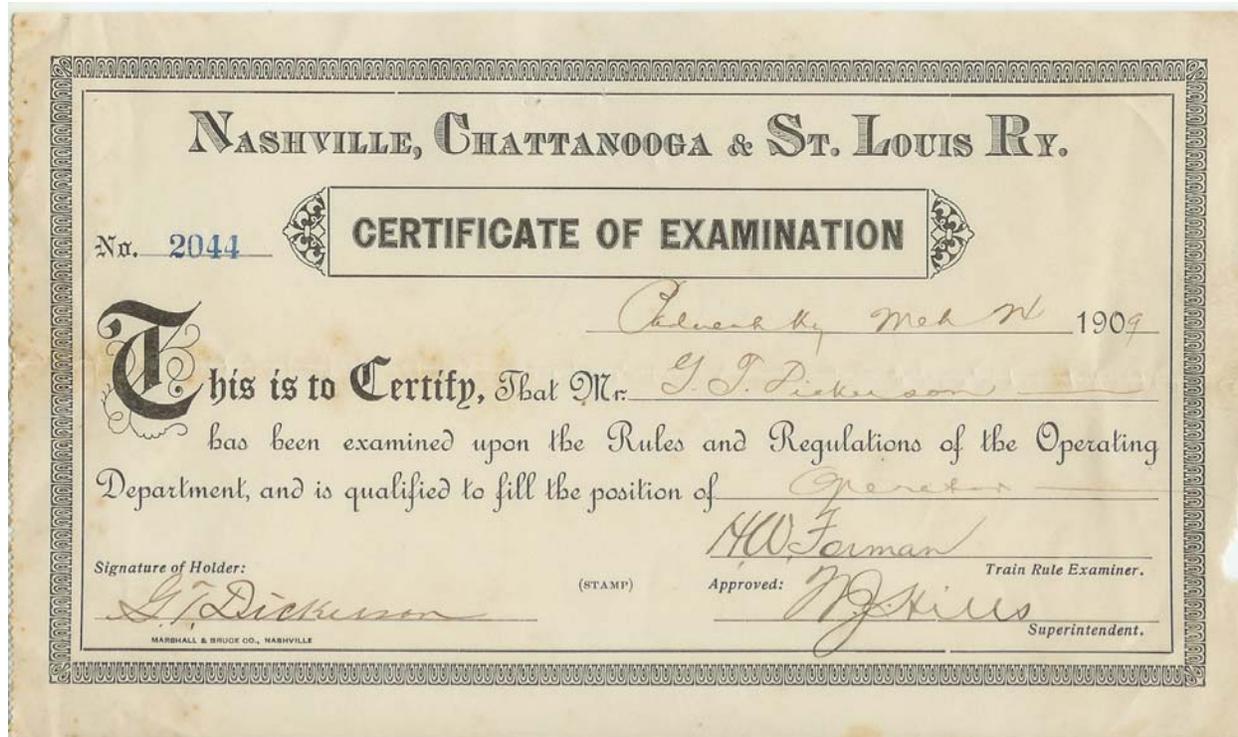


George Thomas Dickerson
Railroad Telegrapher and Freight Agent, NC&StL
October 11, 1876 - April 19, 1943

George T. Dickerson was the son of William H. and Martha J. (Baley) Dickerson. He was born in Tennessee on October 11, 1876 and lived in western Tennessee all of his life. On November 28, 1897, he married Ellen Jackson Brewer, the daughter of James W. and Mary Ann (McCall) Brewer, in Buena Vista, Tennessee. In the 1900 Federal Census, they were still living in Carroll County where Ellen was incorrectly listed as "Hellen J." By this time, they were the parents of James Leon Dickerson who was born on February 18, 1899, and had included George's mother, Martha J, as part of their household since William H. had died around 1898 at the age of 45. George was listed as a farmer.

Sometime during the early 1900's, George went to work for the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad (NC&StL). In 1909, he took and passed the



examination to become a Railroad Telegraph Operator. During this period, he and Ellen had three more children: Wilbur Horace on December 7, 1901; Kate on September 19, 1904; and Deroy Odell on January 1, 1909. A final child, Birdene, was born on July 19, 1911.

Sometime after passing his examination, George became a member of The Order of Railroad Telegraphers (ORT). This union was a part of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) along with several railroad labor groups. On October 26, 1910, George applied for Life Insurance through the ORT's Mutual Benefit Department and was accepted on November 14, 1910. The certificate consisted of a nicely engraved cover page (below),



and an application page shown below.

INSTRUCTIONS

All questions must be answered. Chest measurements should be taken just under the arms and under the vest, first with breath all exhausted, making it small as possible, and then with lungs filled, making it as large as possible. Count number of times that you breathe per minute and rate of pulse carefully for answers to questions 32 and 33. Exact figures must be given in answer to these and 34. The word "normal" or "regular" is not sufficient. If you cannot give correct replies to Nos. 32, 33 and 34, ask your physician. Don't make a mistake in replying to No. 22. Write reply to each question in full. Ditto ("") marks will not answer. Do not fail to date and sign with address.

FEES FOR CERTIFICATE

The fees for Certificates of Membership in the Mutual Benefit Department are as follows. No application will be considered unless it is accompanied with the prescribed fee:

Series A, limited to \$50, members not over sixty years of age eligible, \$1.00.
 Series B, limited to \$300, members not over fifty years of age, \$1.00.
 Series C, limited to \$1,000, members not over forty-five years of age, \$1.00.

No member can hold more than one certificate, but he may exchange it at any time for a certificate in a lower series by making written application, provided all assessments are paid. Any member eligible to a higher series may exchange at any time, provided he is in satisfactory physical condition, by filing a regular application, and if the application for a new certificate is rejected, the old one will remain in full force and effect. The old certificate must always be returned with application for exchange.

APPLICATION

SEE INSTRUCTIONS ABOVE BEFORE FILLING OUT.

