The Toledo & Ohio Central
Switching Out on the Road - the 1960s

by James M. Cavanaugh

T&OC train crews based at West Columbus manned over a dozen local switching trains. These included road "locals" and (trains that only picked up or dropped off cars and switched out on-line shipper facilities, but handled no through cars to a remote destination yard) and "turns" (similar but sometimes with cars to or from a destination where the train would turn around and return to West Columbus. These included the five times weekly Marysville Turn and East Columbus Local, an "orphan local" running from Bellefontaine to St. Marys three days a week on a line cut off from the Western Branch by abandonments in the 1930s, the Mine Run at Corning and a daily Eastern Branch local running between Bucyrus and Stanley Yard at Toledo. T&OC crews also manned four daily "WIP" switching jobs between Stanley Yard and the huge Willis Day Industrial Park several miles south on the Western. There were also yard switching jobs along the Western Branch at Findlay, Kenton and South Columbus, and on the Eastern Branch at Heath.

Some T&OC road trains, especially NT-7 and TC-2, would typically have "short" cars for dropping along the route, and would pick up as well, but usually these would be cuts of interchange cars rather than drops at a shipper's plant or elevator along the way. However, many times NT-7 seemed more like a 130-mile switching job than a through freight train.

<u>Crewing Up and Getting Started</u>

Under the Ohio "full crew" law, the train crew consisted of the conductor, a flagman (brakeman who rode the caboose with the conductor) and the junior brakeman, also known as the "head brakeman" who rode the locomotives with the engineer (called the "hogger" on the T&OC) and fireman. We got a two-hour call from the West Columbus crew dispatcher. The remote reporting jobs like the WIP, St. Marys and Bucyrus locals required up to a two-hour drive from Columbus to the starting point. You did not get paid for driving time, but you could turn in a mileage slip and get something like nine cents per mile reimbursed. On some of the remote daily jobs like the WIP or Mine Run, crews stayed overnight at places like the railroad YMCA at Stanley Yard, or the bunkhouse at Corning.

Mandatory equipment when a brakeman reported for work included a lantern, gloves hat, switch key and work boots. If you lacked any of those you were sent home to get it. You were also required to have a current up-to-date timetable for the line on which you were working, and the New York Central Safety Rules booklet. They did not check for these, but you kept them in your "grip" (suitcase or gym bag for a change of clothes, shaving kit and personal items). Best to have a rain slicker also. Also avoid any loose

clothes that could get snagged on a sharp edge on a moving car or engine - that could be really bad. I preferred a pair of bib overalls and a small-brimmed fedora. I tried an Australian army hat with one-side bent up, but soon it blew away as I was riding on the side of a boxcar in a thunderstorm. Broad-brimmed hats did not work. Coveralls or boiler suits were popular. It was very dusty and dirty out there.

After the crew assembled, the conductor checked in at the yard office to pick up the bills lading (or "waybills") for the cars in the train, and in some cases, the written train orders for the manual block territory on the Western Branch south of Ridgeway and on the Eastern and St. Marys Branch. The waybills, which might number three dozen on a busy local run, were in a big brown envelope with a little tie string. As of 1969-70, after the Penn Central merger, West Columbus was still going through the last of its stock of old New York Central envelopes and other routine railroading paper.

Learning the Job

When a new trainman hired on for the first day, he was assigned the next outbound train as a "student" under supervision of the train's conductor. The "student trip" (you only got one) was an intense experience. The would-be brakeman was put through the paces, learning hand signals - lantern or hand up-and-down or "highball" for ahead, a circular motion for back-up, a raised hand or lantern for "steady up" meaning apply the engine brakes on a moving cut to slow as the stopping point approached, and bumping your fists together over your head which meant move the engine toward you a few feet to ease the slack between the cars enough so you could pull up the coupler pin to uncouple them. The student learned the operation of the coupling gear, lifting the pin and opening the knuckle to receive the other knuckle (cars would usually couple if only one was open but better to open both), and how to connect the air brake hoses and cut in the air from the locomotive end.

You learned the most important safety points, especially the veteran railroader's technique for boarding the foot stirrup of a moving car or caboose – simultaneously clasp the grab-irons with both hands and put the foot toward the approaching cars into the stirrup, and the motion of the moving train would lift you right up for your next step. That way, if you misjudged the speed or your grip missed or even if your foot slipped through the stirrup, you would likely get thrown away from the moving train. If you put your opposite foot (the one away from the approaching cars) in the stirrup, and you missed, it would tend to throw you back toward the moving car, or worse, under it. Never step between moving cars for any reason. And, oh, don't stand too close when uncoupling cars with pressurized air hoses between them, as they fly up and out like a rattlesnake with a five-pound head. "They will make a soprano out of you" the conductor told me.

