

Interview with Dr. George Mitchell
March 10, 1998 9:30 A.M.
Cork Medical Center
By: Russell Moran and Matt Davidson

MD What year did the National Road and U.S. 40 come through Marshall?

GM Well, according to that information that I have here, it was uh, back in 18....
1827.

MD All right, there was a commission to uh, decide on, uh like the Route 40
commission?

GM Uh, I don't...a commission you say?

MD Like a committee?

GM What do you mean now?

MD Um, some kind of meeting, like to decide on what, something about the
making of the parallels of the National Road?

GM I don't know what you mean by a commission exactly. If it had to do with
locating the roads you mean or something to that sort.

MD Uh yeah.

RM Like the safety of the roads?

GM Are you talking about the safety of it?

MD Yeah!

RM Yeah!

GM Well that's, that was uh, where I was involved is that what you're meaning?

MD Uh huh.

GM Well that was back in uh, umm, 'bout uh, middle of 1960's. Probably 1967,
somewhere along in there I don't know exactly, I'd have to look up the records.
But that was after um, to go back a little bit, the original National Road, Route 40,
it was not known as Route 40 then, it was the National Road, or the Cumberland
Trail was also 'nother, another name for it. It was the first Federal highway that
was ever constructed in the United States, and originally it went right through

downtown Marshall, and then later on in the 19, the early 1950's they relocated it, built a new Route 40 which paralleled the old 40 in most places that the bypassed all of the towns along the Route 40, so they didn't, the, traffic didn't go up through the main part of the city along the way, uhuh, so then, uh, in 19, in the 1960's, uh, they uh, started working on the Interstate Highway System. Uh, Route 70 which, paralleled Route 40, through the country, and uh (Do you want to shut that door there?) the, uh, so, it's in that, at that time, that the Route 40, or Route 70 had been completed from, uh, St. Louis across the western part of the state, as far east as Montrose, Illinois, which is approximately 50 miles, it's just this side of Effingham, about 50 miles of Marshall. Uh, on the other end of east, coming from the east they completed Route 70 all the way across, and across the state of Indiana, clear up to the state line. So there's a gap of 50 miles or so between one end on the east and the other end on the west. The interstate highway was a four lane, uh, highway that was, um, uh, Route 40 was a two lane highway and, uh, so this traffic coming from both directions is coming off of a four lane road onto a two lane road. So, we started having a awful lot of accidents. A lot of s-s-serious accidents on Route 40 because of this traffic pouring in and people didn't realize, a lot of people didn't realize they'd gone from a four lane to a two lane road, so, they were doing a lot of passing in the wrong place. Furthermore, they, uh, Route 40 when it was completed that is what we call new 40. Uh, on this highway, they didn't have any no passing zones, there was no lines on the pavement denoting no passing, there were no signs, and so, people, they were just running into each other all over the place. So that, I got involved in this as a doctor because I was treating a lot of these people that were injured and, and, pronouncing a lot of these people dead that had been killed in these accidents. (Cough), and they had had an accident about this west of Marshall on 40, and her husband told me that, I asked him what happened he said well he was from Ohio, and they were going west and they got out just west of Marshall, there was some slow traffic ahead of him when he's, there's a couple of trucks, he said I looked to see if there was a no passing sign or marked as a no passing zone, and it wasn't marked so I assumed that was safe, and said I pulled out to pass these trucks, and just as I got committed, out in the passing lane, there was a car popped up over the hill, mm, right in front of me, coming toward me and he said I swerved to the left to avoid a collision, my wife didn't have her seat belt on, she was rather heavy lady, and she, through her against the door and it popped open, she fell out on the pavement and the car ran over her and killed her. So that night I wrote a letter to the governor telling him there is something that needs to be done about this. There are too many people getting serious injured or killed because of the lack of the markings on the pavement, the no passing zones, and that uh, something needed to be done about it. Uh, I got a call from Springfield, uh, later, and the, uhss, the head of the Highway Department said that the, he, governor had given him a letter and he suggested that I talk to the Highway Department in Paris, District 5, about this and I said I've already done that and, I'm, haven't gotten any satisfaction I said what I want is to have a meeting here in Marshall and I want you or somebody with some authority from Springfield to be at that meeting. He said that you mean you want to have a hearing, I said if that's what you call it, that's what I

