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Lloyd Loving Memoir

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Interview and memoir

1 tape, 45 mins., 16 pp.

BATES EXPERIMENTAL ROAD PROJECT

Loving recalls work testing the Bates Experimental Road near New Berlin, Illinois during the summer of 1922: its purpose, construction, and the reaction of the public. Also discusses tenant farming, farm mechanization, and the community of Loami.

Interview by Jane E. Knepler, 1975

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PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Jane E. Knepler for the Oral History Office on July 12, 1975. Jane E. Knepler transcribed the tape and edited the transcript. Lloyd Loving reviewed the transcript.

This is one of a series of tapes made on a project about the building and testing of the Bates Experimental Road. The Illinois Legislature approved this road before the United States became involved in World War I, but the actual road construction did not begin until the war ended. Construction took place during two summers, and testing lasted until late in 1922. Delegations from other states and foreign nations often visited this site. Data recorded during testing was used in determining materials for hardroad construction, not only in Illinois but nationwide and worldwide. It has been overlooked for a long time as an important chapter in highway construction.

Lloyd Loving was born on a farm near Loami, Illinois, December 12, 1903. He lived most of his early life on a farm there. He graduated from Waverly High School in 1922.

During the summer of 1922, Mr. Loving worked on the testing of the Bates Experimental Road. He then attended the University of Illinois for two years, majoring in electrical engineering.

For a short time, Mr. Loving worked at American Radiator and Pillsbury Mills in Springfield before he started farming near Loami. He retired from farming in 1969 and moved to New Berlin, Illinois.

Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

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Lloyd Loving, July 12, 1975, New Berlin, Illinois.

Jane Knepler, Interviewer.

Q. Mr. Loving, at what time did you work on the Bates Experimental Road?

A. In the summer of 1922.

Q. And would you tell me something about how you happened to go to work there and what you were doing?

A. Well, I intended to go to college. And I wanted some money, extra money at least, and I just called up there to the foreman of the road, and he said, "Yes," that he'd be glad to put me on. Then he put me to work the next night after I called, and I worked from six o'clock in the evening until about, well, I put in eight hours, I guess about two o'clock in the morning. And, filling holes along the road. The road was about half worn out when I started and they had taken off nearly a mile on the west end that they didn't run the trucks over. But as the trucks went over this road, they'd squash out the rock and it was my job to fill in the holes. And I would have a strip about, I would say, two blocks long. And by the time I walked that distance and filled the holes in there, they would be squashed out at the other end. And I did that for about three nights, and the fourth night that I went to work he said, "You got a truck tonight." He just told me to go down and get in the truck, then take off. And I asked for somebody to show me how and he said, "Well, you'll soon learn." I did. And the truck didn't have a cab on it. I remember it had a windshield. The tires were solid tires, solid rubber. Loaded with brick, I expect there was four, five, five tons of brick on it, I believe. And I just drove back and forth, back and forth. Until maybe, I'd have a turn around down at the end. And they had boards, board floor that went down in the ditch and I'd drive down in there and back up and turn around and go back. And at east end down at the Farmingdale Road, they had a good turn around there, mighty easy to turn on, but then that turn around they'd have just on the road at the west end would be pretty hard sometimes. A lot of fellows got stuck in it, but I happened to be lucky enough not to. And then maybe the next night I'd go back, they'd have a different turn around. The road would be so bad down further that the turn around may be a little shorter distance. And I think I worked for, until about the first of September. And I started somewhere around the first of July. About two months. And I went to school there . . .

Q. And where did you go to school?

A. University of Illinois.

Q. Did you have any experiences while you were driving, were there any accidents or anything of that sort?

A. No, there wasn't any accidents. Lots of trucks would break down on the road and they'd have to pull them off or something. I was fortunate enough that they, my truck run good all the time, didn't have any trouble.

Q. Did you drive the same truck every night?

A. Yes, I did, it was number six.

Q. Do you know how many trucks they had testing?

A. Well, at that time I think they must, there was about fifteen, at that time. Some of them had been broken down before at one, when they first started on this, they had more trucks than that. And they run them closer together. You're supposed to stay so far apart, maybe not more than two hundred feet of the truck in front of you. And, so many of them were broken down at the time I started, I don't think there was over fifteen left.

