions, did you apply for those or did they just give them to you?
James Gochenour:	[Bernice Gochenour answering in background] Nope, they called me in the office and gave them to me.
K.R.:	Did other people apply for promotions or was it the standard that they would just—
James Gochenour:	I don't think anybody applied for them. Whoever they wanted to put in there, they put in there. You can't say that's the honest truth because I don't know. [Bernice Gochenour talking in background regarding laying off practices] What was nice about one of them—I got laid off from the roundhouse and when they found out I was going to be retired, they said, “We ain't letting you go. We're taking you back down to the car shop.” So I went back down there and they was showing me how to do the job, but the trouble is, I was getting paid three dollars more an hour than they were getting paid. [laughter] They were telling me how to do the job and I was getting paid more than they were. [laughter] It was in the agreement, you know, when you get cut back to another job, you take your pay with you.

K.R.:	Can you tell me more about the courses and the training that they provided?
James Gochenour:	Well, you know, you went through your apprenticeship and you took other things. In your apprenticeship, you get paid almost as much as a machinist is getting paid, but you work with the other machinists and basically, you watch them and that's how you learn. I still see the other guys I worked with—every week, I see them. Fact is, every month, I have dinner with them one day a month. And we all sit there and take our wives with us.
K.R.:	That's great.
James Gochenour:	We have a good time. Next month, we go to the Happy Clam for dinner. That's in Colonial Beach. [laughter]
Mrs. Gochenour	But the machinists themselves is supposed to get his helper to do all the work. That's the training.
James Gochenour:	They'd say, "Okay, Jim." Sometimes they'd say, "Are you coming over to help me?" I'd say, "I'll be right there."
Mrs. Gochenour	The man before him, he was—[continuing to talk]
Wallace Adams	
James Gochenour:	Yeah, that's another good thing. This old man, he was seventy something years old; his name was Wallace Adams—nicest man you ever want to talk to in your life. Where he lived at was right between where I went home. So I told him, I says, "Wallace, get in the car and I'll take you home and I'll pick you up and bring you to work. Okay?" So, we did that for a good five years. So he retired. Then I found out he passed away. His son called me on the telephone, "Jim, this is Wallace's son." I says, "How you doin', Billy?" He says, "Fine. Dad left you something in his will. I want you to come and get it." So, I went there. I walked in and said hi to Billy and we sat down and talked for awhile. Finally, he brings this hardback book out and on the front it says something about the whole years that the RF&P Railroad ran is in that book. Where it went to...how much it was and everything else. He gave me that. Then he says, "Come on downstairs." Went downstairs and he had a dugout. You know what a dugout is? That's part of the basement that's not all the way done—so there is dirt back there. He went back in there and he started bringing these lights out—railroad lights. Lights that went on steam engines, everything else he had in there. He says, "This is all yours. Dad left it to you." So, I took them with me one day to a union meeting and gave it to the

	person whose house we were meeting in. Next time, I went over there and all these lights were all hooked up and they were all flashing. [laughter] Wallace—he was a good man. He run the lathe all the time.
K.R.:	He was what?
James Gochenour:	He's a lathe man. If you had something round that you had to cut down—
K.R.:	Like for woodworking right? What kind of benefits did you get? Like did you get health care and all that?
Health Care and Transportation to and From Work	
James Gochenour:	Oh yeah. We had health care. We had company doctors. One day, I got hurt over there and said, "I'm not going to the doctor's house; just keep quiet." Here come the railroad detective in his van, picked me up and took me over to the doctor's office. And he wanted a cigarette so bad. I said, "I'm not feeling this thing; it's numb. Go in and get your cigarettes." [laughter] I've got a lot of good friends over there...friends that will last you a lifetime. And we were all on each other's side. I was settin' here and they called me at home. Said, "How are you doin'? When are you comin' back?" All that stuff you know.
K.R.:	How did you get to work when you were at the—
James Gochenour:	You mean when I first started there?
K.R.:	Uh huh.
James Gochenour:	Good question. I think I bought a car, didn't I? I bought a car. I rode with somebody the first month. [Bernice Gochenour in background mentioning him driving a cab] I went into the boss's office one evening when I got ready to leave. I said, "Let me tell you something. I'm a part-time driver and I'm not driving but four hours. I don't like sittin' in a garage getting that car fixed because some damn drunk drove it in the daytime and broke it and I had to put my time in getting' the damn thing fixed." I said, "I don't like that idea." He said, "Well, I'll see what I can do about it." I went home. The next day I came back. Dispatcher says, "Come in here." So I went in there. He says, "See those right there. That's a brand new car. It's never been on the road before." He says, "You keep it with you all the time." That took care of that. [laughter]
K.R.:	And then you had a ride to work too. So, how far away did you