I, the undersigned, hereby apply for membership in the Mutual Benefit Department of the Order of Railroad Telegraphers, and enclose herewith the membership fee, which I understand must be paid before I can become a member.

1. Name in full: George H. Johnson Age 36
 2. Date of Birth: 1876
 3. Have you ever forfeited membership in the Mutual Benefit Department of the Order of Railroad Telegraphers?
 4. Married, Single or Widower? Married
 5. Do you now carry insurance? If so, what amount? 1000
 In what companies? 1st Nat. Bk. & Tr. Co.
 6. Has any application for insurance upon your life ever been made to any company or agent upon which a policy has not been issued?
 7. If so, give reasons why not issued.
 8. Total amount of insurance wanted. \$ 5000
 9. To whom payable?
 (If in wife, give her name in preference to your own.)
5000 Wife
 Residence of Beneficiary Huron and Iowa

10. Have either of your grandparents, parents, brothers or sisters been afflicted with Consumption, Cancer, Insanity, or other hereditary disease?
 11. If so, give full particulars and date of death.

Is your father living?	Ans.	Age if Living	State of Health	Age at Death	Cause of Death	How Long Sick
Is your mother living?	Ans.					
How many brothers are living?	Ans.					
How many sisters are living?	Ans.					

12. Have you ever had any of the following diseases? (Answer yes or no to each. Do not use ditto ("") marks.)

Disease of the Heart?	Asthma?	17. Have you ever been subject to a Chronic Cough, Expectoration or Difficulty of Breathing?
" " Lungs?	Bronchitis?	18. Are you Engaged?
" " Liver?	Convulsions?	19. If so, do you wear a truss?
" " Stomach?	Erysipelas?	20. Have you any Ulcers, Tumors, Skin Diseases, Piles, or local ailments of any kind on any part of your body?
" " Bowels?	Fistula?	21. Have you any Disorder, Infirmary or Weakness?
" " Kidneys?	Gonorrhea?	22. Are you now in good health, free from symptoms of disease, and do you usually have good health?
" " Bladder?	Scrofula?	23. Is there anything to your knowledge or belief in your physical condition or personal habits tending to shorten your life which is not distinctly set forth above?
Raising of Blood?	Varicose Veins?	24. Have you ever had any serious illness or personal injury from the effects of which you have not fully recovered?
Frequent Dizziness?	Palpitation?	25. If so, give full particulars.
Pleurisy?	Sunstroke?	

If any part of this question is answered in the affirmative, explain fully.

16. Have you ever had Rheumatism?
 Muscular or Inflammatory?
 How long ago?
 Describe fully?
 Give name and address of attending physician.

26. Has there been any change in your weight during the past year?
 27. If so, has it increased or decreased, and how much?
 28. To what extent do you use alcoholic stimulants?
 29. Do you use opium or any other narcotics?
 30. Name and address of your usual physician:

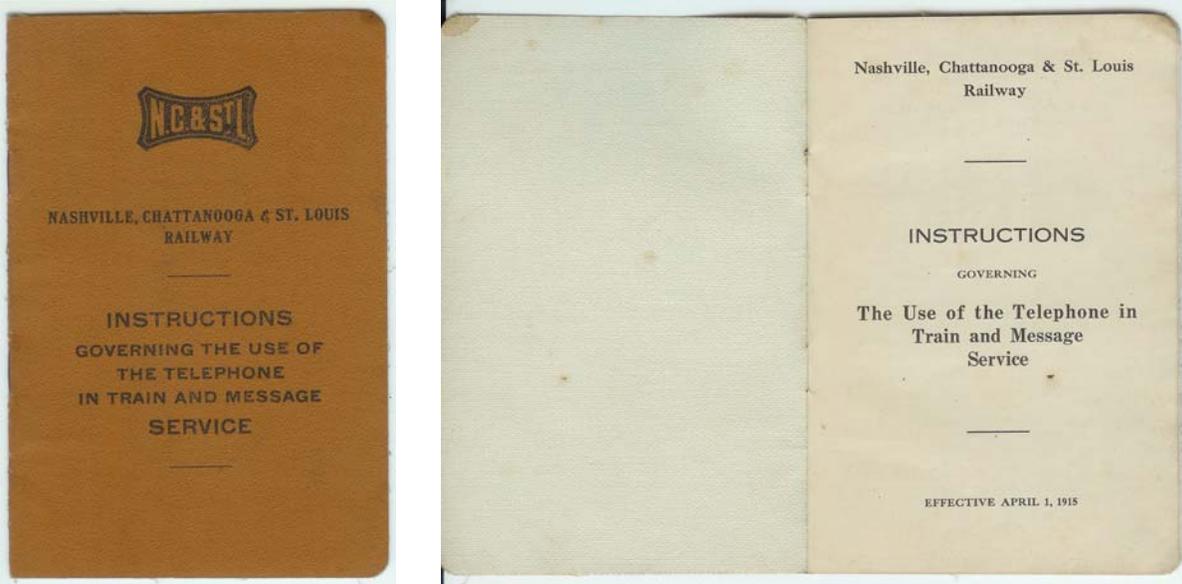
31. Weight 125 Height 5 ft 7 in
 32. Number of Respiration per minute 16
 33. Rate of pulse per minute 74
 34. Chest measurement. [See instructions above.]
 Forced expiration 34 1/2 inches
 Forced inspiration 36 inches

It is hereby Covenanted, Declared and Agreed, that all the statements and answers contained in this application for membership shall, together with the laws governing the Mutual Benefit Department of the Order of Railroad Telegraphers, now in force, or which may be legally adopted hereafter, be the basis, and form a part of the contract between the applicant and the said Mutual Benefit Department, and any hereby executed to be true, and any certificate which may be issued upon this application by said Department shall be accepted upon the express condition that if any of the statements or answers in this application are untrue, or if any violation of any covenant, condition or restriction of the said certificate or of the Constitution, Statutes and laws of the said Order, governing the said Department which are now in force or which may be adopted hereafter, shall occur, then the said certificate shall be null and void and membership in the said Mutual Benefit Department, together with all right to any benefit therein, shall be forfeited, and that if payment for such and every assessment is not received by the Executive within the time limit specified in the laws of the said Mutual Benefit Department at that time, membership in the said Mutual Benefit Department, and all right to any benefit therein, is forfeited; it is further agreed that any remittance may be applied for payment of any previous unpaid assessments that may be due, under the conditions herein stated; and it is further agreed that the sending of any notice of assessment shall not constitute, or be considered as, a waiver of any previous unpaid assessments. It is further agreed that in any question, which may arise which is not expressly provided for in the laws governing the said Mutual Benefit Department, whether it be a claim for benefit or other question, the decision of the Executive Head of the said Mutual Benefit Department, or specified in its laws at that time, will, unless reversed by such authority or authorities as may then be provided in the laws governing said Mutual Benefit Department, be accepted as final.