Q. How long was the original experimental road?

A. Two miles.

Q. And it extended from, you said . . .

A. From Bates-down to the Farmingdale Road. That's a mile this side of Curran.

Q. Do you recall the building of the road?

A. Not much. I just know that I heard my brother talk about it. He had two teams working on there to grade the road up and get it in shape to put the new, the experimental part down. I know they hauled, I think they unloaded the brick and sand and gravel and cement at Bates. And then they hauled it with, they had some small trucks, they hauled that in. Along with wagons, too. They used wagons and teams to haul that down the road. And mixed it by hand. They, most of it, although they had some kind of a small mixer there, I understand to mix cement with. Some of it was just solid brick and the bricks were different sizes. They had bricks that weighed as high as eleven pounds a piece. And they had the small brick. They changed, because I remember, the mixture every one hundred feet. And that, to test what kind held up the longest.

Q. Were they testing different kinds of brick roads as well as different kinds of concrete?

A. That's right.

Q. If they were about one hundred feet then they were approximately one hundred different groups?

A. Yes. A number of groups. Quite a number, I don't know exactly how many different kinds of road there was, but there was a lot of them, I know that. Had them marked with a pole or a stake. That stake had a number on it. And they could go by their book, what kind of road that was in that mixture.

Q. You lived around Loami at that time, is that right?

A. Yes.

Q. What were the reactions of the people about the building of the experimental road?

A. Well, it, about the same reaction as there is nowadays, spending so much money there foolishly, they thought. Felt that way.

Q. Do you think as the testing went on, they still considered it a foolish venture?

A. Well, yes, I think they did. Because no one realized at the time that in fifty years there'd be as many hard roads in the country as there is, and I think they thought that was a lot of money to spend testing. And then turn around and wear it out driving trucks back and forth. That seemed to be the most foolish thing, wearing it out.

Q. Do you know how long they continued the testing after you stopped working?

A. I think it stopped before Christmas that year. It wasn't long after that that they stopped testing, because the road was almost worn out when I quit. That was, it was real hard to drive back and forth over; you bounced up and down over rough spots and not very much of it left when I left.

Q. When you started working, you said about a mile had already been worn out?

A. Yes.

Q. How long do you think they had been testing before you started on the testing?

A. I can't really answer that question, but I would say it had been running at least a year of day and night driving. Of course, if it was raining they didn't go too long. Light rain, why you just kept on driving. But if it got to raining hard, they'd lay you off for the night or maybe until it cleared up.

Q. How was the right-of-way lighted, or did you depend on truck lights?

A. They had some kind of a lighting system, and I can't remember really what kind it was. It was a light every, oh, maybe, two or three blocks. It wasn't too bright a light. You'd sort of go a

lot in the dark, because I don't remember of the trucks having lights on. I can't remember of a light being on the truck. I know it was rather dim when you was driving along the road. You had to be very careful and stay awake, because in passing the other trucks you had to be very careful of it.

Q. They weren't using high speeds at that time?

A. Oh, no.

Q. Do you know about what you traveled?

A. Oh, we didn't run more than, I'd say, twenty miles an hour to twenty-five, something like that. The truck wouldn't run very fast, but they had lots of power.

Q. Do you recall the building of the road here that we call Route 36 now?

A. Well, some of it, yes. I was, I guess, away from home when some of that was built. I said the other day I thought that they had a little track that run down to this Experimental Road, but that wasn't true. They had the track when they built 36; but they didn't have the track when they had the experimental road. They just unloaded there in Bates then. But when they built 36, I think they built that little track that run down, and people hauled a lot of it on that.

Q. They hauled the dry materials out from New Berlin by the railroad. Is that right?

A. Yes.

Q. How did they get the water to mix the concrete?

A. I don't know.

Q. You said you called the foreman and you were put to work. Were there quite a few people from Loami working on the road?

A. Not very many at that time. I don't know where most of the men came from, unless it was Springfield, because there was very few people on there that I knew from around here.

Q. When your brother had teams working on the road, did he employ the driver or did he lease the teams to a contractor? Or do you have any idea how that arrangement was made?

A. I think he leased the team to the contractor. I don't think he did any work himself, but he had the extra horses and just leased them to the, perhaps to the man that drove the team, and then he dealt with the contractor as far as the salary was concerned.

Q. Did they have any other way of grading, or did they use completely horsepower?

A. Well, they had, I think, a few trucks, small trucks running. But it was all horsepower in the grading part. Yes.

Q. Did they build that road up very high?

A. No, it wasn't very high. It was fairly level with the countryside there. I know where you turned around with the truck, there was very little ditch there that you went down in.

Q. Do you have any idea of the reason for choosing that particular spot to build an experimental road?

A. No, I don't. I don't know of any reason why they chose that particular place. One thing might be it was level all the way through there. There was no ups and downs in it at all. It was partly level clear through the line.