	live?
James Gochenour:	I'd say eight miles or something like that.
Typical Work Day	
K.R.:	What would describe a typical work day?
James Gochenour:	Well, I was an ICC machinist. You don't know what this is, do you?
K.R.:	Well, isn't that the inspector?
James Gochenour:	That's the inspector—the gentleman inspector. I was the ICC machinist.
K.R.:	So, how would your day go?
James Gochenour:	I would come in there and I'd do [unintelligible]. I'd work on the inside of the roundhouse. If they didn't have a test to do, sometimes I would go out and work the [unintelligible] over there. That's electric motors that they had coming in there—electric engines.
K.R.:	Did you have scheduled breaks, a scheduled lunch or did you choose it yourself or everyone at the same time?
James Gochenour:	Oh yeah. No. Four hours and then evening three hours. We got a two hour break; I mean every two hours, we'd get a break—ten minutes or so.
K.R.:	So, how long was your typical work day?
James Gochenour:	Eight hours.
K.R.:	Standard.
James Gochenour:	Unless I worked overtime.
K.R.:	Did you work overtime a lot?
James Gochenour:	Oh, quite a bit. I worked sixteen hours in one day. But, when I went to CSX, twelve hours. And I told them, I says, "I've been here 12 hours, goodbye, I'm goin' home." It was a federal law that I couldn't work more than 12 hours a day. So, I said, "Goodbye."
K.R.:	What types of shifts did you work? I know in the beginning you said that they said to be here at midnight.

James Gochenour:	I worked 11 to 7 that shift. And then I worked daylight shifts sometime—4 to 12, 3 to 11, whatever. Sometime, it was 4 to 12; then they made it 3 to 11. And they changed to 7 to 3; and 8 to 4. Or 8 to 4 and 7 to 3. If you went to work one hour early, you got off one hour early.
K.R.:	So when you worked 3 to 11, 3 a.m.?
James Gochenour:	No, 3 p.m.
K.R.:	3 p.m. to 11.
James Gochenour:	Eight hours. Now, we had three different shifts of people. If I worked daylight, I was relieved 11 to 7 and a man came in at 3 o'clock and relieved me.
K.R.:	Did they have people around the clock?
James Gochenour:	Yep. 24 hours. After awhile, while I was still there, they used to give us Thanksgiving off; they'd give us Christmas off; New year's off. Holidays, you know. Only one who was over there was the foreman; he would answer the phone, that's all.
K.R.:	So, is that what you did when you were a foreman? [No answer; perhaps a nod.] So, even when you were in the roundhouse, you traveled around. You didn't just work in one area.
James Gochenour:	Oh, I traveled around. Sometimes I would go to the roundhouse, to the Relay yard. That's when the train comes in—up on the hump—they separate the engine from the train. Then he brings the engines down behind the [round]house and takes them on down the track into the train yard down there and relay yard. Then we would get on the trains and we would switch the engines around and we'd work them down there, inspect them and make sure everything was working okay and then we'd send them out on another train. That's what we did down there. A lot of times, the engineers would bring the engine down there and I'd stop them behind the roundhouse and I'd say, "Go on, get off and go on home. I'll take it down." I run the engines too—like I said.
K.R.:	Did you think that your work days went by quickly?
James Gochenour:	Sometimes. Other times, it didn't. It all depended on how I felt. If I was tired or something like that. Then it felt like a week. [laughter]

