

Riverton Yesterdays



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A Monthly Newsletter of Oldtime Stuff about Riverton, Utah

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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: Marie Densley Bills was my very best friend. Once in awhile I would get with Lina and Anna Cascutti. They were sisters living on the lower road below the cemetery. But Marie Densley's farm was right by ours. Lizzie was her mother. Her full maiden name was Elizabeth Butterfield from Herriman. When she had her first little child, they hired a girl to help her. Her name was Minty. They hired her to take care of Lizzie. After they got the baby taken care of and Minty left, old Dan Densley married her for his second wife. The next time she went to have a nice little baby, he hired Libby to come and work for him to take care of her and the baby. After they got through there, he married Libby. She was his third wife. They was all in a row there.

Mel: Did your family do very much with your dad's other family?

Viola: Yes. We all got along just like one family. They were all grown up when I was big enough to play. Harold was Aunt Cal's youngest and he was way ahead of me in age.

Mel: Why did your dad turn himself over to the marshals during the polygamy raids?

Viola: He found out the others were hiding out and he said, "I'm not going to hide out. I haven't done anything I'm ashamed of." So he went and gave himself up. They let him go in six months. That was when I was younger. Dad was a good-looking guy. While he was in prison he made a beautiful bathrobe made with little knots. My sister Ann's got it. Mother gave that to her. It was just beautiful. He had Mother put it in her trunk. They give him material and taught him how to do it. He made one for Aunt Cal and one for Mother. He used to talk an awful lot about the Manifesto. He knew he shouldn't have done it, but he was inspired. I guess that's why we got here. He enjoyed every minute he was in the prison. They treated him just beautiful in

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there. He had no axe to grind and no fault to find at all. But he was the only one from Riverton that went because he turned himself in. The polygamists in Riverton got along just beautiful. Dan Densley had three wives. Minty was the second wife and Libby was the third. Libby was in between Minty and Lizzie. It was all a long string there. There was Aunt Cal, Mother's place, Dan Densley's Elizabeth, Libby's, and Minty's right in front of the school building. The people never treated us any different. They treated us alright. There were very fine people out there, especially our neighbors. There was the Hamilton's. They was Aunt Cal's nephews. Ed Butterfield lived right across the cemetery road. Tom and Reub Hamilton was on the other side. A. T. Butterfield was right across the street from us. He bought the George Beckstead home. Dad was engaged to a beautiful girl in Iowa — her name was Charlotte. Any time they set a date to be married, she'd change it. She kept putting him off. Old lady Hamilton — the old grandma — said, "Now Charles, if I were you, I would marry Caroline just to spite her." That was her old maid daughter [Charlotte] — but she was lovely. Aunt Cal was a beautiful woman. She was so good. So he did marry Caroline. When Charlotte found out he got married to Caroline, she was so mad! She married George Beckstead and they lived across the street. When she couldn't get Dad mad, they moved and sold the place to A. T. Butterfield. That was just across Redwood from us. He had a beautiful barn. We used to go in that barn and hear the stomping of the horses and it would scare us half to death. My Dad helped build it. Each horse had its own stall. There was a loft. Kids used to get up and play up there. We were too frightened to go in the barn too far because we didn't know if we'd get stomped or not. It used to scare my sister Ann half to death.

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.... So he did marry Caroline.

Mel: Do you remember any of the old Riverton pioneers and settlers?

Viola: Every 24th of July there's be a hay rack go down the street with all these old pioneer ladies on it. Two of them were Maddens and a Bills. The sisters would get on this hay rack and ride down the street in the parade. They were dolled up in their bonnets and

their shawls. They used to pass our place on Redwood. I never could tell who they were. They had all the pioneer ladies on there. They had these wagons fixed up and they had the fire department honking all the way down the street, pulled by horses.

Mel: When did the first automobiles come to town?