Q. Did it follow an existing roadway when it was built, or was it a new road?

A. Well, I think it was a new road really. I'm pretty sure.

Q. So, its building would not inconvenience people along the right-of-way?

A. No.

Q. Did the trucks make a lot of noise?

A. No, they didn't. They didn't make too much noise. There was just quite a little noise in the bouncing of it. The springs weren't much on it, and it was just like riding in a lumber wagon. But as far as making noise was concerned, I don't believe it was. The motors didn't make much noise.

Q. Did you consider it more work to drive the truck or to handle the shovel?

A. Well, it was more work handling the shovel, because I remember that they kept pretty close watch on the fellows working on the road to see that they didn't kill any time, that they didn't go to sleep or something. (laughs) They watched them pretty close.

Q. You don't recall what they were paying for labor at that time?

A. Well, I think that I got thirty-five cents an hour. As I remember, yes.

Q. Was that considered a pretty good wage at that time?

A. Yes, I think it was, because I worked at the American Radiator about three years after that and got forty cents an hour, the year we were married. So, I think that was a pretty fair wage at that time, yes.

Q. Do you feel now that you took part in an important experiment in road building?

A. Well, yes, I do, because I think they probably learned a lot from that experiment there, when they built other roads. And I think people from all over the United States came in there to look at that road to see what happened, the different materials that they used, and so and so.

Q. You think it had an impact beyond the borders of Illinois then?

A. Oh, yes, very much.

Q. How do you feel about living in Central Illinois? In this particular instance, Illinois built an experimental road and other states patterned after it. Do you think that in any other respects Illinois has set a pattern?

A. Well, yes, I think that Illinois has set a pattern in farming. And soybeans, I think, has been one of the big grain, or the most important grain that has been raised in Illinois; and they've made more progress with the soybean than most any other part of the country.

Q. Do you consider this an innovative part of the United States?

A. Yes, it's a very important part, I think, to me.

Q. As you look back, you don't consider yourselves in this part of the country then just plain farmers and sort of back-country people?

A. No, I think that the progress that the farmer has made here has made the farmer a part of the city. Really, the city people and the farm people have come closer together in Illinois than they have in many parts of the country.

Q. When you went to the University of Illinois, what did you study?

A. I started in electrical engineering.

Q. Did you stay in that field?

A. Yes. I had two years in that field. Of course, that's only the basic part of it. That's not the real, that's just the mathematics. And that's about all that I finished in.

Q. You didn't work in the school of agriculture at all?

A. No.

Q. Did you use that electrical engineering, or did you return to agriculture?

A. Took a return to agriculture.

Q. Do you recall anyone else who worked on the road at the time you were working there or who worked there before?

A. Well, I don't recall anyone that's alive now that worked there, except George Marr. And he's told me about it since. I didn't know him then. But since he's told me that he started when the road started and helped to mix the materials and wheel them down there in a wheelbarrow and so on.

Q. They actually took them in a wheelbarrow and dumped them in these places?

A. That's right.

Q. That's even a little less than horsepower?

A. Yes, that is. But that is about the only way you can handle cement, you know, when you didn't have the trucks like we have today. That's the only way they handled it then was in wheelbarrows.

Q. Do you remember when they started having ready-mix trucks to bring out concrete?

A. No, I couldn't say really. It hasn't been too long though, I don't believe.

Q. They weren't using those when they built the highway 36 here?

A. I don't think so, no. I don't think they had anything like that then.

Q. Did you make any new friends while you were working on the road?

A. Well, just the engineer at that time. He was very friendly with me. He's the one that, when he found out that I was going to the University of Illinois why right away he notified his fraternity, and they were there to greet me a few days after I arrived. I was invited over to their house for dinner two or three times.

Q. What fraternity was that?

A. Sigma Chi.

Q. Did you join the fraternity?

A. No. I joined a fraternity, but not that one.

Q. Did you live in a fraternity house when you were . . .

A. The second year I was there I did.

Q. Where did you live the first year you were there?

A. Lived on Illinois Street, East Illinois, I believe it was. West Illinois over in Urbana, about six or seven blocks from the campus.

Q. Was this a private home?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you get room and board?

A. No, just a room. And I worked at the Dew Drop Inn for my meals. I didn't get my meals. Had to fire the furnace for Mr. Lloyd Morey, who was the comptroller at that time, and he later on was, took the presidency of the university. He was one or two years, I don't remember why, whether the other one died or left something like that. He was the college president.

