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G. A. (Gus) Sieber Memoir

SI15. Sieber, G. A. (Gus) b. 1863

Interview and memoir

1 tape, 10 mins., 4 pp.

Sieber recalls work and stores in late 19th century Jacksonville, Illinois.

Interview by Donald Robinson, 1954

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Preface

This manuscript is the product of a tape recorded interview conducted by Donald Robinson for the Oral History Office in ca. 1954.

G. A. (Gus) Sieber was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1863. In this memoir Mr. Sieber discusses his family history, his work as an electrician and some of the stores that were in Jacksonville when he was a young man.

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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G. A. (Gus) Sieber, ca. 1954, Jacksonville, Illinois.

Donald K. Robinson, Interviewer.

A: I have lived in Jacksonville 90 years. I was born in 1863, Nashville, Tennessee, the son of E. R. and Katherine Bagale Sieber. During the Civil War my father was a government inspector (inaudible) as the army advance, my father traveled along with them.

We came to Jacksonville in 1865. My father went into business in what is now the (inaudible) building [northeast corner of North West and West State Streets] on West State Street which is now occupied by Thompson and Thompson Law Firm. In this shop we made Kentucky rifles, barbed wire fence, making and testing pistols for Dr. E. B. Black, making braces for Dr. David Prince [pioneer orthopedic surgeon] who at that time had an office located on South Sandy Street. Also made needles (inaudible) for Fitzsimmons and Kreider Mill located where the Jacksonville Creamery (Now Doyle Plumbing company. The mill was razed about 1912 and replaced by the present building.) was on North West Street. Around the corner on Douglas (formerly North Street) was a man by the name of Lambert who made barrels for flour milled by Fitzsimmons and Kreider Mill.

After I finished my schooling here, I went to Chicago where I was associated with (inaudible) company and May Heals Company where I started making duplicators and (inaudible) machinery. I remained in Chicago from 1884 to 1886. I returned to Jacksonville in 1889 starting my own electrical contracting business.

In 1889 I married Lillian Cannon, formerly of Jacksonville and later Rawlings, Wyoming where Mr. Cannon was in business. Miss Cannon was in her junior year at the Illinois Female Academy (on the MacMurray College Campus today) when Dr. Short was president. Dr. Short's daughter Miss (inaudible) Lambert Short married E. C. Lambert, a cousin of Mrs. Sieber. We have three children: Mrs. (inaudible) Jackson of Normal, Illinois; Miss Charlotte Sieber, living at home; and Dewey who is associated with me in the business.

One of the first jobs I did was the wiring of F. J. Andrews, Sr. residence, a lumber dealer. (Andrews Lumber Yard is still located at its original address on North Main Street near Norfolk and Western Railroad.) Other fine homes were wired: the home of J. Duer and Richard K. Auburn on West State Street. Practically all the churches and schools built at that time were wired by my firm. Wiring (inaudible) schools and churches within 200 miles were wired by us. I have trained most of the younger electricians in Jacksonville.

I remember making the sweat baths at the Oak Lawn Retreat. This was a private hospital owned by Dr. McFarland. (Now the Chateau deFleur Apartments on Route 36 east of Jacksonville.) This sweat bath was somewhat like a Turkish bath. It was built like cabinets large enough for a person to sit in position and the cabinets were six sided lined with mirrors and between the mirrors were 32 candle power lamps to furnish heat. This bath was used for the benefit of the patients.

Handling all the electrical work I possibly could, I still have time to make the braille writing machine in 1892. Mr. (Frank Haven) Hall, Blind School Superintendent, came to me and asked me if I could make a writer for the blind. At this time the blind just used the slate and stylus. I persued with my own ideas and developed what is known as the braille writer. Mr. Hall paid me \$65 for this machine and then had them manufactured in Chicago. Mr. Hall had 100 machines made at a cost of \$11 each and sold them for the same price. Today these machines sell for \$55.

I remember when Jacksonville had cars drawn by horses for transportation--later electrified. It was owned and operated by Miss Sally Hook. Many of the old stores I remember (inaudible) jewelry store, Waters and Maddison Hardware Store, Rapp Brothers, James Cruse Harness Shop, Carter's Drug Store (located where the Farmers Bank [Hoffman Florists on South Side of Square] is now), Schmaltz Grocery Store located on the corner where Montgomery Ward is (on the west side of North Main at the square). The Opera House was located by Kline's at the present time (on the west side of South Main at the square). Clothing stores at that time: S. S. Knoles, Seeburger, and Tomlinsons.

I became a member of the Kiwanis Club 33 years ago and I have had perfect attendance at meetings once a week for 33 years. I have been a member of the Odd Fellows for over 50 years, received my 50 year jewel a few years ago. I became a member of the Central Christian Church when Mr. Russell Pratt was pastor. On my 91st birthday last year I was very happy to receive a letter of congratulations from Governor and Mrs. Stratton.

End of Tape