K	I understand that. So, you had regularly scheduled lunch. Did you bring your own lunch or did you go out?
James Gochenour:	No, no. One day we were going to cook. So, I got in the truck and I went over to Safeway and got some stuff. When we got back to the roundhouse, we called the secretaries and said, "Come on over and have dinner with us." And all the secretaries came over and ate with us—at the roundhouse. [laughter]
K.R.:	So they had a kitchen there for you?
James Gochenour:	We had microwaves and stuff like that.
K	What type of food did you bring to eat—like sandwiches?
James Gochenour:	Well, when I come in, in the morning if I was working daylight, I would come up the road—I lived in Woodbridge at the time where I live now—I would leave the house at 5 o'clock before the traffic started and I could go over to Glebe Road, stop at the Giant all-night store and get my frozen breakfast. Go on over and start eatin' when I got in.
K.R.:	In the beginning, you did night shifts. Was that only for those three months?
James Gochenour:	Whatever time they told me to come in.
K.R.:	So you liked the night shift? [End of Tape 1; beginning of Tape 2, side B—reversed]
Night Versus Day Shifts	
K.R.:	All right, we were talking about night shifts versus day shifts.
James Gochenour:	Yeah, well, you didn't have as many people on night shifts as you did on daytime.
K.R.:	Was there less work because there were fewer trains running?
James Gochenour:	They didn't do the yard jobs, stuff like that, in the nighttime; they did it in the daytime. The only thing the night shift would do, would be the road diesels and stuff like that.
K.R.:	Now was this just like cargo type trains or—
James Gochenour:	This is freight.

K.R.:	No passenger trains.
James Gochenour:	No passenger trains.
K.R.:	And how many days a week did you work?
James Gochenour:	Five.
K.R.:	With standard two days off in a row or did they...?
James Gochenour:	Yeah.
K.R.:	Did you get weekends off?
James Gochenour:	It all depends on what they assigned you.
K.R.:	So, it could have been...
James Gochenour:	Monday or Tuesday, Wednesday Thursday, Friday, Saturday or whatever. You had to have some people there while you were off so they had to make it staggered through the weekend. You can understand that.
Potomac Yard Work Environment	
K.R.:	Right, of course. Now can you describe the general aura of the Yard—things such as the sounds and the smells and the sights?
James Gochenour:	Well, we could smell fuel oil and stuff like that and I never paid any attention to anything else.
K.R.:	Was it pretty noisy?
James Gochenour:	It was noisy when they run.
K.R.:	A lot of clanking and engine parts or anything—
James Gochenour:	Just the running of the engines. You could hear that. But after awhile, you don't even realize it's doing that, you know. You expect it and it's there; you just don't think about it.
K.R.:	Right. Could it be quite loud at times?
James Gochenour:	It all depends on what notch the engine is. [laughter]
K.R.:	How well the engine's working? [laughter]

Bernice Gochenour:	The heat was horrible between the hot metal in the summertime—
K.R.:	It was very hot?
Mrs. Gochenour	Or cold.
James Gochenour:	Sometimes; and sometimes it was really cold. On this day in 1987, we had a 9-and-a-half-inch snow and I was walking around in it.
K.R.:	Working with cold metal.
James Gochenour:	With cold metal. Most of us wore gloves and stuff like that. Like I said, every time we went on duty, we would carry a two-way radio with us—even if we were in the roundhouse, we had the two-way radio with us. If something happened to one or something like that, you could call him on the radio.
K.R.:	Did a lot of people get hurt?
James Gochenour:	Some.
Mrs. Gochenour	[unintelligible] Somebody got his leg cut off, didn't he, Jimmy? Somebody else was caught between—
James Gochenour:	It was a laborer. They did what they call a front-rider. A front-rider is actually [pause] the same guy that does the guiding. If he knows he's got [unintelligible] the guide that's the engineer knows it too. So he slows it down. He gets off; lets it go by; and then he'll throw the switch and come back on the track. That's what a front-rider does.
K.R.:	And that can be dangerous?
James Gochenour:	Huh!! I would say so. I would say so.
K.R.:	I wouldn't want to do it. [laughter]
James Gochenour:	We were very careful. If the front-rider had to get off, he would get off and either stand over here where we could see him. We'd stop and he had to walk across the track; he would walk across the track and throw the switch and walk back on THIS side before we'd ever take the brakes off and we'd know where he's at.
K.R.:	Wow—I wouldn't do it. [laughter] Did you have experience with hobos or freight train riders?