Q. You made most of your living while you were there?

A. Yes.

Q. You said you were making some money to have extra money while you were at the university. Did you use this for tuition or just for incidental expenses?

A. Well, I used it for tuition if nothing else. My folks gave me what money I needed and had to have.

Q. Why did you decide to discontinue going to the university and come back to the farm?

A. Well, because I didn't have the money to finish, that's all. At that time, the community was hard hit and my folks didn't have any. Got disgusted, like many of the boys are doing nowadays. What's the use to go to college if you can't get a job when you get out? About the same then as it is right now. Of course, a college boy could get him a job in later years.

Q. Did you start farming on your own then or did you return to your . . .

A. Well, the first year that I left college, I farmed for a year or so, until we were married in 1928. And I worked at the American Radiator for a year, and Pillsbury Mills for about eight months. And, my father wanted me to come out to the farm. And then she felt like she'd like to try it and we did. And we stayed there from there on. She liked it and . . .

Q. Did you have what you consider a modern farm house when you started farming?

A. No, no, it wasn't modern at all. We didn't have lights until 1938 in about seven years, eight years after we had moved to the farm.

Q. You mean electrical?

A. That's right. Lamps and outside toilets.

Q. What kind of heat did you have?

A. Coal stoves. Cook stove in the kitchen, that kind of stoves.

Q. Did you use that kitchen cook stove in the summertime too?

A. No, we used an oil burner in the summertime. If we had to do any baking, why I'd fire up the cook stove.

Q. When you got electricity in 1938, was that part of a general electrification program or . . .

A. Yes, the Rural Electrification Program.

Q. What did you use the electricity for other than lights when you first got it?

A. Well, of course, we had the electric refrigerator was about the only appliance I believe that we had that time, other than the lights at the beginning. Then, in later years, I think about 1946, why we put in the bathroom and we had running water in the house and we used the electricity for water pumps.

Q. Why would you wait until 1946 to put the pumps and so forth in?

A. I expect it was because we couldn't afford to do any better, probably. I don't remember exactly. It was a rented farm was one reason.

Q. Did the landlord then put the water in for you or did you have to?

A. No, we put the water in ourselves. The landlord paid for the bathroom, but we did that ourselves.

Q. You did the work yourselves?

A. Yes, we did all the work.

Q. And how long did you live on that farm?

A. Forty years . . . until I retired.

Q. When you were farming as a tenant, did you farm on shares or did you pay any cash rent?

A. Well, the first five years, I guess, about, we paid cash rent, and then we ran it on shares after that.

Q. Did you keep livestock on shares as well as the grain?

A. No. The livestock all belonged to me. Just the grain rent was on shares.

Q. What kind of livestock did you keep?

A. We raised white-faced cattle, raised the calves from white-faced cows, and hogs. Just those two, hogs and cattle.

Q. How did you get your livestock to market?

A. Well, I hired it hauled by a trucker in those days.

Q. You had fairly good roads then?

A. Yes, we had fairly good roads after, oh probably 1940, so from there on, I think. We first moved out there, the roads weren't very good then, but after they voted in oil and so on, why we had pretty good roads.

Q. Do you remember when they started using oil on the roads?

A. (chuckles) Well, I think about 1935. I expect it was about that time. I don't remember, really, exactly.

Q. How far did you live from a paved road?

A. About four miles. We were about four miles south of 36.

Q. Did you have an automobile when you moved to the farm?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you able to use that automobile the year around?

A. Well, we did. We had chains on it part of the time. (chuckles)

Q. About how often did you go to a town and what town did you go to for most of your shopping?

A. Well, I guess Loami was where we went for most of our grocery supplies. We went to Springfield maybe once a week.

Q. What sort of social life did you have in your community?

A. Well, that was the nice part of it back in those days. The community would get together at least once a month, have a potluck supper or maybe an oyster supper. And we had threshing runs, all done with a steam engine and a separator, and maybe there'd be as many as fifteen or twenty neighbors that would swap help back and forth, you know, and go from one to the other and do their threshing. And that group would always get together, especially during the winter, at least once a month. And in the summertime we wouldn't get together so much. But at least once a month in the wintertime. We had a lot of fun that we don't have nowadays, social life that we don't have now.

Q. Where did you meet once a month?

A. At the homes, first one and then another had it. We really enjoyed that and we really miss it now.

Q. Did you do anything particular for entertainment or just visit?

A. I think just visit. I don't remember having much entertainment.

Q. Did you play any cards?

A. Well, yes, they played cards too. And then earlier, I mean, back before we were married, they had dances around the country a lot. The men would have violins and guitars and so on and play, and there were square dances and so on.