Switching Locomotives

Our typical power for a T&OC local would be a single GE EMD GP-9 1,750-horsepower "hood" unit. These were about the most unattractive, least comfortable engines for crew, and I especially disliked the head brakeman's seat in the middle with no view forward. These locomotives had the diesel engine and dynamo forward of the cab, giving the engineer and fireman about the same view as from the cushions of a steam locomotive. There was a short hood on the rear end that contained a lavatory (gravity type, usually with the water tank flush not in service). But the GP-9s were virtually 100 percent reliable, had good traction and light axle loads that allowed them to go into the most horrid bent-rail, rotted-tie industrial siding on our line. On some of the locals, especially the East Columbus and St. Marys jobs, we more often got SW7s, little 1,200 yard engines with incredible 360-degree visibility, but lacking the muscle to start or drag a heavier local train uphill.

Many road locomotives had working radios that might or might not be on the active NYC or PRR channels. The radio units, usually mounted just over the engineer's controls, with a telephone receiver handset with a "push to talk" button, brightened up the night air with glowing red and green lights and chatter from familiar and mysterious trains all over Central Ohio. "B&O Transfer. B&O Transfer, over." "I've got you Alum Creek." "We have you moving just after PR-17 clears." "Roger that. Is that N&W man off the plant yet?" This went on all night and day. It became hypnotic at night. You did a lot of sitting and waiting on T&OC locals, in sidings or industrial tracks listening for the dispatcher's order allowing you back out onto the main track. The radio was your entertainment.

I recall one evening when someone (most of us could guess who) was playing a harmonica on the radio over the air, very funny but of course strictly against NYC operating rules. Suddenly we heard the imposing voice of Trainmaster J.V. Pluto, a serious commanding presence, saying "Whoever's playing that harp had better be good enough to make a living at it."

The Local Caboose

Each local also had a caboose, or cabin car. On a local or yard switching job this was usually a classic old NYC green liveried long platform local caboose. These were 40 feet long, with a nearly ten-foot long uncovered platform at each end. Outside, there were ample yellow grab irons running at chest height from the cabin door to the steps, which were cut fairly low for easy mounting on a switching run where you would be up and down them a hundred times a day. The idea is that standing anywhere outside you would have one hand on a grab iron, less likely to be thrown and hurt by a sudden lurch.

What the long-platform caboose offered in exterior safety devices was easily offset by the extreme lack of creature comforts inside the little nine by twenty-foot box cabin.

Unlike the well-kept road cabooses, with comfortable lounge-type seats in big bay windows, bright interior lights, battery-power with a generator attached by rubber belts to an axle for recharging while under way, an insulated icebox and real lavatory, big stove and bunks, these local cabin cars were claustrophobic and dusty, with small reversible seats opposite two tiny windows that admitted little light, and what appeared to be aluminum storm doors. The toilet was a tight fit, and the small oil-fired stove was barely adequate to take the chill off a raw day, if it worked at all. There was usually a water cooler with one gallon of potable water, but bring your own ice chest in the summer. Like all cabooses, these carried a spare coupling knuckle, several spare brake line air hoses, a big open-jaw hose wrench and supply of "fusee" flares and torpedos. The latter were small wax-covered wads of firecracker explosives mounted on a lead strap about six inches long. If you were "flagging" the rear end of a train stopped on a curve to protect it against a following section or train, the flagman would run back a few hundred yards and use the strap to wrap the device on the top of the ball of the rail. If a train ran over it, the torpedo exploded with a loud crack that could be heard aboard an engine, signaling the crew to use the emergency brake to stop.

Sometimes the local would be assigned a road pool caboose, usually a 44-foot covered-platform NYC bay-window cabin with comfy seats. After the Pennsylvania-NYC merger we also got short PRR cupola-top bittersweet-red cabooses.

Each local had its own tradition as to whether the head brakeman rode the engine or caboose. On those with short trains and significantly long slow runs between switching points, like the pastoral St. Mary's run, you rode the cabin.