want to do. He says, we've never done that before and I said well, it's about time you do. So he agreed, and so we set up a meeting and got the word out by, just by word of mouth, and it was on a Thursday, at um, Tom's Restaurant in the dining room. (Cough), and I got to the meeting and the room was filled with people, the chairs were all filled, people were standing up, the man from Springfield was there, the head of the Highway Department of District 5 was there, and I'd arranged to have John Lewis, who was in the state legislature there, also I had the, the Captain of the State Police in District 12, which is this area, and also had the press there to cover this. And the meeting went on for about two or three hours. And everybody got up and different ones told about the problems that we'd had and how that they'd been involved and other friends of theirs had been involved and it was...and it was a good meeting. Well after the meeting we took these people on a trip out uh toward the state line just to show them what was going on and it was about the time that uh we had increased traffic from Terre Haute, people coming uh home from work. And I knew that that was going to be the case so the driver of the vehicle would pull over to the place where there was...was coming to a hill or someplace where the...the line of sight was obscured and about that time a car would pop over the hill and he'd swerve back into the right lane to avoid a collision. It didn't take but about two or three of these uh things or two or three of these uh...uh what's uh, uh, the, uh, one uh, men from Springfield, a man from Springfield says that you don't need to do that anymore 'cause he says I can see. He was scared. So he came back to Marshall and he instructed the... Chief uh, Engineer from Paris to have a man out the next day to review...to check the whole highway and see where they need to put up signs. And he told him, he says he don't need to go by the book, he says just use your good judgement. The next morning I (cough), was going to the hospital to Terre Haute, and I saw a man out their with a, pushing a wheel down the center of the pavement measuring the distances, so it wasn't long 'till they had the no passing zones marked. So this uh, slowed down some of the accidents that we're, cut back on some of the accidents that we'd never..., that we'd had before, but it's still, we're still, we're getting too many, and too many people being killed, so that's uh, when we decided that we ought to do something else, so I thought the best to do was to uh, get up a petition to the governor, and uh, Tom Komerford who was from Martinsville was editor of the Martinsville Planet, was a good friend of mine and he'd been writing editorials in the paper about this situation, so I called him and asked him if he'd join me in this and he said he'd be happy to do it. So he printed the petitions and we got the word out, and people came in and asked if they could carry petitions. And uh, we had s-s-scattered all over the county. And uh, the only requirement was that the person, who signed that petition had to be a registered voter in the state, err, voting age in the state of Illinois. And (cough), it wasn't long 'till we had accumulated a tremendous number of, uh, signatures, (cough). One other thing we did, we printed some cards and uh, had those in all the filling stations, (cough), and restaurants along highway 40 clear across this 50 mile stretch, and it gave people from out of our territory, and our area an opportunity to make some comments about the...uh, safety on, or about Route 40. Uh, they could check off it's....it's a great road, it's

uh, a lousy road, and so forth and so on. So we collected all those cards, in the meantime the newspapers and the television people got into the act, they heard of what was going on so we had excellent newspaper coverage, uh, television stations, uh, Channel 2, and uh, Channel 10, um, Channel 3 from Champaign, uh, one day they came down and did an interview with me out, went out with Route 40 where we had an accident just that day out at 6th and Route 40. Uh, we did a 15-minute program on Channel 2. There's a panel discussion of, uh...uh, Tom Komerford and me, and uh, the uh, representative from the television station and that was put on Prime Time on Saturday night, and so we got a lot of, a lot of coverage all over the whole area, and everybody supporting it. So we collected all these p-p-petitions, and then we'd, or o-our plan was to go to Springfield and present this to the governor and so uh, (chuckle), we raised for a meeting, and instead of taking a whole mob of people up there we gathered together a-a-a representative, a group of about a dozen people, that's from different, uh, like housewives and farmers and other...business men, and...and that sort of thing. (Cough) And uh, we took these petitions and made a ribbon we put them together like a big long ribbon is, I think it was about 60 feet long. We had I think eight thousand, uh, signatures. And then we had all these cards, we had a stack of those cards is about almost two feet high. And the comments were not very...uh, complimentary, uh, people from out of the state had made, they were, they were right on, right on target. So the night before (cough) we went to Springfield, we went out to the Eddington's place of, w-w-where they take the wrecks and we had the television people there and unfortunately