Signature George H. Johnson
 Address Huron and Iowa
 Date Oct 26 1906

This page provided a lot of personal detail about George that had been lost to history such as physical size and family health history.

By 1915, the NC&StL was already modernizing its communications to the point that an “INSTRUCTIONS Governing The Use of the Telephone in Train and Message Service” was published.



During World War I, the nation’s railroads were taken over by the government to ensure maximum effort and efficiency instead of competition. As a result, railroad unions had to deal directly with the United States Railroad Administration.



During this period, in addition to membership cards, the ORT was using ciphers to communicate with their members.



George did not keep the cipher for these two documents, but he wrote the answers on the July to December slip as "Justice" and "Liberty." Therefore, eleven of the 26 letters for the 1918 Key can be known; A=c, C=e, G=u, H=y, M=t, N=i, P=l, Q=j, V=s, W=r, and Y=b. Using the method of Frequency Analysis and these known letters, the January to June password would be deciphered as "Patriotism" and the wire test would be "Hope."

The Order of Telegraph Operators issued their "Unwritten Work" letter in 1917.

Form 131-9-17

UNWRITTEN WORK.

CHALLENGE.

Mb aoxpperse x kewvbr mb xvacwmxnz oc yc x iciyew bz moc bwecw hbg lnpp wgy moc mbk bz hbgw abppxw lnmo moc nreuc znrsew bz hbgw wnsom oxre. Nz x iciyew oc lnpp wcvkbre yh wgyynrs moc aonr lnmo moc pezm nreuc znrsew.

GRIP.

Moc swnk nv ixec yh moc swxyknrs bz wnsom oxrev lnmo mogiyv apbvaph kwcvvce mbsemocw xre ixfars moc pemmcw "I" br yxaf bz oxre lnmo moc mogiy.

DIVISION CARD.

The Division Card should always be asked for as a further proof of membership, and should not be recognized unless fully up to date.

X iciyew xkkwbxaonrs xrbmoev iciyew, lob nv x vmwxrsew, nr, kwvermnrns onv axwe lnpp vxh: "Lnpp hbg pbbf xm monv." Xzmcw nrv keamnrns moc axwe, nz nr kwbkew zbwi xre gk-mb-exmc moc iciyew weacnjrs moc axwe lnpp vxh: "Kxvv." Moc iciyew kwvermnrns moc axwe lnpp moer rxic moc znwvm pemmcw bz moc agwwerm kxvvlbwe; moc iciyew weacnjrs moc axwe lnpp ere yh rxinrs moc pxvm pemmcw bz moc agwwerm kxvvlbwe.

TO GAIN ADMITTANCE TO DIVISION ROOM.

Moc bgmvnec vermnrcp gkbr xrh xpxwi xm moc bgmcw ebbw, lnpp xeinm hbg mb moc xrmewbbi loewogkbr hbg lnpp xejxrac xre ixfc moc pemmcw "H" br moc nrrew ebbw. The Inside Sentinel will open the wicket and if satisfied will ask from you the password, and if correct will admit you to the Division room, when you will advance to the altar, salute the Chief Telegrapher by extending the right arm parallel with the body, bringing hand to forehead, then drop to side. The Chief Telegrapher will respond in the same manner, when you will take your seat, always remembering not to pass between the altar and the Chief Telegrapher, unless given permission to so do by him.

WIRE TEST AND PASSWORD.

The password and wire test are changed semi-annually.

WIRE TEST.

Nr gvnrs moc lnwe mevm, moc iciyew aoxppersnrs, lnpp snjc moc lnwe mevm lbwe xre moc iciyew aoxpperse lnpp wcvkbre lnmo moc znsgevc bz moc exh bz moc ibrmo. Moc iciyew aoxppersnrs lnpp moer ixfc moc pemmcw "B" xre moc iciyew aoxpperse moc pemmcw "F."

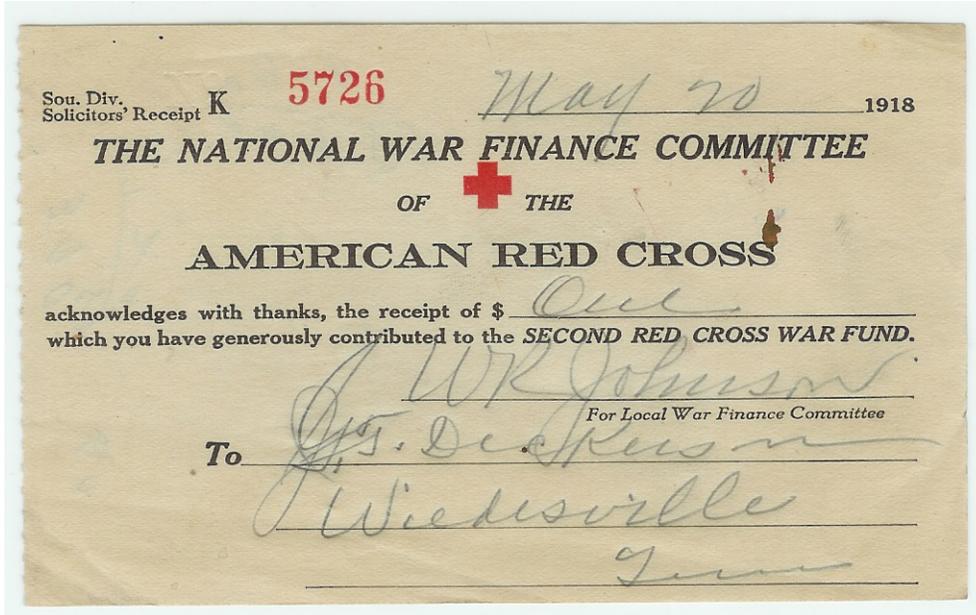
WHO ARE ALLOWED TO SIT IN DIVISION MEETINGS.