Viola: It was a Model T. It come in there just a roaring! It belonged to one of the rich guys in Riverton. I'm not sure whether it was John Hansen's or a Dansie. It stopped out in front of our house by the mailbox one day. They couldn't figure out what was wrong. My brother, Will, happened to be home. He monkeyed around with it and it started. He hadn't even seen an automobile before. Indians used to come into town all the time. Every time they'd come, my mother would lock all the doors in the house. They'd come to the door and she would give them food. Sometimes they'd come through my dad's orchard and sometimes they'd come down the road. But they always landed in our backyard — four or five of them. I always kept out of their way. I was a coward. The Indian ladies had their heads wrapped up in a scarf — just tied their hair back. They come and begged Mother for something to eat. I think one time she made them up a pot of coffee. They sat outside and drank it in tin cups. She had plenty of cream and sugar. She used to feed them good. Gypsies never come in our place. They rode by in big canvas-topped wagons. Some of them had donkeys pulling their wagons. They didn't bother us. They used to come down through Redwood quite often. I was about fourteen when they had the flu epidemic. They made us all take Epsom salts.

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Next Issue

"I Drove a School Bus": Memories of School Bus Drivers (Rulon and Elvoy Dansie, Joe and Elias Butterfield, Ken Silcox, and Willard Bills)

"My Dad Was a Bus Driver"

by Marie Dansie Withers

My dad [LeRoy Dansie] was a bus driver for Jordan School District for 24 years. He had been driving bus for as long as I could recall before I started school in 1937. He purchased and maintained two buses — a little blue "cracker box" bus and a larger Reo bus that could haul more students. It was orange with a black top. Jordan District furnished his buses thereafter. I always marveled that coming out of the "Depression years" he was able to do this. (I'm sure the other bus drivers of this time did the same.)

My dad touched a lot of lives of the students he transported to and from school. He wiped countless noses, dried rivers of tears and buttoned lots of coats and sweaters. Many times we waited while a child was sent back to their house to get a forgotten sweater, coat, or boots. My dad concerned himself with the well-being of each of his passengers and was concerned when someone was ill for a period of time. He knew everyone's name. They were a part of "his family." Time after time, when a parent answered a knock on the door, it was Roy Dansie with a comic book, a bottle of soda water or a small bag of fruit for the missing sick child. I know of other times when a crying child was upset because of a forgotten lunch and was comforted and assured that it would be there at lunchtime — and it was, even if it meant that he returned to their home and fetched it back to school. (Not everyone had an extra car in those days.) It got to the place where Mom would pack an extra sandwich in our lunches, so Dad could share with the child and save the trip.

In those early days there were no heaters in the buses. Many times my mom's pieced quilts were called into action to be wrapped around the kids for added warmth until they got to school. Because of the severe winter conditions, Dad always had a shovel and tire chains in the bus in case the roads were drifted with snow and impassable. I remember one night when the weather and roads were so bad, he had to cut some fences and cross some fields in order to get kids home safely. When the weather became inclement, an extra route was added. It was called the "stormy weather route." He also drove the 2:00 bus to take the first and second graders home. If my dad could have had his way, no child would have walked to school. He figured if the bus went by their house, it made no sense that they couldn't ride. Some parents felt the same way and thought they should ride and blamed Dad, but he didn't make the rules.

My brothers and I always had our choice of seats, for we were the first on the bus in the morning and the last ones off. (Originally the buses were stored at our house. When the district started to provide the buses, they were housed in the garages at the school.)