t-t-that day there had been, I think there was three or maybe four women in a small car that had hit the bridge out at Big Creek and all of them were killed, and they had this car on the boom of a wrecker, this small car used as a backdrop and uh, got pictures and television coverage. Went to Springfield the next day... and uh, the governor didn't meet with but he had his-his assistant met with us, and uh T-Tom Comaford arranged with the associated press to have a reporter and a photographer there, and so we had this meeting in a lot of the hearing rooms at the capital (cough), and they had all the big guns out to shoot us down. The top people in the transportation department and others, and uh they were going to do us in, but they didn't do it, and uh we really laid it on them, and th-we had a picture which would represented this petition to the governor's man, and we had that s-s-strong out there that fifty foot uh ribbon of petitions, and uh, the next day the story hit the national press it was in, uh, the Chicago newspapers, St. Louis newspapers, all over the, this area, a full column, telling about all the horrible things that had happened to people on Route 40 and how dangerous it was, and the state had told us that day at that hearings, it said well there wasn't anything they could do about it, it would be at least three years before they could, s..., do anything about it, and uh, so this was all covered at (cough), and along with a picture, and the, uh, papers and uh, so I was in Terre Haute, uh, that evening, uh, had a delivery, and... u, I-I'd just completed a delivery and I was paged, I went to the phone, and it was the governor's office, and it told us that uh, uh, told me that, uh, the governor had an announcement he was going to make and that I would be pleased with it, he couldn't tell me what it was but it w..., he knew that I would be

happy. The next day it was in the (cough) paper, the governor made his announcement, he said they were going to have a crash program to finish this interstate 70, in this 50 mile stretch, and he started letting contracts two weeks later, so we got that done, well in the meantime we still had Route 40 to deal with. So then the state decided that th-th...then one of the things we did though was, I'd talked to the highway department, again th-they were hard to talk to. But I...they had the no passing zones marked but, I suggested that they put a large...signs at each end letting people know that this was a two lane highway, that they were g-g-going to be, uh, traveling on. And also to put no passing zones or signs on the left-hand side of the pavement, instead of on the right, and make them large, uh, and so, they did and they put those signs up I think they were about four feet by four feet with big letters, NO PASSING. They put them on the left side, hand side, of the-the pavement. Today that's a common practice if you'll notice that all the no passing signs are on the left-hand side of that pavement now. Because if you're going into the passing lane and there's some trucks or something ahead of you, you can't see the sign on the right-hand side. You gotta have it on the side where you can see. So uh, so then they decided that uh, this is the nost...most dangerous stretch of pavement in the state, so they got a grant from the Federal Government to set up a, an, a committee, uh, to study these fatal accidents. They called it the Fatal Accident Investigating Team and they had, they asked me to serve as a doctor so I couldn't turn them down because (chuckle) I'd been creating so much trouble for them, and uh, then they had specially trained state policemen, uh, specially trained, uh, highway engineers, they had an automobile mechanic that was a, uh...that was, knew what he was doing, uh, a psychologist and a photographer. And we were given a identification card to carry with us, and uh, then, uh, we, they didn't have any...pers...they'd never done this before so we had to develop our own protocols of how to and what we want to do in an investigation. So then they...the way it worked, the state police headquarters in Effingham would call us when there was a fatal accident or they might be, er, consider fatal accident, regardless of what time of day or night it was and then we all went to the scene of the accident immediately regardless of weather, sometimes it was sleeting, sometimes it was snowing, sometimes it was storming, and the most, a lot of those accidents of course happened in the middle of the night, and as we covered this whole 50 mile stretch, and...the...way that we had it set up they were not to move any of the wreckage, or move a body if the person was dead, but to remove the injured to get them out as quickly as possible and get 'em to the hospital, and leave everything set just the way it was, 'till we got there. And all I did was my protocol was to, uh, uh, get a autopsy, complete autopsy on each dead driver. Uh, complete toxicology study, the stomach contents and blood, and uh, took pieces of liver t-tissue, uh, to check, and uh, so we, we did that for, oh I guess it was almost three years...and it, about two years I guess it was. And it was a, it was, it was a really quite an experience, I mean because you saw everything, and uh, 50 percent as I recall, it...t-the one thing that we weren't permitted to do was to release any of the findings that we had, we had to all go into Springfield, and that was to protect us from being sued, or being, uh, called in to appear at a trial, and uh, everything was sealed but it was, but I'd say...as I

recall, it was 50 percent of those that was alcohol involved, and, and another thing, a very few people were wearing seatbelts, uh, we saw a lot of gruesome stuff, so that's, that's what you're referring to about this commission it's a, it's a long drawn out story but that's the way it happened. So then Interstate 70 was completed and things were much improved as far as safety is concerned.

MD Okay, uh, alright, um, this is a little further back, uh do you know if, this is way off the subject, but did Marshall grow up around the National Road?