A member of any Division will be allowed to sit and participate in the doings of his own Division without the current card and password sixty days after the commencement of the semi-annual dues period and no longer, after which time they will be excluded until they possess the password and current card.

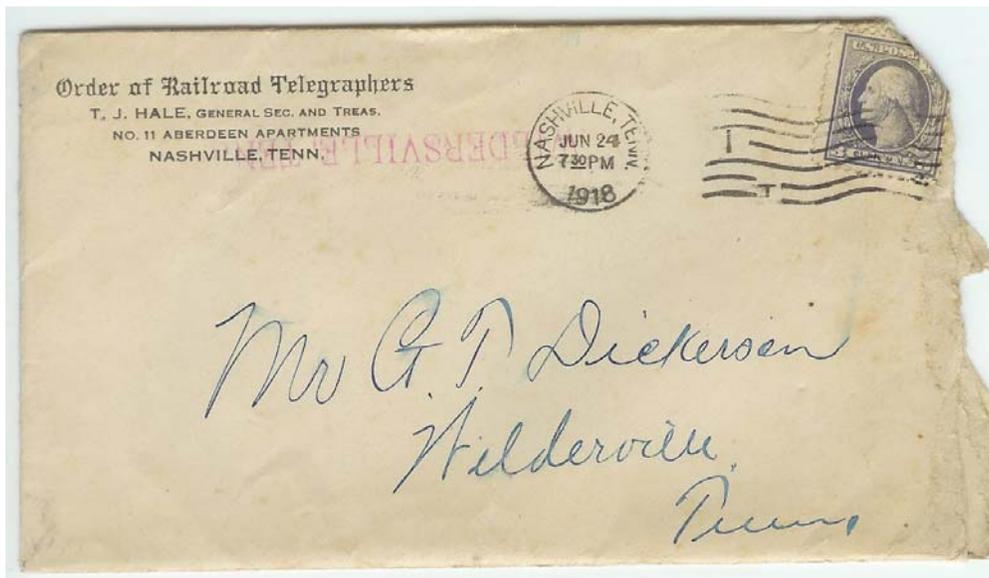
Members of Foreign Divisions will, under no circumstances, be allowed to sit in other than their own Divisions without the current password and card.

This letter provided instructions for union meetings. Initially, the Cipher Key was not available, but the letter can be deciphered using Frequency Analysis in less than two hours. However, the Key was later found among George's papers and is included at the end of the article. Therefore, anyone wishing to decipher the Unwritten Work can try before given the answer key.

During the war, the American Red Cross held several fund raising drives and George contributed to the Second Red Cross War Fund in 1918.



Under the USRA, the unions had to present contracts dealing with hours, wages and concessions, directly to the government. Therefore, union committees met to discuss and agree upon terms and provisions. George kept three such letters.



J. M. HAMILTON, General Chairman
Kingston Springs, Tenn.

T. J. HALE, General Sec'y and Treas.
No. 11 Aberdeen Apartments
Nashville, Tenn.

The Order of Railroad Telegraphers



L. C. YORK, Ass't General Chairman
Kennesaw, Ga.

W. C. BROWN, Chairman
Tullahoma, Tenn.

N., C. & St. L. System Division

W. O. WIGGS, Chairman
Christiana, Tenn.

No. 57

THEO. PINKSTON, Chairman
296 Union Avenue
Memphis, Tenn.

Memphis, Tenn., June 19, 1918.

To ALL MEMBERS:-

For your information we wish to advise you that we have just received instructions from President Perham to proceed with our negotiations with the Management for the purpose of securing a contract and we are preparing to do so at the earliest possible moment.

Your Committee regrets as much as any of you as to the long delay incurred in our negotiations which was on account of the Government Control and the long deliberations of the Wage Board before reaching a decision. Under the circumstances we felt that there was but one course for us to follow and that was to leave the questions of wages and hours with the Wage Board and we were so advised by our Grand Officers.

We are glad to know that the time for action has arrived and we are sincerely hoping that all members will promptly remit their dues and help us to stay in condition to carry our negotiations to a final and satisfactory conclusion.

It is the expressed desire of all members of the Committee to raise the dues from \$4.00 to \$5.00, therefore, your dues for the period June 30th to December 31st, are \$5.00.

As you all know there are many cases that will have to be adjusted and it is the intention of your committee to lodge a vigorous protest with the newly created Wage Board with a view of getting a larger increase, 8 hour day, 26 work day month and two weeks vacation. These matters will have to be presented to the Wage Board and it is barely possible that at least one member of the Committee will have to go to Washington before our affairs are adjusted satisfactorily.

Let us stand together and support each other and everything will come out alright. Other Railroads have been in negotiations longer than we have before getting a schedule. We would have of course made much better progress had it not been for the Government control.

I am sure there is not a member that will not accept the raise in dues cheerfully, inasmuch, as most System Divisions have their regular dues fixed at \$6.00 for each semi-annual period.

Yours fraternally,

J. M. HAMILTON, L. C. YORK,
W. O. WIGGS, W. C. BROWN,
THEO. PINKSTON,

General Committee.

June 18, 1918

HOTEL TULANE,
Nashville, Tenn., February 28th, 1918.