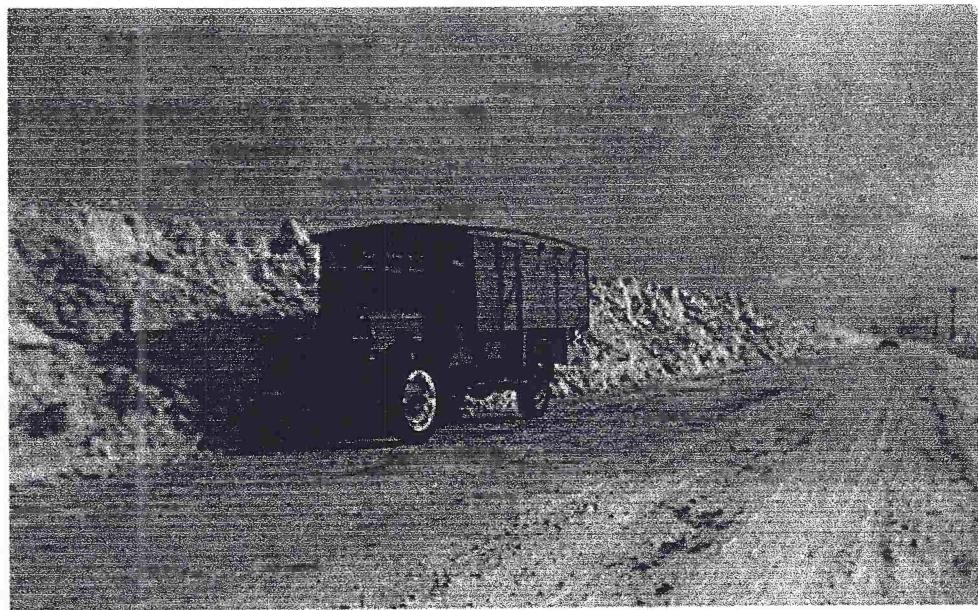
Dad made trip after trip to the Salt Lake Temple, at night, taking adults to do ordinance work and baptisms. His passengers would pay a small fee to

help pay for the gas. (If they had it.) He often took groups of Scouts to different activities, too.

Many mornings Dad's bus could be seen outside the school windows after school had begun for the day. He would be there helping Edgar Aylett (our beloved school janitor) repairing a motor, light, or furnace. My Dad was every child's friend and buddy and so was Mr. Aylett.

I can recall vividly the cold, foggy, snowy morning of December 1, 1938, when we received word at school that a train had struck a bus of Riverton and Bluffdale students. I never knew how Dad and the other drivers received the word (for we had no phones) to return to school and transport their students back to their homes as quickly as possible. As soon as the mission was accomplished, the bus drivers were dispatched to the accident scene to retrieve bodies and help any way they could. It was way after dark when he returned home and collapsed into tears. Tears for all concerned, including a fellow bus driver, Ferrald Silcox, and lifetime friend. Our childhood innocence was lost through that terrible period of time, especially witnessing the mass funerals held in the Riverton Junior High auditorium.

My dad continued to drive bus for many more years. I married and two of my children got to ride to school on "Grandpa Dansie's" bus (then furnished by the district). My kids and I had the privilege of riding with my dad on the last trip he made before retiring. The faces had changed, but the love of his passengers was still there. The sincere expressions of tears, hugs, and "we will miss you Roy!" said it all.



Blue Cracker Box Bus, ca. 1936

Around the Block with Meredith and Maurine Page

[Note: Mel Bashore interviewed Meredith and Maurine Page on 9 February 1985. This is an edited transcript of excerpts of that interview.]

Maurine: My father [James Steadman] worked for Grandfather [John R.] Winder and then he met Mother there. Dad went to ask Grandfather if he could have Mary Ann. He said, "Well, does Mary Ann know?" So then, Grandfather bought the farm about a mile and a half down south of here. It's about three-quarters of a mile inside Riverton. My parents lived up there in Myers' place. It was just a little place there. When Grandfather Winder gave 'em this place down here. He bought it and paid for it and gave it to them. Then he gave them cows and he gave them the horses. We lived on kind of a hill — not a real big hill, but just rolling. Ed Morgan and Father got along real good. When the water turn came, they used to stand with their shovels in the ground and talk. They were good neighbors. Then there was [James] Tempest. He lived next south. He was awful fussy about the boys playing ball in the pasture. He didn't want any ball to come over in his place.

Meredith: I do believe that the people that were living in Bluffdale, Riverton, South Jordan, Draper, and Herriman was relatively happy people. I never heard of them killing each other. That's a big accomplishment now-a-days. Don't you think so, my dear?

Maurine: Oh, I think so.

