

# Riverton Yesterdays



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A Monthly Newsletter of Oldtime Stuff about Riverton, Utah

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My Father Was a Polygamist:  
Memories of Viola Nokes Dowdy  
and Marie Densley Bills

Editor: Karen Bashore

Asst. Editor: Mel Bashore

Address: Riverton Historical Society  
Riverton Art Museum at the Crane House  
1640 West 13200 South  
Riverton, UT 84065

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## My Father Was a Polygamist: Viola Nokes Dowdy (cont.)

[Note: Mel Bashore interviewed Viola Nokes Dowdy on 18 September 1986. This is an edited transcript.]

Viola: I used to go to church. We went to the domed church. The first LDS church was on the lower road above the cemetery on the east side.

Mel: Is that where you went to church first?

Viola: I was a little bit too young, but Mother used to take me there for awhile. My brother [Horace] used to tease me a lot. He'd chase me around the place and

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pull my big braids. I had hair almost down to my hips — just as gold and pretty as ever. He'd pull my hair. I called him an old witch — I thought I was swearing. He popped me one on the head. The next thing I knew, I came to and I was laying on the foot of Mother's bed. She was in there with baby Stanley. I was only about six. She was crying. She said, "Get on the horse and go down and get your dad out of the church." That was way down on the east side. He did. I'd come to and then I'd go out again. Mother kept crying. Dad came in and got the olive oil and administered to me. I came out of it.

Mel: Did he administer to you just by himself?

Viola: Yes. There was nobody there — he was in the stake anyway. So I guess he thought he could do it. It was an emergency.

Mel: Do you remember what the inside of that church on the lower road looked like?

Viola: Yes. It was partially adobe. It was one great big long building. It didn't have any basement. They had little outside privies. I wasn't very old. They didn't take me much. Children always go to sleep in church. Mother had too many children to drag down. It had nice big windows with curtains on the windows. In the chapel where the bishop stood was on the east end. The door to enter the

chapel was on the west side up the stairs. There were just enough stairs to get in the door. The pulpit was on the east side where the bishopric sat. There were choir seats behind the bishop. There was a bunch on either side of where the bishopric sat behind the pulpit. The people could see them on both sides. A sacrament table was on the south side. There was a great big pot-bellied stove on the south side. They had a picture of the Savior that used to hang on the west wall facing the bishops and counselors up on the stand. They had it so that the bishop and the speakers could always look right at it. I think that it would be an inspiration. I know that I'd be inspired a lot more if they had a picture of the Savior in front of me. It was a big, lovely picture. They had benches with backs. Little babies — three and four years old — would be sound asleep on the benches. I only remember being in that church about three times, while they were building the dome church. When they got the domed church finished, we could go more often. They had big stairs on either side that you could go up to the chapel. It was a lovely place. Why they pulled it down I'll never know. When I started going to Sunday School, we went in the back of the big dome chapel. We come in from the back. Our little rooms were in there. I remember the songs we used to sing. There was one named "Coo Roo Roo, Coo Roo Roo." That was pretty. Joe Green's wife used to be our teacher. I think her name was Carrie. She'd have us sing the prettiest songs. We always had to fold our arms. Our rooms were small. Our little classrooms were right in the back on the same floor. We didn't have to climb a lot of stairs. I don't know why they had the stairs on the east side and on the west side there wasn't any. There was two rooms. We had the girls in one and the boys in the other.

Mel: Was there a back door to the old domed church?

Viola: Sure. There was no stairs going upstairs from the back. They had a back door. The

preachers would come in the back door and take their seats along in front of the audience. The chapel had the prettiest windows with drapes on each side of the windows. It had two or three windows on each side. They had some little colored glass in the tops of them. [Editor's note: Doug and Bee Brown had several of those stained glass windows, one of which they displayed at a Historical Society history fair in the

The ceiling dome was real pale blue — like the sky.



1980s.] The inside was all hardwood and shiny. The ceiling dome was real pale blue — like the sky. We didn't pay much attention to the windows, but I used to stare at the pretty ceiling. It was so pretty. They put the electric lights in when I was still home. They used to have the gas lights in the chapel. It was so decorative.

Mel: Were you there when they tore it down?

Viola: No. I would have cried my eyes out if I'd have seen that!

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Mel: What was in back of the church?

Viola: A field — parking where they put their horse and buggies. There was no cars in those early days.

Mel: Were there trees out there for shade?

Viola: Yes. My dad furnished the trees and planted them. He also planted all the trees in the park. He had two fifty gallon barrels of water. He'd hand us the buckets of water and every tree would get two buckets of water. That's what got them growing.

Mel: Did he plant the trees north of the church called the "church grove?"