James Gochenour:	Several of them. I was walking up to one, one day. He says, "Which one's leavin' first?" I said, "Over there on twenty track—is leaving first." "You got a cigarette?" I said "No." [laughter] You know, I never had any trouble with them. You know, they always ask for a cigarette or ask me what train was leaving first or something like that. I didn't pay much attention to them.
K.R.:	So you didn't mind if they got on the trains?
James Gochenour:	It wasn't my job to get 'em off. My job was to get the train out of there.
K.R.:	Did they have people that would watch for them?
James Gochenour:	Railroad detectives.
Safety Policies	
K.R.:	And, so you were an inspector, did you think that safety conditions were—
James Gochenour:	We had safety things on, you know, the information that we had. We were pretty strict as far as safety things. When you work on something like that that we were working on out there, it could kill you in a second if you don't know what you're doing. Everybody's taking care of everybody else, you know.
K.R.:	What types of rules or standards regarding safety did workers have to follow?
James Gochenour:	Like I said, we had the locks on the switches; we had the tags on the engines. If somebody walked up to something and says "I don't hardly think so; I think we better look at that thing". And we did. [Bernice Gochenour reminding him about "flag."] We had what you called a flag. If we got off and we put the engine back in there and then we put the lock on the switch, we had a metal thing that stuck out—it was a big round thing painted blue. Nobody could touch that thing but the person that put it up there.
K.R.:	Now what would happen if somebody didn't follow a rule?
James Gochenour:	They would be told about it quick. "You don't do that thing; you don't do that."
K.R.:	And when people got hurt, what happened?
James Gochenour:	You send 'em to the hospital. And they have to answer

	questions—the person who was working with them and all that stuff.
K.R.:	And if they weren't able to work in the capacity that they worked before, would they be assigned a different job or—
James Gochenour:	I never run into that. I don't know. They would stay home.
K.R.:	Do you remember any particular incidents or accidents? We've discussed a few.
James Gochenour:	I was working on the rabbit one time.
K.R.:	The rabbit? What is that?
James Gochenour:	A rabbit is an apparatus that goes between the rail and it runs on its own tracks. And what it does, it goes behind the cars in the car shop. When it gets back there, it comes up and then it comes back forward and the wheels on it is on the axle of the cars and it pushes the cars. That's what they call a rabbit.
K.R.:	Does it hook them to the engine to move them?
James Gochenour:	No, no. Just where you're putting the cars in the shop to be fixed.
K.R.:	Just moves them around. Okay.
James Gochenour:	You don't have an engine on them because it's like I said it's all locked up. But we had a rabbit up there and it was an electric thing and running. We would tell everybody in the car shop, "Five's running; four's running"—whatever.
K.R.:	Were the railroad workers a close-knit group would you say—you still have friends and you see them once a week
James Gochenour:	The closest people you ever seen in your life.
K.R.:	That's great. When you all worked together, did you socialize a lot as well?
James Gochenour:	Oh, yeah, we socialized, yeah. Sometimes we'd go out and have a good time—just like everybody else you know. There's one thing we would never do; we would never take drugs or we'd never drink. We would never drink on the job; absolutely not. That was a no-no.
K.R.:	Uh huh. You'd get killed.

James Gochenour:	Absolutely.
K.R.:	Did you do things locally? Like go to restaurants?
James Gochenour:	We had a picnic once a year.
K.R.:	Where did you guys have that?
James Gochenour:	One day, at Potomac Yards, we got our own Amtrak train—all that was on the train was us—and we went to Richmond down there and had the picnic down there.
Female Railroad Workers and Other Jobs	
K.R.:	That's nice; that's sounds great. [pause] Were there females that worked in the Yard?
James Gochenour:	Not outside in the Yard—no. One or two females that ever worked in the Yard and they had a man with them.
K.R.:	They had what?
James Gochenour:	They had a man with them.
K.R.:	What type of work?
James Gochenour:	One woman was over there; she was a laborer. And I remember this like it was yesterday. And we had a truck like I told you. And that truck was a pretty good size truck. And they told her to take the truck over across the track—on the other side—and she got in that thing. She was looking that thing over. She was looking this way and this way. I said, “What's the matter?” She said, “How do you turn this thing around? There ain't no room.” I said, “Do you see that track right there?” She says, “Yeah.” I said, “Do you see the rail sticking up above the ground?” “No.” I said “Well, that's the one you back up into and take off.” [laughter] We didn't have no yard engineers as women—all men.
K.R.:	How about clerical work?
James Gochenour:	Oh, there was women there. Stenographers, some computer people and stuff like that.
K.R.:	Did that change over time, because you said there were female train engineers? Did that increase over time or change at all?
James Gochenour:	I never saw it. One day I was walking into the Yard going to work.