GM (Clear throat) Well, 'course I wasn't here (chuckle), but according to history, Marshall was already here, not as big as it is now when the National Road came through, and uh, it goes...it went right down Archer Avenue, as they call it now, it was Main Street then, and of course it did grow up around it, but the original town was, was just a village then it was not very big so it did grow I guess it seemed like, could say it grew around Route, uh, 40, or the National Road.

MD What was the National Road originally built of?

GM I beg your pardon?

MD What was it originally constructed of?

GM What was it originally constructed of? Well, mainly they just graded it up, and uh, with uh, with the dirt and then they, uh, had some rock, and uh, some of it was uh, what they called a corduroy road. Do you know what a corduroy road is? (Russell Moran and Matt Davidson nodded no in the background.) They cut trees, not big trees particularly but medium size trees, and laid them crossways, of, of the road, so that you're riding on, on that-s, that bumpy...that's the reason they call it corduroy.

MD Um, who funded the construction of the National Road?

GM Federal government.

MD Federal government.

GM The original, uhuh, it was a federal...

MD Do you know how much it would have cost them?

GM I think I can tell you that here in just a minute (looking through pamphlet). There's a lot of stuff in this...(pages turning)...uh...(pages turning)...the total cost of, about, that's for the total road from Cumberland, Maryland to Vandalia, Illinois, it was estimated about 7 billion dollars.

MD 7 billion!

RM Pretty impressive numbers!

MD Did they have, uh, local people work on it or did they have crews come in to...?

GM Well I, uh, I'm sure that they had uh...a good, most of the people were local people that worked on it, uh, (cleared throat) and uh, 'course they had, were supervised by the federal people.

MD Is that the same on the Route 40 too?

GM I beg your pardon?

MD Is that the same, uh, people, or the people, uh, from the city?

GM Well...(papers turning)...when, you mean when, later when, you mean after it was uh, constructed and later on the years when it became Route 40. It didn't become, it didn't become Route 40 until uh, I can't remember now, but s-s-s not, it's probably been within the last 65 or 70 years. I think as I recall it originally was Route 11, I believe, I'm not sure. But at, uh, that time and it was dirt...are you talking about when they paved it?

MD Yeah

GM Well that, that was uh, done in about, Route 40 was paved in about, uh, 1920. Uh, and course there were a lot of local people worked on it, but it was a, the uh, company that c-constructed it through this area was the Hayworth Construction Company. I remember that, and uh, but they'd, th-they had their engineers and their foremen and, you know, supervisor people that was there contract, but they hired local people to work.

MD Alright, um, back then did they have, uh, speed limits?

GM No! No sir, there was no speed limit up until about, oh...it's probably in the 19...late 1940's 1950's. I don't know the exact time, but for a long time there was no speed limit.

RM How fast did cars go back then, I mean?

GM Oh, they could go 80 miles an hour...faster. When I was in high school, I know that I-I'd ridden a lot of times with this guy, that...75-80 mile an hour.

MD Was there a lot of traffic?

GM Back in the (leaned back in his chair) earlier days, there was considerable traffic but not...the traffic really began to build, I'd say, along in the 19, or late 1950's and 60's, as I recall.

MD When they started having problems with accidents and things, how many, how many accidents happened?

GM You mean early on?

MD Uhuh.

GM (Cleared throat) Back in those days they didn't have too many. Of course it, cars, in the early days a car didn't go very fast, Model-T Fords, and uh, um...35-40 mile an hour so you didn't have a lot of bad accidents, but I, as I recall it, uh, back in the 1920's 1930's, uh, of course in the early 40's the war was going on so there was-s-s traffic and gasoline was rationed so, there wasn't, uh, too much traffic. Uh this, uh, so the accident rate was low.

MD Alright, uh, this is the last real question. Do you know any interesting stories about Route 40 that would interest anybody?

GM About Route 40?

MD Yeah.

GM Well, I remember, uh, I can remember when Route 40 was, before it was paved. When it was, uh, primarily a dirt road, it did have some gravel on it, but in the wintertime it was almost impassible. Either the snow, freezing and thawing, and to go from here to Terre Haute was quite a tr, quite a trial. It was quite a deal. Uh, there wasn't very much traffic. Uh, uh, out east or Big Creek there by the pumping station, the water pumping station. You know where that is, just east of Marshall. You go out on the 49, and you go east and you look off to your, you know where Big Creek is?