Q. Where would they have the dances?

A. Well, somebody would just clear out a room in their house and have it, or if somebody had a barn that happened to be empty, they'd have what they'd call a barn dance. I remember one time they built a new barn at my brother's place and had a dance in the loft, the barn loft. And we just had a lot of fun. In fact we didn't intend to go and then all at once we said, "Well, let's go to the dance." And we went, and we certainly enjoyed it, all of us. (horn honks outside) But they were mostly square dances in those days that we had in the country.

Q. You feel the lack of social activity on the part of neighbors now then? (horn honks again)

A. Yes.

Q. Did the church play any part in your life?

A. Yes, we were active in church all the time, both of us.

Q. Was there social life connected with the church?

A. Yes, at that time there was, lots of it, more than there is now.

Q. What sort of social activities did they have at the church?

A. Well, mostly potluck suppers, and then the church served suppers, too, different, maybe, once a year at least they'd have a large chicken supper, chicken-pie supper, something of that sort. And then different classes in the church would meet, and Sundays through the summer they'd have at least one picnic. They'd go to some parks and have picnics.

Q. Were their suppers once a year money-making affairs?

A. Yes.

Q. What church did you attend?

A. Methodist.

Q. And that was in Loami?

A. In Loami, yes.

Q. Was there a large congregation at that time?

A. Yes, we had a pretty good sized congregation at that time. I expect there was nearly two hundred in our congregation. There was three churches in the town, a small town, I think that was a pretty good church. Only about five hundred in the town and we had about two hundred in the church.

Q. Of course, people came from the country to attend there too?

A. Yes.

Q. When you left the farm, did you come to New Berlin to live?

A. Yes.

Q. What year was that?

A. 1968. (Mrs. Loving quietly corrects him) 1969, September 13, 1969.

Q. You remember the day better than the year?

A. That was the day we sold out of our household things that we didn't need, and being the thirteenth, I remember it pretty well. (chuckles)

Q. It didn't happen to be a Friday?

A. Yes, wasn't it? (Mrs. Loving interjects, "I think so, maybe.")

Q. You didn't feel it was a bad day?

A. No, it was an excellent day for us.

Q. You had a good sale?

A. Excellent, very much better than we expected.

Q. But did you have any bad feelings about leaving the farm?

A. Well, after living there forty years, it was really like home, and that's where our son was born and so on. But yet we realized that it was too big for us and we couldn't take care of it like we would want to take care of it. And, I've never been sorry any minute since we left.

Q. How many acres did you farm?

A. I farmed about 550 acres at that time.

Q. When you started farming were you using any mechanization at all?

A. I had one tractor, started with one tractor and a horse and a mule. And, of course, accumulated more afterwards, that is more horses, because I didn't keep this old tractor another year. I kept horses until, I think, about 1947. I had horses up until that time. But I did all the heavy work with tractors.

Q. Did you raise your own horses or did you buy them?

A. I bought them.

Q. Were there any people in the community raising horses?

A. Yes, there were a few horses raised in the community, a few, not very many.

Q. Did you buy your horses locally, or did you have some place where there was a market?

A. Well, I usually bought them from some trader that dealt in trading horses and so on. There were a number of them around at that time. That's about all they did was just buy horses and sell them, and that's the way they made their money.

A. They just bought and sold, kind of sold them. I don't know of any of the traders that raised their own horses. Somebody'd have a horse, it might be twenty-five miles from here, and they'd go look at it and buy it maybe and sell it to some farmer. Many times you got gypped on it. (chuckles)

Q. You didn't get much of a chance to look at it ahead of time?

A. Well, you didn't get a chance to try them out anyway. (chuckles)

Q. How many horses would you use in addition to your tractor?

A. About four.

Q. Would you keep more than four?

A. No, I never did have more than four.

Q. What sort of equipment did you use the horses with that you couldn't use the tractor for?

A. Planting corn mostly, and then work cleaning out barns, cleaning up around the place if you had to use a wagon or anything like that.

Q. Your ground preparation then was done mostly with a tractor?

A. Yes.

Q. What kind of tractor did you have?

A. Farmall, one of the first ones. The first one I had was one of the first ones built. Then I finally come to what they call the F-20 and the F-30, and that's still International. I used International all through my farm life.

Q. You enjoy living in New Berlin now?

A. Yes, I do, very much.

END OF TAPE