Switching Run Paperwork

Once the conductor and flagman were aboard the train and we got under way from the yard, the conductor's first order of business was to sit at a small four-seat booth-like table at one end of the caboose, take the waybills from the big envelope, reach inside the paperwork cabinet on the wall above the desk and pull out a tablet of tear-off train manifest forms. The conductor filled in the train name, date, origin and destination, conductor's name and departure, arrival and intermediate stop times. Below this were columns of tiny boxes, into which the conductor wrote the number of each car. Every railcar in the US has a unique identifying alpha-numeric number, the first part of which was the code for the individual railroad (e.g., NYC, PRR, NW, CBQ, SOU etc.) followed by a four to six digits of numerals. By the 1960s cars also had an "UMLER" (universal machine language equipment register) bar code patch on each side that could be read by a scanner as the car entered a big yard, with the car number and details as to capacity, light tons, and date of original build and latest rebuild. The conductor also had to write on the manifest the drop-off point for each car and whether the car was loaded or empty, and net tons shown on the waybill for loads. For an empty car, he just wrote "MTY". Often the waybill for an empty would just be a computer punchcard, with the car number and "MTY" handwritten on the back.

Waybills came in a big variety of forms. The commodity descriptions and freight rates on them were fascinating. There were through line-haul rates, terminal and switching charges, car-cleaning and weighing charges and a myriad of other details. There were also complex arrangements like transit rates, where a commodity would move from a distant origin to a processing mill under a certain low rate per ton-mile, and then after processing, the transformed substance would move on to a destination market or terminal elevator at a higher rate. The shipper had to use the same railroad on the outbound leg in order to get the advantageous rate inbound. Where loaded cars traveled over several line haul railroads, they apportioned the revenues according to a complicated interchange agreement formula. Line haul roads like the T&OC generally did not charge separately for switching, while terminal railroads' revenues came only from switching or shifting cars, charging per move. Those of us on train crews had no clue how the railroads made enough money from these charges to cover the enormous capital and operating cost we could see. But by 1969-70 the Penn Central Railroad corporate brass apparently did not understand this either.

In all yard offices of the T&OC, and I later discovered those of many railroads, there were signs reading "Get foreign cars off the line by midnight." Some of our paper forms also had this at the bottom. I learned that when loaded cars of another railroad interchanged onto the New York Central, we paid their owner something like $10 per diem (pronounced in the railroad world as "per dye-em") as hire. If the car was not shifted off the NYC back to the owner or to another railroad by midnight, an additional day's car hire accrued. By 1969, there were also starting to be leased cars owned by companies like GATX, and others called "free running cars" which had no home railroad at all, but just earned per diem revenue wherever they were used on any given day. Some cars earned hire every day, loaded or empty, others were on leases that only required hire when loaded. A yard clerk organizing a cut of empty covered hoppers to dispatch to a shipper's plant faced a bewildering exercise to decide what combination of cars available in the yard at that moment would optimize financial results for the New York Central. Even today, with sophisticated software algorithms and fast computers, this is no easy task; railroads have expensive closely-guarded proprietary programs to do it. All the NYC had back then was a savvy clerk with an Eberhard-Faber No. 2 pencil. But we could see that many key people who made or lost money for the line were freight salesmen, clerks and accountants wearing suits rather than overalls, never driving a spike, tightening a bolt or pulling a coupling pin.

<u>The Basics - Setting Off and Picking Up Cars</u>

As the caboose office paperwork was finished, we were usually just approaching the first switching point on the run. This might be a warehouse, factory, refinery, grain elevator, coal mine or power plant where our local was assigned to drop off or pick up cars. Looking at the conductor's list, the head brakeman would see how many cars were going in and how many were coming out. The hogger would slow and apply the engine

brake as we neared the shipper's siding. The brakeman would drop off the engine, counting the cars as they went by. As the last of the drop cars approached, he would raise his lantern or fist, signaling the engineer to "steady up" (cut power and start applying the engine brake). When the cut point after the last drop car was a few car lengths short of the switch, he would motion to the engineer with the back and forth "stop" signal. You have to leave the rest of the train back about two car lengths behind the switch. The train had to be "in the clear," far enough back so the cars did not "foul" (block) the engine and cars from proceeding down into the siding.