	<p>This woman was up there trying to get this engine started. I looked up at her. She was one of the engineers; I knew her; she knew me too. “Well, don’t stand down there, Jim. Come on up here and get this thing started.” [laughter] I looked up there and I said, “See this button? It turns that way. And when you turn that way, the starter starts.” I says, “Now, you see this little lever here. When you push that lever in, that gives the engine fuel so it’ll start.” I says, “And when you keep your hand on the lever until you see that hand on the gauge come up,” I says, “that’s the oil pressure; then you let your handle go and your engine’ll finish.” She said, “What would I do without you?” [laughter] There was some school kids come in there one day. They sent me out there to explain the engine to them. There was I guess 20 kids—school kids. And I said “Five of you at a time; come up to the engine and I’ll tell you what’s up there.” Each one of them could sit in the engineer’s seat so they could see what he’s looking at all the time. I got them all down except this one little boy. He puts his hand out. He said, “I got one question.” “Okay, what is it?” He said, “Where’s the horn?” [laughter]</p>
<p>K.R.:</p>	<p>Did you show him? Oh yeah, that sounds typical. So, other than the positions that you had, what other types of jobs were available at the Yard?</p>
<p>James Gochenour:</p>	<p>Let’s see, we had laborers. We had electricians, [inaudible], pipefitters, foremen of course. And we had like the people working in the office. We had car inspectors; we had airmen. We had a blacksmith shop; we had blacksmiths. Then we had engineers, brakemen, conductors. That was most of the men.</p>
<p>K.R.:</p>	<p>Did you become a master mechanic?</p>
<p>James Gochenour:</p>	<p>No, I was a foreman when I retired. What I did down there—when I was a foreman in Richmond—I had a computer and I had a printer. And the printer would come up with paperwork for each engine; what was wrong with it and what had to be done to it and all that stuff. Well, I would take that paperwork and take it down to the other room down there. The mechanic would come in and get it. He’d look at it and he says, “Okay,” and he goes to the parts room and gets the parts. I talked to people all over the United States right in my office.</p>
<p>Railroad Terminology</p>	
<p>K.R.:</p>	<p>It says here that we are interested in railroad yard terminology and the layout of the Yard. Can you explain piggybacking—which you</p>

	did earlier which was great. And what is a hump?
James Gochenour:	A hump is where the train comes into the Yard and goes on what they call the hump—there’s northbound and southbound in Potomac Yards. Now, on the northbound—you had ten tracks up there on the northbound and you’d tell the engineer when he brings his train in “Track 8” or “Track 7” whatever. And he brings his train up that track. And then he sets his brakes and the brakeman goes back there and he sets the hand brakes on the first four cars. And then he unhooks the engine and takes it down to the roundhouse. Then we got what they call a hump. He gets behind after the car inspectors been on that train—about three sets of car inspectors. When they had a caboose there, they took the caboose off and put it on the cab track and the car inspector up there would restock it for the next trip. And then the hump man would come up and he goes on the back; push that thing over the top of the hill. That’s why they call it a hump. And at the top of the hill, they had a cutter there. What he done is he pulled the pin. Each car would go down into the track that they had it lined up for and they’d make up different trains that way according to where they’re going to...And when he gets his engines up at the top, he puts his last car over, he goes back down and gets on the rear end of another train and the hump master will tell him “Okay, come on.” That’s the way they done that. That was the hump. We had braking on each set of motors; they work the brake system. The conductor was the boss of the [unintelligible]. The engineer all he done was drive. That’s all he done. If something was wrong with someplace, the brakeman get off the train.
K.R.:	So, the hump was basically just a hill?
James Gochenour:	Just a hill.
Bernice Gochenour:	They’d cut ’em loose and hook ’em up another place.
K.R.:	So, it would go from one train and then wherever the cars were going to be hooked onto other trains.
James Gochenour:	Wherever it was going in the United States—usually in the Eastern part of the United States—we had a bunch of cars going to Philadelphia, we’d put ’em on that one track. And that Conrail would come in there and pick up the trains, take it to Philadelphia or New York or wherever it was going.
K.R.:	Let’s see. What is a coal tipple?