Dear Sir and Brother:-

After several days of consideration and deliberation, the committee received a call from the Ass't General Manager, on Feb'y 26th., at this conference Ass't General Manager read to us Director General ~~of~~ of Railroads, GENERAL ORDER No. 8, article 8 as follows:-

"The Broad questions of wages and hours will be passed upon and reported to Director General as promptly as possible by the present Railroad Commission. Pending a disposition of these matters by the Director General, all request of employes involving a revision of ~~whstet~~ schedule or General changes in conditions effecting wages and hours, will be held in abeyance by both the Managers and employes. Wages when determined upon will be made retroactive to January 1st., 1918., and adjusted accordingly. Matters of controversy arising under interpretations of existing wage agreement and other matters not relating to wages and hours will take their usual course, and in the event of inability to reach a settlement will be referred to The Director General."

We then presented the other rules of the original submission holding in abeyance, the question of hours and wages, for the action of the United States wage Board,.

This proposition was also declined on the grounds of lack of authority which is not in accordance, with our understanding of the situation.

The Ass't General Manager stated that ~~xxxx~~ he called the committee for the purpose of explaining his proposition with reference to withdrawing the voluntary concession as follows:-

"Twenty-six work day month, over time for Sundays and legal Holidays, fifteen day vacation with pay, eight basic day, and an increase in pay, the amount which was not stated, forty cents per hour for overtime."

These concessions were to be put into effect through the Division Superintendents and would not constitute a schedule, similar to those in existence on other railroads, and could be withdrawn by the Company at will at any time., without notice.

Your committee convened for the purpose of securing a schedule and are now following the usual course, as provided for in Laws of the ORDER, as expeditiously as circumstances will permit.

The negotiations has been referred to our organization for adjustment and you will be further advised relative to future developments just as soon as there is anything to report, of interest.

With best regards, we are,

Yours fraternally,

J. M. HAMILTON,
W. C. BROWN,
W. O. VIGGS,
L. S. YORR,
Theo. Pinkston,
COMMITTEE.

ALL MEMBERS SHOULD BE ADVISED.

February 28, 1918

Lexington, Tenn., Aug. 29th, 1918.

Dear Sir and Brother:-

Following letter received from our General Chairman, Bro. Hamilton, who has just returned from Washington, D.C. where he has been assisting our President in putting our case before the Wage Board.

"Our case was presented to the Wage Board at Washington by our President assisted by the different General Chairmen. You will find in August Telegrapher, the things that were asked for.

We heard the representatives for the Railroads give in their recommendations, and I am glad to say they are in favor of a nice increase for our class of employes themselves. Below you will find the amount of increase a great many of them though proper.

Telegraphers & Telephoners, \$25.00 increase with \$100.00 Min.
Agent-Telegraphers & Telephoners, \$25.00 increase with \$120.00 Min.
Non-Telegraph Agent, less than \$100.00, \$25.00 increase, \$85.00 Min.
Positions paying \$100.00 to \$200.00, \$30.00 increase.
" " \$200.00 to \$250.00, \$35.00 increase, with \$250.00 Min.
Leverman, \$25.00 increase with \$90.00 Min.
Directors, \$25.00 increase with \$135.00 Min.
Dispatchers, \$30.00 increase with \$170.00 Min, and \$210.00 Maximum.
Lineman, \$25.00 increase with \$90.00 Min.

All Based on 8 hour day, exclusive of Sunday, Pay roll of Dec. 31st, 1917, and one day off in 7 for dispatchers.
Then lineman was changed to read Foreman, \$145.00. Lineman \$135.00.

Of course you understand we are asking for great deal more than this, and will undoubtedly get. This is merely what a number of General Managers for the railroads wanted to give us, and so advised the Board. All the General Managers were anxious to have any increases clearly stated so there would be no more misunderstanding such as was experienced with increases carried by order No 27, and we heartily agree with them in this respect.

We should know what the Wage Board is going to grant us between the 1st and 10th of September, or perhaps sooner. There is nothing for us to do but wait the action of the Wage Board and judging from the awards they have granted employes of other classes I have no doubt but we will get the increases we are so justly entitled to."

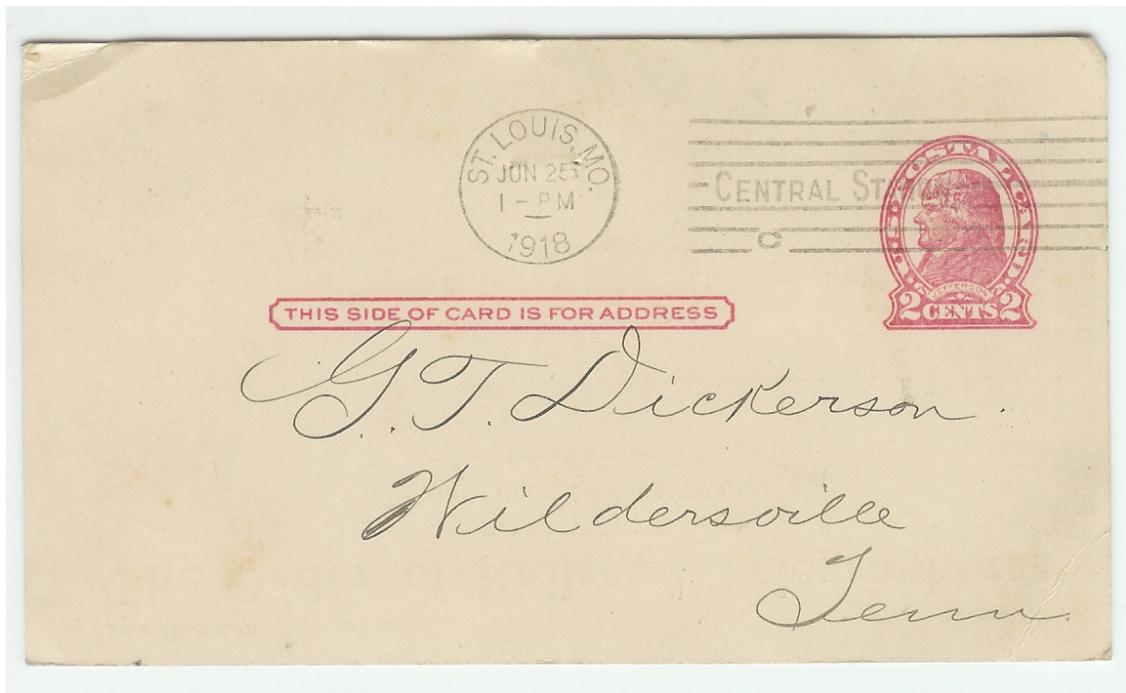
Yours fraternally

W. E. Arnold
Local Chairman.

Pls show to all members.