Here to understand what happens, you need to visualize the equipment on the end of each train car. Always the same, it consists of an enormous steel coupler like a big muscular claw protruding from a box-like spring-loaded structure welded to the car frame. At the end of the coupler was a movable "knuckle," which sits in an opening on the end of the coupler mounted on a fixed vertical shaft. The knuckle opens and closes like a person's hand. There is a foot-long, two-inch diameter movable pin that drops in from the top at the back of the coupler to lock the knuckle into the closed position. You can get the idea if you take your hands and move them toward each other laterally. When your fingertips meet the opposite palm, clasp your hands together tightly and then pull your hands against each other. That is exactly what the couplers look like when two of them close on each other to couple train cars together. Now imagine the pins on each coupler dropping down through the back of the moving part (your fingers in my example), to hold the moving part closed when you try to pull apart. Actually the moving piece on a railroad coupler, the knuckle, is a 78-lb steel casting with a flange back on the inside that fits into a slot on the coupler receptacle attached to the car frame, so that the force of the locomotive's pull is borne by this flange and slot, rather than the more fragile little vertical shaft or pin. This elegant invention, the Janney or "buckeye" coupler, dates from 1873, and replaced the primitive link-and-pin mechanism that used to require brakemen to walk between moving cars and hold a long chain link in place as the couplers approached, and drop the pin into a hole through the link by hand. Many lost fingers, arms and lives doing it. With the buckeye coupler, you could pull the pin up with a levered rod that ran from a chain attached to an eye atop the pin over to the edge of the car, without stepping over the rail.

The other apparatus of concern to the brakeman switching cars is the air brake system. Each car has an air pipe running its length with a valve and heavy stiff rubber air hose at each end positioned just below the couplers. About three feet long, the air hoses screwed into the air pipe on the car end, and had a cast steel "head" on the other (loose) end with a 1.5-inch diameter opening facing one side through which air under pressure of 80 pounds per square inch pumped from the engine could pass. The heads' shapes allowed the brakeman to pick up the two loose hose ends, push their rubber-washered openings together side-to-side, and lower the pair down toward the track, causing a flange on each to nest (or screw) into a groove on the other, locking the two together into an airtight connection, with the hoses hanging down below the couplers joined together at a 90-degree angle. The ingenious element of the hoses is that when

the cars are uncoupled and pull apart, the hoses stretch back up into a straight line and the flange and groove disconnect from each other, allowing them to part without damage. The brakeman would open or close the valve (called the "angle cock") to let air pass through from the engine, or cut the flow from the engine when uncoupling.

Once stopped, the brakeman would turn the angle cock on the rear end of last of the drop cars, usually leaving the angle cock on the next car open so the air in the brake line would escape, setting the brakes on the train. Then he would signal the engineer to back up slightly to give him some slack to release the coupling pin, then he would yank up the pin and signal the engine to pull ahead. The still pressurized hoses would pop apart as the cars separated, giving off a huge "pfsssshtt" sound. You would hear the creaking as the brake rods moved and shoes on the now-engineless train set against the wheels. The brakeman would swing aboard the moving cars behind the engine, ride up to the switch and signal the hogger to stop. He would dismount, unlock and throw the switch, and then move his lantern or hand in a circular motion - the back-up signal. We would back the cars into the siding to be "spotted" in the right places for the shipper, usually under a grain chute or opposite a loading dock door.

<u>More Challenging - Getting Lined Up Properly</u>

Here is where it got interesting. If there were already cars in the siding that we were picking up, you could either go in and get them with the engine first, but then they ended up between the engine and the cars you were dropping off. Alternatively, you could take the cars in the train and use them to reach in and get the pick ups, come back out and back them down onto the main and put them on the train, and then go back in with just the drop off cars.

But more likely than not, some of the cars in the shipper's siding needed to stay where they were. Perhaps there would be five cars in there, and numbers 1, 3 and 4 were to stay and numbers 2 and 5 were to be picked up, and replaced with the first two cars on our train. What would the most efficient way be to pull 2 and 5 out and put your two "short" cars in there, in the right order, with the fewest moves?

I recall Jerry Coburn, a big friendly T&OC brakeman who liked western hats and discussing tennis strategy, telling me this process was like the old riddle about the man with a small boat who had to get a fox, duck and sack of wheat across a river, but could only take one at a time. He could not leave the fox alone with the duck, or the duck with the wheat, lest one be eaten by the other, but can leave the fox with the wheat unattended. How to do it? Take the duck across, leaving the fox and wheat together. Then come back and get the wheat, take it across, but bring the duck back. Then put the duck back ashore on the original side, bring the fox across, leave the fox with the wheat, row back empty, get the duck and bring him across and you are done. Most people do not get it because they do not think of taking the duck back the wrong way at the one point. But that is what works with the riddle and with railroad switching.