MD Uhuh

GM You look off to the left you see that building down there, that's where our water comes from. Well-that-that-that's where 40 used to go it went, that was the Old 40, the original National Road, crossed right there, went through Livingston (cleared throat), and uh, they had a covered bridge there, old wooden covered bridge like they have up in Clark County that the covered...that everybody goes to see. And I don't remember this but, I do remember that one out there but there was also a covered bridge over Mill Creek west of Marshall, and uh, so when they started to pave Route 40 or the National Road it was stalled, it wasn't known as Route 40 then it was the National Road, uh, this construction, the Hayworth Construction Company did the work and they had their, what they called their

yard, south of where the White Plant is now at Marshall down where Clark Service use to have their place down, right on the railroad track, w-w-where the railroad track used to run. And that's where they had all their equipment, uh, their sand, gravel, and cement, and everything they, n-needed, and their forms that used to building the highway. And then in order to get that, all that material in e-everything to the site where th-the-they were doing the work, the had what we called a (chuckle), used to call it a dinky train. And they laid railroad tracks, narrow gauge railroad tracks. It was just like a toy train, you know ya...how you put the pieces together, and they'd lay that out, starting where they'd...here and then they kept working, that way along as-as the pavement was, was put in, they'd go right along and the, and they bring all that material out in rail...cars that had a little gasoline engine that pulled 'em, and that's the way they carried the material out there, and then they'd, uh, they had a cement mixer on the site. Uh, they didn't have bulldozers and all that fancy equipment at that time. (END OF SIDE 1 ON CASSETTE)

(BEGINNING OF SIDE 2 ON CASSETTE) They had, uh, steam piledrivers, that uh, drove the piling, that uh, where they put the bridges in. Uh, they used what we call s-sip-scrape-scrapers, uh, it's-s like a, I don't know if you ever saw one they got handles on them and they're metal, uh...scoop. A-It's-a the handles are attached to, and then they'd, they would pull that, uh, team of horses and they'd move the dirt that way, they'd dig it out and move it, uh, and they, they um, as I said a lot of it's done by hand, those shovels and picks, and uh, then they uh, uh, would mix the concrete on the site, of a s-steam powered concrete mixer. They had their forums that they put down, and they'd the, uh, material spread in the bottom, the sand and gravel that they'd put the concrete over, and they had reinforcing rods that they put in, just like they do now, so they built that all the way to the state line, and, and on west, in this area out towards Martinsville and Casey. And uh, then after they completed that, uh, a year or so later they put in Route 1, uh, going south and north. But the National Road was first, and uh, they employed a lot of people (cleared throat), a lot of people. And uh, it was a, I think the original road was 16 feet, 16 foot pavement. Then later years back in about 19, in the 1930's I think it was, they decided to widen this road, so they laid a, I think a two-foot strip on each side of it. And then, then, they'd the-the-they'd covered it or laid brick, put brick over it and had a brick surfaced, uh, highway. And uh, but that was in the 1930's. That was done. And uh, but this uh, this road has a lot of history, uh this, what I'm gonna give you here has a lot of information in it about, on how it started, and how wide the right-of-way was and all this sort of thing. But another thing they added, I-I don't recall in this area here, but over in Indiana, and most of the road, an-and-and perhaps here in the early days, it was a toll road, and uh, they had toll houses about every, ha-, 10-15 miles. And uh, they had a big wooden arm that went down across the road, you came to that then you had to stop and pay the, pay the toll before they'd let you go by. And I think that's where the toll-house cookie got it's name, because they had toll houses at each place and the, the man who collected the toll and his family lived in the tollhouse. And uh, of course this was, opened up to the west, uh, people coming,

(10)

immigrants coming from the, from the east in covered wagons, and uh, all their belongings going to the west, looking for a better place, uh, my mothers was raised along (cleared throat) the National Road born in Indiana (cleared throat), central part of Indiana, and uh, she remembers seeing these, uh, people going by on their, in their covered wagons, and their families and their livestock would be driven along the side, uh, going west, so uh, but it was uh, it was quite, quite a project it, to get this done. This uh, Old Stone Arch Bridge out there west of town where we live is, was uh, built at that time, and according to story it uh, that all the...uh, stone, that was put in that bridge was brought down from northern Indiana on a barge and then it was hauled over to the site by oxen, ox teams. And the stone, the stones were all cut and fitted together with a keystone at the top, it's an arch, and there's not mortar in there. They're all fit tight against each other, and it's been there since it was built in the, uh, early part of the, uh, 1800's. And it still carries traffic, uh, so uh; it's a good bridge. Got any other questions?

MD Umm, no I think that'll be it.

RM Um, no that's...

GM I'll have my secretary make a copy this, (shuffling papers) and you can dig up some more information from this.

RM Yeah, alright.

This was transcribed by Russell Moran, Matt Davidson, and Zack Werkheiser.