Viola: Sure. He furnished the trees — mostly box elders. They were beautiful-shaped trees. Then they planted lawn all around. There was a school on the south side. They had lots of trees over there and the outside privy there. The old school house was there. When I was in the fourth grade, the room was on the north side. I walked to school. It was just a little ways away. We were taught to take care of ourselves and walk. We used to go to the store when we were six and seven years old for Mother; to the Page-Hansen store. We carried what we bought back home. Dad had the buggy and horse, but he was always in there himself. I remember when Lina Cascutti and I took Mother's eggs and butter down to Lute Peterson's store. We used to take our stuff down there to sell. When Mother wanted her eggs and butter taken to the store, we'd take it down to Lute's place and he'd take it out and give us the money for it. One day, Lena and I decided we was going over to

Crescent to the ball game. We took the buggy and horse and rode it over there. Mother got worried because we were gone for two hours.

When we got home,

Mother and Dad was both sitting there questioning us. My big-shot brother Horace happened to get in the middle of it. I said something a little sharp. Boy, he slapped my face! I stomped on his foot! I said, "You got no business hitting me!" Mother chased him out of the house. But he's taking over. He was just like he was the father — the old fool. That wasn't fair for him to be popping me around.

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Horace happened to get in  
the middle of it.**

Mel: Did you shop at any other stores other than Lute Peterson's and Page-Hansen?

Viola: That's the only places they had outside of the hamburger joints.

Mel: Where were they located?

Viola: George and Jim Dansie were brothers and they had a hot dog stand right on the corner of Redwood and the Herriman Road. Tommy Nichols's store was down a little further past the street that goes to Herriman. He had a little ice cream and hot dog store. Once a week, the businessmen of Riverton would get together in Tommy Nichols's little place and

talk. So my brother Hon and Eddie Bills and two other guys filled a sack full of rocks and climbed up and put it in the chimney — the stovepipe. It wasn't long before they was all scrambling out! Those boys disappeared in a hurry! Hon, Ivan Nell, Tom Callicott, and two or three of them all ran around together. [to be continued]

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## My Father Was a Polygamist: Marie Densley Bills (cont.)

[Note: Evelyn Dreyer interviewed Marie Densley Bills on 24 November 1986. This is an edited transcript.]

Evelyn: Where was your Father's store?

Marie: I think it was down at the Commercial Building. Florence Page used to tell me, "You're father was a wonderful man." Her mother was left alone with a big family when Thomas died. They'd come to the store and Father would say, "Don't worry about paying.

We used to run up the path when we'd hear Uncle Ed Butterfield coming in his car. . . . That car made so much noise.

Just take what you want." He didn't have the store very long because he let them charge everything. They charged in them days and they'd depend on the people paying and they [a lot of them] never did pay him. Anyway, my Father wasn't much of a businessman for [running] a store like that. I can't remember going to his store. [Our house that I grew up in] is still there. They've cut that weeping willow tree down that Mother used to have there. The lilac tree is still there. We had eight lilac trees up the path. The path was dirt. We had dirt roads in them days. We used to run up the path when we'd hear Uncle Ed Butterfield coming in his car. I'd get ahold of my two younger brothers, Gordon and Golden. That car made so much noise. He said, "Next time I come I'm going to take you for a ride." We was all thrilled about it. When he come the second time, he drove in to the yard. He said, "Now Lizzie, you got to go with me." "No," she said, "I want to wait until it doesn't sound so bad. I'm scared to get in it. It makes so much noise." She wouldn't let us kids get in it at all. She said, "Maybe next time." So the next time he come, he got a Model T. Then he give us a ride in it. But it was making a terrible noise. It never had any top on it. I think he just put it together himself. You didn't have to have a driver's license in them days. That was one of the first automobiles in Riverton.

Evelyn: What do remember about "Electricity Ike," the tinker, who used to

live above the Big Canal on the Herriman Road? Did he ever stay or park at your mother and dad's place?

Marie:

I think he did. That wasn't the one who sold fish was it? No. Oh, the old tinker. I remember him. Seems like he used to come and stay to Mother's overnight. She used to let that fish man who used to come so far with his fish stay there all night. He had to

make such big trips back down south somewhere. He had a horse and buggy. That's how we went courting in them days — in a horse and buggy. [The first dentist was] Henderson. We used to get on the D&RG and ride into Salt Lake to get my teeth fixed. I remember Dr. Hardy. I had him [deliver] my first child. All my brothers and sisters were born in Mother's house with a midwife—Mrs. Blake. All four of my children was born in the same house where I was born. We should have moved long ago. — But my Mother wanted us to live there. She lived alone. I did all of her washing after we was married when we lived there. During her last days, she went over and lived with Gord because Gord owed her. They got land from her. My Mother had a couch, four chairs, and an organ in the front room or what we called the parlor. All three families once a month would get together. They would each furnish something [food]. Of course, when my Mother got all this furniture and her house all fixed up, the other two families had to have the same. I remember Aunt Lib had a green couch and chairs. Aunt Mindy had an orange couch, I think. We [the three polygamous families] got along good together. When I was born, there was three — Claude from Aunt Libs and Leland was from Aunt Mindy. All three of us was about the same age. When they blessed me, the ward clerk [had recorded] Araminta Wardle as my mother.

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### Next Issue

My Father Was a Polygamist: Interview with Viola Nokes Dowdy (cont.)