August 29, 1918

In addition to letters, George kept notices of Mutual Benefit Department Assessments such as shown below.



Form 249-S--5-18

The Order of Railroad Telegraphers

782
57

Mutual Benefit Department

St. Louis, Mo., *6/18* 1918

Dear Sir and Bro.:

Your remittance of \$ **1.80** in payment of
Assessment No. 142 (July-December, 1918) received and
placed to your credit.

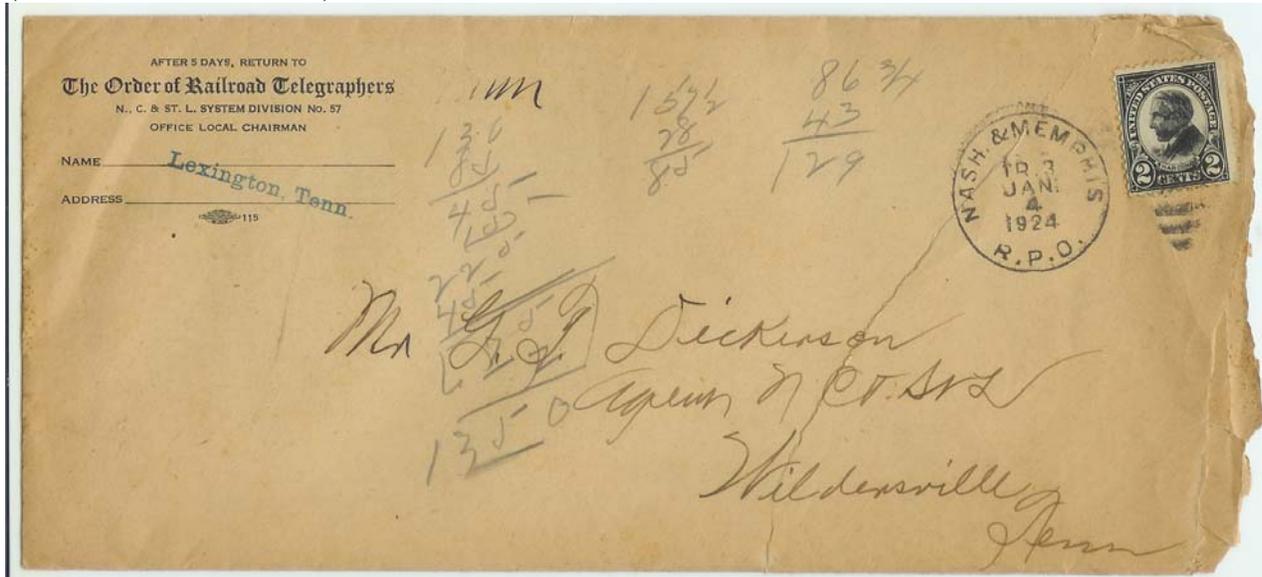
Yours in S. O. & D.,

C. B. RAWLINS, Sec'y and Treas. *7*

MAILED IN ST. LOUIS, MO. JUN 25 1918 115

George sent the ORT \$3 for this period and the ORT remitted \$1.20 in a letter dated June 25, 1918, stating “we do not credit partial assessments.”

After the war, George continued to work along the Paducah-Memphis Division of the NC&StL and continued to live in Wildersville, Tennessee. He received a letter from the ORT in 1924 for which only the envelope remains. But it is a valuable envelope as it was postmarked by the “Nashville & Memphis R.P.O.” (Railroad Post Office).



In addition to letters, George kept many of his Individual Income Tax Returns.

1922, NC&StL Agent Wages, \$1,918.31	Express Commission, \$150.00
1923, NC&StL Agent Wages, \$1,934.08	Express Commission, \$165.58
1924, Not found	
1925, NC&StL Agent Wages, \$2,022.71	Express Commissions, \$160.29
1926, NC&StL Agent Wages, \$2,051.14	Express Commissions, \$155.00
1927, NC&StL Agent Wages, \$1,068.00	Express Commissions, \$120.00

(It is uncertain why his wages dropped so much in 1927. However, it may be assumed that he did not work as much because his son, James Leon, died on March 27, 1927, and his wife may have been sick since she died on February 29, 1928.)

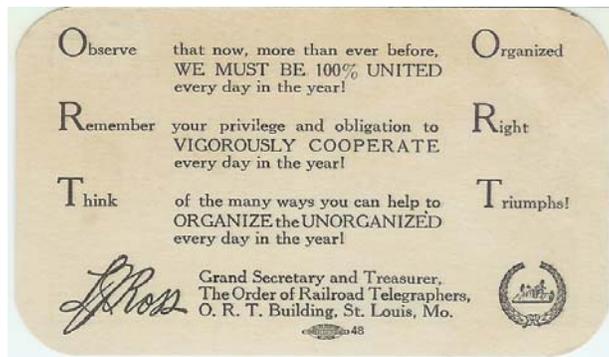
1928-1930, No tax returns were found.