In the steam days, it was even more important to think through this process and organize into the fewest back and forth movements. While a diesel engine reverses with the pull of a small handle on the control panel, the reversing linkages on switching steam engines (especially little local and yard engines below the horsepower mandated by law in Ohio to have power reversing gear) had to be hand cranked between forward and reverse, requiring a lot of strength and stamina. Many a time the engineer and fireman would get "played out" on a hot day doing this, halting the work.

In addition to the complexity of getting the cars in the right order, there were many dangers to brakemen switching in shipper plants. Often the track was sharply curving, with a poorly-lit loading dock or wall alongside the curving lead. (Plus it seemed like we always ended up switching out these places at night in a thunderstorm or blizzard.) The track may have been laid in 1912 when 30-foot boxcars ruled the rails. A short car had ample room on the curve, but if you shoved a 50-footer in there, the ends would have adequate clearance from the wall, but the middle of the car would come right up against it. Since the end of the cars being pushed would be out of sight of the engine around the curve, the brakeman, flagman and conductor would array themselves along the side to relay signals to the engineer for fireman. A trainman walking along side could be crushed by the middle of an oversized car coming up against the wall if one were dispatched in there by mistake. Always consult timetable rules, which tediously list what engines and cars are allowed in each track of the customer's layout!

Also be on the lookout for things like a forklift ramp shoved in an open boxcar door along a loading dock. If you pull the boxcar, it will be a big mess, plus the ramp can take your head off when it goes by the place where you are standing to admire your work. Equally dangerous were packing materials or wads of sharp metal cargo wrapping straps that might be dragging from the side of a car.

After spotting the drop cars as instructed, and putting the not-ready-to-go cars back where they belonged, we would gather up our pick ups, pull back out on the main, throw and relock the switch (don't forget that last detail), back down on the train, recouple and link the air hoses, pump off the brakes, and get back on our way. All that from start to finish might take 45-60 minutes at one location. A single car drop or pickup might take five or ten. To be safe you had to avoid rushing it.

Dropping Cars - Railroading Gets Athletic

All the foregoing routine works very nicely if the points of the customer's switch off the main track aim toward the direction your train is traveling. (In railroad terms, a switch on a track that runs back behind you has "trailing points" and a switch for a track that runs off ahead of you has "facing points.") If you bring a train up to a facing points switch, and there is no place nearby to run around your drop-off and pickup cars to couple onto them with the front end of the engine, then you have no easy way to get

them in -- if you pull in with a car, the engine is ahead of it in the dead-end track and cannot get out, and if you run in to grab a car and bring it back out onto the main, then it is ahead of the locomotive for the continuation of your trip, not ideal.

On many short runs, we would just keep the drop cars for such facing points tracks for our return trip, and run around them farther up the line and drop them in on the way home when facing the right direction. However, on some trips this was impractical and we had to get the car in there somehow for the T&OC shipper's next shift. When this happened, our solution was a "flying drop," or as we called it just "dropping a car."

To do a drop, we would bleed off the air brakes of the car to be dropped so it would roll freely. (Another ingenious feature of the Westinghouse brake system is that each car has an air reservoir that if pressurized between zero and just under 80 pounds sets the brakes, but you can pull a rod on the side of the car to let all the air out, causing the brakes to go limp.) After testing the car's handbrake, we would back up 100-150 yards, and then speed toward the facing points switch (sometimes as best one could with a wheezing old SW7 or RS2). The conductor (best judgment, willing to own the mess if something went wrong) would be at the switch, flagman (senior brakeman) on the rear step or footboard of the engine to pull the pin when the car got up to speed, head brakeman (young, agile, stupid me) on the car up near the hand brake wheel. Once rolling, the flagman would pull the pin and give a highball to the hogger, who would speed up and race ahead of the free-rolling car to get the engine past the switch; as soon as the engine was clear of the points the conductor would "bend iron" - throwing the switch - and the car would roll down into the siding. The brakeman would set the hand brake quickly to stop the car before it got too far in and hit anything. The engine would then back up past the switch, reverse and go forward into the siding and couple onto the back end of car, now ahead of the engine, and spot where it belonged.

You could not do a drop just anywhere. You needed about 150 yards of clear track behind the switch and 75-100 yard past it on both the main and siding, free of highway or street grade crossings, and preferably a track level or sloping down toward your siding. It was time-consuming and at least a bit risky. I only recall doing it on the Eastern Branch Local between Bucyrus and Stanley, on the St. Marys at Russell's Point or Wapakoneta, and occasionally on the Western at the Akron Canton & Youngstown interchange near Arlington, Ohio and rarely at mine tracks near New Lexington.