Meredith: A little farther up the road there was a Newman — the old Bill Newman. He was a drunk. Maybe it's true, maybe not. I don't know. But anyway, he was a drinker. He come home drunk and his wife locked him out. So he went over to the wood pile, got an axe and chopped the door down.

He come home drunk and his wife locked him out. So he went over to the wood pile, got an axe and chopped the door down.

Charlie Nokes was a bee keeper and had a big orchard. He worked for A. T. Butterfield. Horace Nokes was one of his older sons. Horace said to me and some other boys that was up

swimming in the Big Canal that he was going to drown himself. We was all surprised about that. There was a bridge there. He let out a scream or something. He dove in the canal and went upstream. Us kids was looking for him to bob up. We was going to go down and tell about this Horace Nokes's drowning and then he got up above the bridge and walked down the canal bank to our surprise. It was just a trick. Anyway he was still alive. Charlie Nokes's wives were Caroline and Sarah. Caroline was a very thin woman and Sarah was as fat as her husband. Charlie was a heavy-set man.

Maurine: They made molasses in these big, long tanks. When we'd go home from school they'd be pushing and stirring it back and forth while it was cooking underneath. We were all interested in it, but Mother and Dad said to stay away from there. But we did go up there once to look at it. They thought we'd be getting in the way. But we just went in one day to watch. We could see the big paddles going back and forth stirring up this molasses. I don't remember whether he sold any of it or not. I think it was just for his own families.

Death Notices

Robert "Bob" Henry Densley (74); died in Salt Lake City; husband of Gloria Crawford; parents were Aaron and Eliza Densley; father of Mark, Lisa; brother of Donna Bills; heating/air conditioning company owner

Jodie Haslam (42); died in West Jordan; parents were John T. and Sharon Carlisle Haslam; mother of Tyree, Justin; beautician

Letters

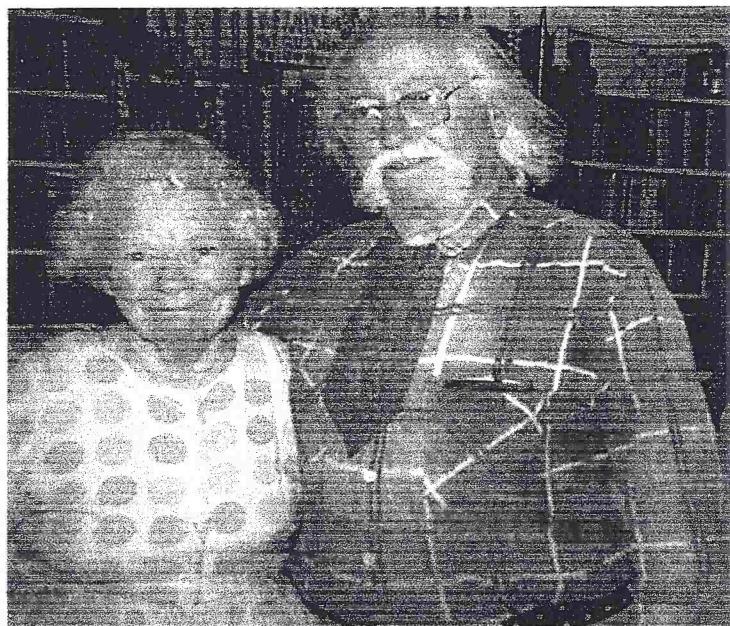
[Note: The post office returned a mangled issue last month minus the front cover so we couldn't tell who it was supposed to be sent to. Whoever didn't receive the December issue, let us know and we'll send it to you post haste.

If anyone has photographs of old school buses used in and around Riverton that we can borrow to scan into the next issue, please let us know.

Elvoy Dansie confirmed that the photo in the December issue of *Riverton Yesterdays* was indeed the Bate store. Leonard Beckstead tore it down to construct his car wash. There was a log house to the west.]



Sunday School Superintendency
(l. to r.) Edgar Aylett, N. K. Thompson, Robert Cardwell, Vilate Butterfield



Maurine and Meredith Page

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