1930, NC&StL Agent Wages, \$1,697.55	
1932, NC&StL Agent Wages, \$1,377.48	Express Commissions, \$90.00
1933, NC&StL Agent Wages, \$1,355.40	Express Commissions, \$90.00

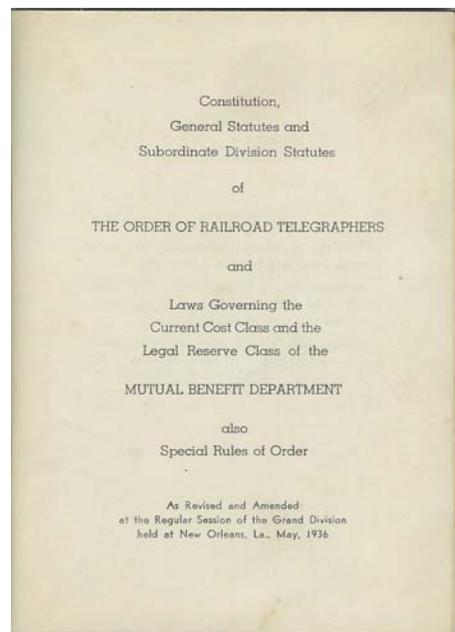
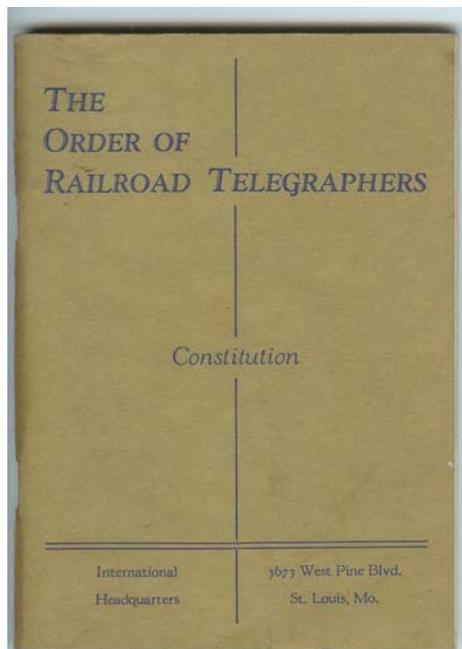
The drop in wages is a direct result in the economic downturn of the country during the Great Depression. And the strange part of the tax returns is that he listed his name as “G.T. Dickson.” This change is not unusual, since correspondence with the ORT used several different spellings. However, after 1930, G.T. Dickson was used on most correspondence including membership cards.



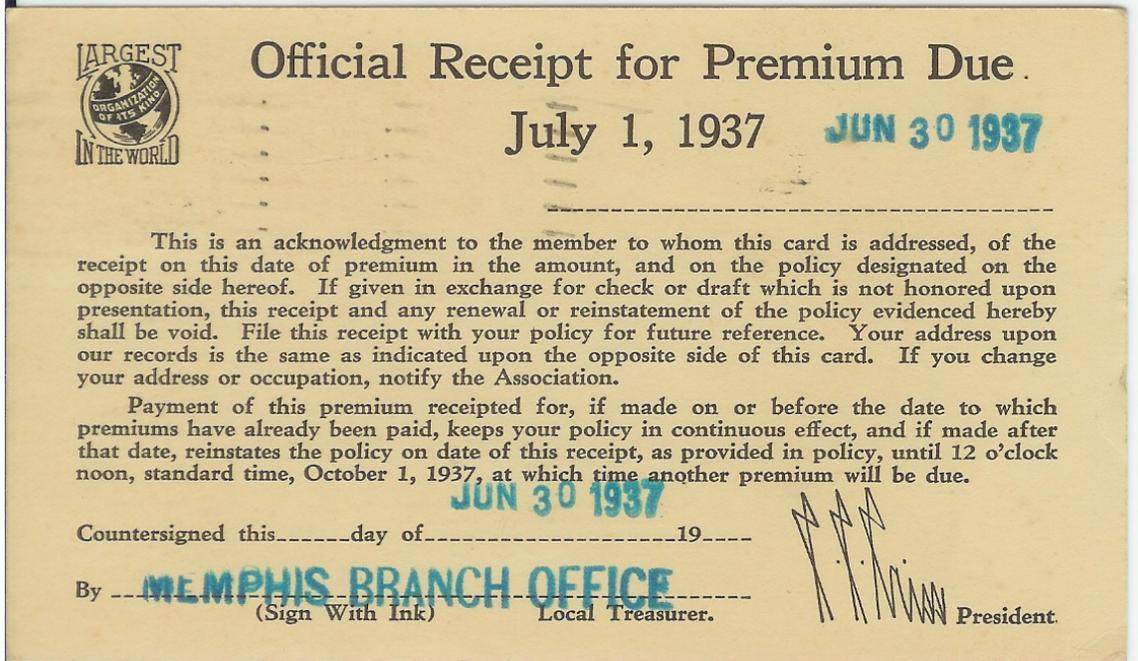
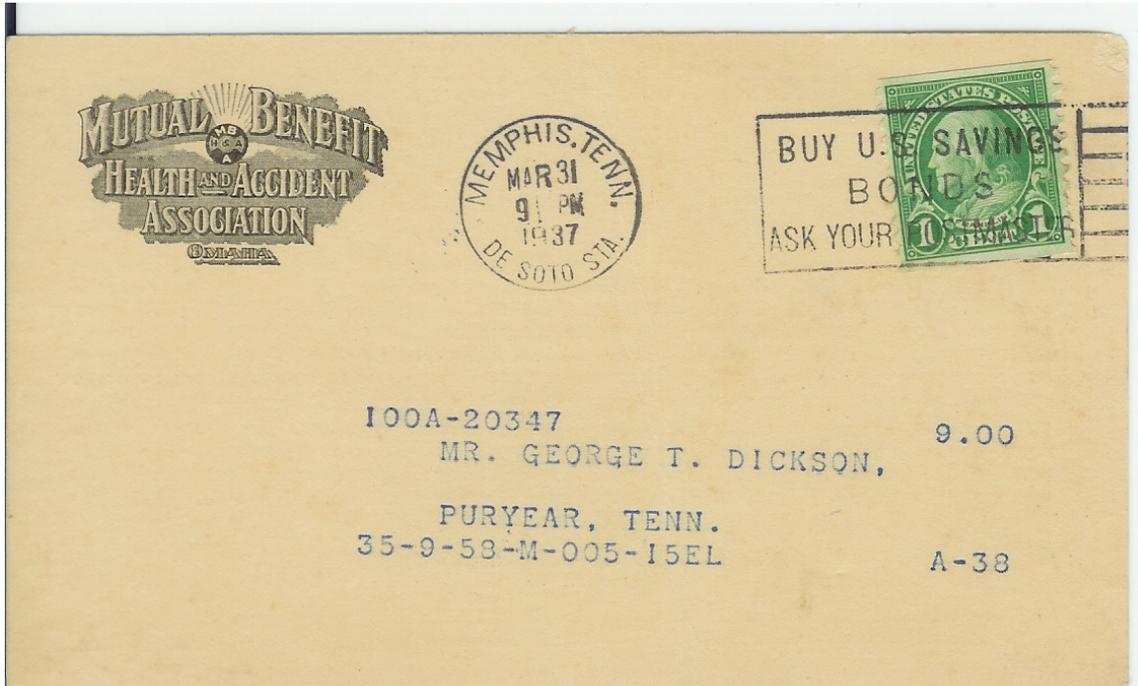
In 1933, he received a calendar card from the ORT that included the following on the reverse.