James Gochenour:	A coal tippie was used when they had steam engines. That's where they put coal in the tenders.
Mrs. Gochenour	They have coal tipples in coal mines when coal I guess comes down [unintelligible].
K.R.:	Is that how they would get it onto the engine—through the tipples like a chute?
James Gochenour:	Yeah, and just pour it right into the tender of the engine.
K.R.:	[pause] What happened in the classification yard?
James Gochenour:	Classification yard was what we called—and that's where the engine or the car came off the hump that was down in there. The classification yard—you got car inspectors down there or carmen they call them. And they would hook the hoses up and then they'd put a plant line on it. They'd close it off—the back car—they'd close that off and that way, they'd pump the air up on the train when the engines pulled up, they'd take the land line off, put their engines on it and hook it and they've got their train already pumped up.
K.R.:	And what was the function of the retarder operator towers?
James Gochenour:	If your car comes down there and your retarder's here and he comes down in there, the car comes in there. They close it up on the wheels and it slows that car down.
K.R.:	Is it something that's on the track then?
James Gochenour:	It's part of the track; it's part of the track. It's what they call a retarder. That's why they call it a retarder because it retards that engine from going too fast down the hill.
K.R.:	So it's only on hills—on down slopes?
James Gochenour:	Yes.
K.R.:	What kind of freight came through the Yard?
James Gochenour:	Every kind you can think of. We had refrigerator cars; we had cars full of telephone poles. We had freight cars that had boxes and stuff in it.
K.R.:	And food cars?

James Gochenour:	Whatever they had in it. It went where it was supposed to go. They had all kinds of things in there. You can't believe what they had.
K.R.:	Yeah, and telephone poles? [laughter] But I guess they have to get where they have to go somehow so—
James Gochenour:	We even had piggybacks—[laughter] One day, a bunch of potatoes come down—loose potatoes in the car; the car derailed—turned over—and they got it sittin' back up. And there were all these potatoes over the hill. And there's [unintelligible] pumped up.
Changes in the Yard, Surrounding Area, Machinery, and Company Policies	
K.R.:	Yeah, I'm sure [laughter] That's great. Can you describe the changes that took place in the Yard over the time that you worked there?
James Gochenour:	Let me explain it to you. [Bernice Gochenour talking in background.] They had different kinds of things going wrong. I can't remember, you know, some of the things. Sometimes they'd close a track off or something because [unintelligible]...be on it the next day—something like that. They'd close the track off.
K.R.:	I mean was there physical growth while you worked there?
James Gochenour:	Physical what?
K.R.:	Like growth. Did it become bigger? Did they add stuff while you worked there?
James Gochenour:	Oh yeah. They laid more tracks in there and everything else.
K.R.:	[pause] Did you notice any residential developments around the Yard?
James Gochenour:	Yeah, we sat there and watched them build that big high-rise down there on the North End. It wasn't there when we went there. [laughter]
K.R.:	Were there changes in the machinery that you worked on?
James Gochenour:	We got new engines—stuff like that—yeah.
K.R.:	Did you have to re-learn how to work on them or did somebody come in and teach you or did you tinker around?

James Gochenour:	Yeah.
K.R.:	Oh, somebody came in—okay. So, did you do any work with the steam engines?
James Gochenour:	No. One time I did. They brought one of those excursion trips—you know, that takes people out and brings them back? He come in here one night, he says, “Gotta get them pilot wheels out of that thing.” I was standing there listening to him. I says, “I don’t even know what I’m looking at, let alone what I’m working on.” [laughter] He come out there and he showed me what the pilot wheel was. You know what a pilot wheel is? It’s two wheels—two small wheels—in the front that turns when the track turns. The pilot wheel will turn with the track and the other engine just follows it right around. That’s why it’s called a pilot wheel.
K.R.:	And is that what they needed fixed?
James Gochenour:	They wanted one of them taken out. They wanted to change the wheels in it.
K.R.:	Were you able to do that?
James Gochenour:	I got it done.
K.R.:	[laughter] Good. A whole new experience.
James Gochenour:	[After Bernice Gochenour reminding him in background] Oh, the circus train would come through all the time.
K.R.:	What was that like?
James Gochenour:	They would get out and what was the cafeteria there and get the machines and stuff like that. These two guys got out of the train. I says, “Who’s famous on there?” “Well, we’ve got the littlest man in the world on there?” [laughter]
K.R.:	Did they have all the animals and stuff as well?
James Gochenour:	Yeah, yeah.
K.R.:	How interesting. Did you get to see them?
James Gochenour:	Their handlers would take them out and give them water to drink and stuff like that.