## Death Notices

Max C. Egbert (79); died in Draper; husband of Viola Beth Shulsen; parents were Alma and Estella Callicott Egbert; father of Richard, DeMar, Jean, ReNae, Sherry, Debbie, Rhonda, Paul, Dixie, Connie, Dan; Kennecott employee, construction, horse stable owner, farmer.

Audrey Sager Christiansen (75); widow of (1) Ronald W. Sager, wife of (2) Wayne Christiansen; parents were Lynn L. and Vera Sybrowsky Graves; mother of Lynn Rae and Ron; Silver Spurs Riding Club member for over 30 years.

Margie Feury Reed (88); widow of Miles Edwin Reed; parents were James Harrison and Virginia Lee Bostic Feury; mother of Bonnie, Keith, Gail, Thayne, Richard, Tom, Gary, Jim, Deborah.

Ralph Crane Page (78); husband of Elaine White; parents were Thomas I. and Florence J. Crane Page; father of Paula, Wade, Patti.

G. Tom Burrridge (70); died in Salt Lake City; husband of Sandra Lee Heath; parents were Theol Lorenzo and Jane Wanda Christison Burrridge; father of Tom Jr., Melissa, Jonathan, James, Jennifer, Timothy, David, William; Utah Highway Patrol, courthouse security officer.

Ray (Mortensen) Vosburgh (65); died in Arkansas; husband of Janet Volovsek; parents were Edward James and Ruth Mortensen Vosburgh; owned/operated Mortensen Appliance and Furniture.

Garn A. Stewart (81); husband of Elaine Taylor; parents were Arthur M. and Vera Peterson Stewart; father of Sandy, Jeff, Luanne, Jan.

## Letters

[Editor's Note: Elvoy Dansie spoke at a church fireside on 11 November — a memory filled night entitled "Elvoy Remembers . . . A Nostalgic View of Riverton." Elvoy is 91 years young, retains a phenomenal memory of the past, and can still say the alphabet backwards (Z to A)! We taped it — although we turned off the recorder before he recited the alphabet — he just zinged it out too quickly! We are indebted to Elvoy for much of the information in our files about old Riverton.

We had some additional students identified (in fact all of them!) in the Jim Seal 8<sup>th</sup> grade photo that we printed in the October issue by two of our subscribers — Mona Madsen Jensen and Dorothy Page Swofford. They were schoolmates and appear in the same row as Mr. Seal: Mona (in the middle) and Dorothy (second from the right). It came as a shock and delightful surprise to Mona (who lives in Bountiful) as she only has a single photograph of herself as a young child. Mona's family operated the service station just north of the Commercial Building. We have quite a number of school photos, many of which are lacking identification. We are going to print them in the hope that we can get your help in identifying the people in them. Just photocopy the page, number the students on the photocopy, and send us the names of the students on an accompanying page. Unfortunately we didn't get any identification on the Blanche Larson class photo that we printed in the October issue. That was probably a 1944-45 class photo.]





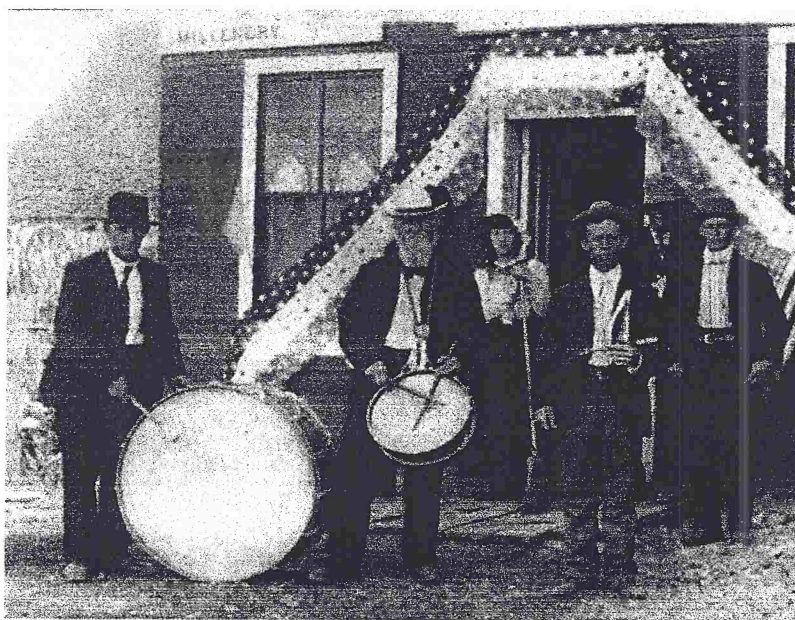
“First Store in Riverton”

southwest corner of intersection of 12600 S. 1700 W.

This photo donated by LaMar Berrett was taken by him in 1959.

He remembers the building being the home  
of Janie and Joe Newman.

Could this possibly have been the Bate Store?



William E. Bate band, copy of photo donated by Karen Leonard  
[from left: (?), William E. Bate, (?), John Bate, (?), poss. Ernest Bate]

**RIVERTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
CRANE HOUSE  
1640 W. 13200 S.  
RIVERTON, UT 84065**



1929 Riverton 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Pearl Bodell (teacher)

Mildred Densley collection