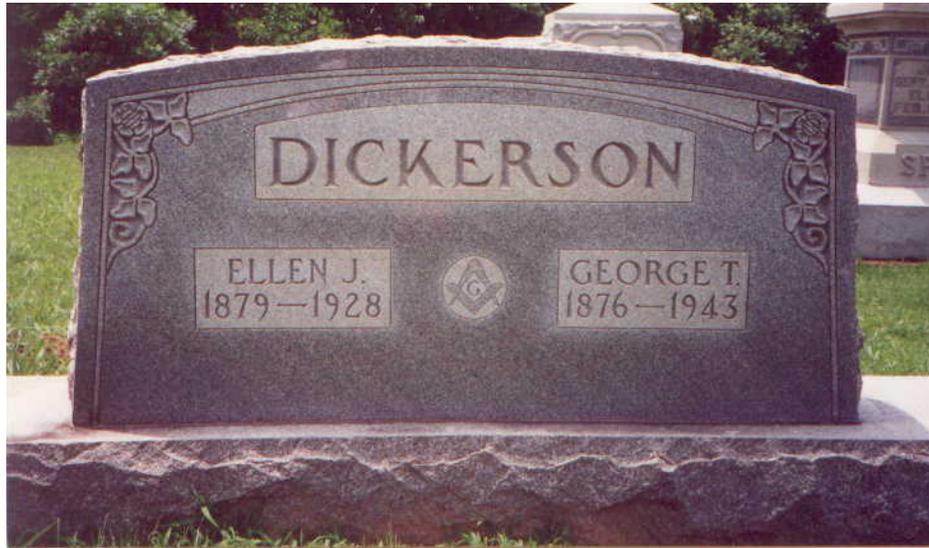
And in 1936, he received a copy of the ORT Constitution.



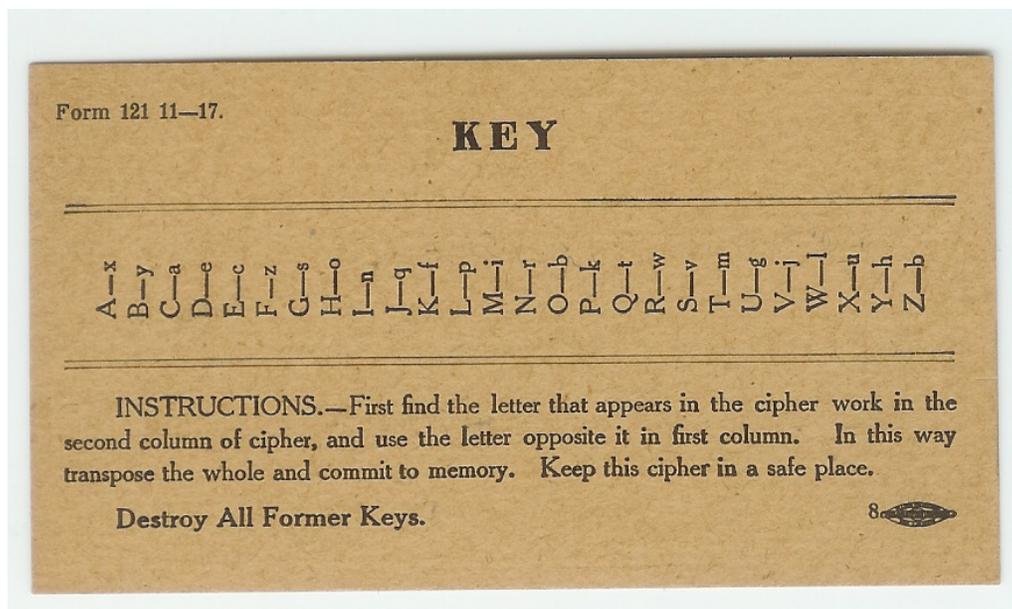
During his tenure with the NC&StL, George worked in Wildersville, Huron, and Puryear, Tennessee and Hazel, Kentucky. In addition to the ORT Mutual Benefit Department, he had insurance policies with Woodmen of the World and the Mutual Benefit Health and Accident Association.



George T. Dickerson/Dickson died on April 19, 1943. He never remarried and it is not known if he ever retired from the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad. He was buried along with his wife and son in Spelling Cemetery, located in Buena Vista, Tennessee.



As promised, here is the 1917 Cipher Key.



(This biography was prepared by Stewart Wade, the husband of Linda Ozier Wade. Linda is the Great-Granddaughter of George T. Dickerson, Granddaughter of Kate Dickerson Ozier, and Daughter of William N. Ozier. These papers were rescued from the burning of old family papers in 1970, by Stewart, mostly for the stamps.)