K.R.:	Kind of scary. [Second side of tape begins] Were there any major policy changes?
James Gochenour:	We had changes but I don't know if they were major or not.
K.R.:	Nothing to speak of I guess. Were there minorities that worked in the Yard?
James Gochenour:	Oh yeah. We had Korean people working there. We had Lats; we had whatever. Whoever came in there to get a job, we worked them.
K.R.:	So, there were no policies—nothing that really changed over time? And you said that you had a two-way radio with you all the time when you were a machinist? Or—
James Gochenour:	Everybody.
K.R.:	Everybody.
James Gochenour:	All the people that worked outside that house had a radio with them.
K.R.:	What was the frequency that you were on?
James Gochenour:	I couldn't tell you. [laughter]
K.R.:	Did you guys have certain codes that you used?
James Gochenour:	No, we just told who we were and then the message.
K.R.:	Do you remember when the NCR151 computers came into use?
James Gochenour:	I have no idea. I didn't have anything to do with computers.
Retirement and the Potomac Yard Retired Employees Association	
K.R.:	And when did you retire again?
James Gochenour:	I retired the seventh day of January, 1995. That's another thing they had. After a while, you had a Safety Day and you'd get off with pay.
K.R.:	Like a free vacation day. That's great.
James Gochenour:	Yeah, a Safety Day.

K.R.:	And did you get to choose when you took that?
James Gochenour:	Uh huh.
K.R.:	Could you add it to your vacation?
James Gochenour:	Yeah.
K.R.:	How much vacation time did you get?
James Gochenour:	I had five weeks when I left—when I retired. Five weeks a year.
K.R.:	Wow, that was great.
James Gochenour:	'Course I had Safety Days too.
K.R.:	That's great. And, did you join the Potomac Yard Retired Employees Association when you retired?
James Gochenour:	Yeah, I'm a member of that now—yes.
K.R.:	Okay.
James Gochenour:	Fact is—I'm on the Board of Directors.
K.R.:	Oh, great. That's fantastic. So, what does the Association do?
James Gochenour:	It's made up of individuals that worked for the railroad. What we do, we go in there. And you've got everybody's telephone number and everybody's address. If something happens to one of them, all of us know about it. Say, one of them dies or something like that, well, there's certain people, I live in Woodbridge; I'd do the calling down there. Got one living in Alexandria; she does the calling up here. And we all tell them what happened, where they're going to be at and all that stuff. We give money to charity outfits—people that can't get along real good and worked with us, we give them something every Christmas.
Fond Memories of the Yard	
K.R.:	That's a great organization. What are some of your fondest memories of the Yard?
James Gochenour:	Oh, gosh, I got so many of them, I couldn't tell you. [laughter] But my most memorable thing is the people I worked with—my lifelong friends that I've got. People I know are still living but I don't know where there at right now but I know their wives; I

	know them; they all know me. We even bowl every Thursday morning.
K.R.:	That's great.
James Gochenour:	Every Thursday morning, we got the railroad people there. It's usually about four or five of us guys with our wives.
K.R.:	Well, that's fun.
James Gochenour:	We have a good time.
K.R.:	Sounds like it. Did you have any really bad days or anything in particular that you'd like to share?
James Gochenour:	Not really.
K.R.:	Great. Anything particularly funny that happened that you would want to share?
James Gochenour:	Good gosh, yes, all the time. My name's Gochenour. Everybody'd call me Googie.
K.R.:	Googie?
James Gochenour:	That's right. I've had people come over and tell me, "I don't know how to do this; they tell me to go ask Googie." [laughter]
K.R.:	Well, were you upset when the Yard closed?
James Gochenour:	Well, I wanted to stay there. I wanted to stay until I could retire. I still had three years to go before I would even get to my age to retire. I got that taken care of with somebody else. They put a new parking lot in there. They worked on that thing for about, I guess, a week and a half or something like that. When that thing stopped, I pulled into the parking lot and this guy who was working on the thing said, "There's your parking place." [laughter] I pulled in there and parked.
K.R.:	Nice. [pause] What are your thoughts on the Potomac Yard area today?
James Gochenour:	Well, it's changing a whole lot. Most of what I know of, it's not there anymore. They got an RF&P Railroad Society; they're in Fredericksburg. They wanted us to send them pictures that we had and stuff like that. I sent them some. They put out a magazine once a month. They usually come down to our picnics; they do

	this and that and the other thing. We went to the Potomac Yard Centennial out there. Here's a Parker pen. See what it says.
K.R.:	"Potomac Yard Development." Now is there anything that I haven't asked that you want to share?
James Gochenour:	No, that's about it.
K.R.:	We went through quite a bit. [End]