We also did a much tamer "gravity drop" on the East Columbus Local north of 5th Avenue. On this move, we would position the caboose on the front of the train, pull down next to an industrial track switch on a steep grade on the main track, set the handbrake on the caboose, uncouple the engine and pull it into the industrial track. Then we would bleed off the air brakes on the caboose and cars, letting them roll free and run up against the caboose brake. The conductor would release the handbrake of the cabin and the train would roll quickly down the slope past the engine and across the Alum Creek Bridge; as soon as the train was across, the conductor set the brake before

it could reach Nelson Road. The flagman and engine crew would then bring the engine down and couple on to the rear end. With this move we were all set up with our engine on the proper end of the cars to switch out the big Albers warehouse just across Leonard and Woodland Avenues.

There was another move called a “dutch drop” about which I have read but never seen. In this fancy maneuver designed to get a car from behind to ahead of the engine, the crew set up as with a drop but this time using a trailing points switch. The engine would get the car rolling, uncouple from it and speed up and run past the switch, slamming on the brakes at that point and reversing; the conductor would throw the switch, and the engine would dart into the siding, with the conductor throwing the switch back allowing the rolling car to pass it, after which the engine would emerge from the siding and couple onto the back end of the car. The only apparent use for this extremely risky move might be to get a car in the right position for a drop-off farther up the line where it was impossible to do a regular “drop,” possibly due to a grade or other terrain. While the only danger on a regular “drop” would be a derailment if the conductor did not get the switch open fast enough, or possibly the dropped car not clearing fully into the siding if it had insufficient momentum, on a “dutch drop” you risked a live collision if the engine did not get clear quickly. I cannot imagine trying to reverse a steam engine fast enough to do this unless the car was 200 yards away rolling very slowly on sloping track. T&OC timetables and safety rules prohibited this move, most wisely.

<u>The Dreaded Pole</u>

If you dropped a car and it did quite get all the way into the siding it would foul the main so the engine could not get by. In that case you were stymied until help arrived with some other form of motive power (maybe an NYC maintenance dump truck with a chain) to move the car a few feet either into the siding or back past the switch where the engine could couple on and try the drop again. However, for these instances, some engines carried what we called the "beam" (or “pole”) in a steel slot outside the frame on one side. It was a wooden 6x6 about 15 feet long, rounded and pointy on the ends, which could enable the locomotive to push the car into the clear. A real nuisance to do, it took two able-bodied risk-takers to hold it in position. The engine had round metal “dimple” fittings or a flange socket welded on the corners of the frame to accommodate the easy end of the beam, but for the hard end it was often the devil's time finding a spot where it would grip correctly on the frame of car to be pushed. (It's tempting to use things like ladders and grab irons, but don't do it!) I only saw it once or twice but recall this being a sweaty job that took a good 25-30 minutes to complete. You would only drop a car when you were 100 percent sure it was going to work - without the pole.

The only NYC locomotives I remember that carried the beam were a few (rare on T&OC) Alco RS2s or RS3s. Some NYC long platform cabooses carried it, in a cradle on one side along the frame. I can imagine that dragging the beam forward from the caboose 15 car lengths on a steamy mosquito-filled night, struggling for footing in loose ballast, would

have seemed like carrying the Holy Cross up Calvary.

I read that in the early days of railroading, before air brakes and the advent of the yard hump, car classification was done using a pole. An arriving train would be dropped on a switching lead with the yard tracks veering off to one side, and a yard engine would pull up on a parallel track and the crew would use the pole to push cars into their assigned tracks. Now that is a hard way to make a living!

Your Reward for That Hard Work - Do It Again

The main memory I have of switching jobs is that your reward for a couple hours of hard work setting up an entire industrial facility like the Heinz bottling plant at Bowling Green, Whirlpool up north of Findlay, or Scottslawn at Marysville, was to ride five miles down the line and do it all over again at another place. But it gives you a terrific sense of accomplishment to get a job like that done right.

Our main limiting factor was the 16-hour maximum workday under the laws of the 1960s. As you might guess from the foregoing description of switching, if you handled two or three major locations, plus the more routine small drops and pick ups, and with the process of getting underway back at West Columbus, waiting for conflicting moves to pass so you could get out of side tracks back onto the main, plus the running time to get out and back, it was all you could do in a day.

[Done from notes and memory from 45 years ago - corrections and additions welcome.]