

Riverton Yesterdays



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A Monthly Newsletter of Oldtime Stuff about Riverton, Utah

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Riverton Dome Church: Reminiscences
and Recollections

"I Drove a School Bus": Ken "Bus" Silcox

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On Saturday, 30 March, we enjoyed a delightful evening at the Crane House. Ken Neff played several hymns on the restored dome church organ. Willie Webster recounted how the organ was preserved in their family and donated to the city. Jack Chidister described how he restored the organ. Several reminisced about their memories of going to meetings and classes in the old domed church. Among these were Dorothy and Harry Swofford, Beth Chidister, Violet Hamilton, LaMar Berrett, and Elvoy Dansie. In the coming weeks, we will transcribe their recorded remarks and print them in *Riverton Yesterdays*. Due to the interest evident from this meeting, we will depart from our scheduled articles promised in the last issue to print excerpts from interviews discussing the old church.

Riverton Dome Church: Reminiscences and Recollections

Meredith: The whole floor was seats and they had different aisles.

Maurine: And then the choir had seats on both sides, not just one behind the other, they went up — up the stairs.

Meredith: Everybody, I think, felt bad about that when it was torn down. Some people want to tear down all the time. They aren't builders, they're tear-downers.

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*Meredith and Maurine Page,
interviewed by Mel Bashore, 2 March 1985*

Mel: What do you remember about the old dome church?

Ren: Hell, we used to gather bird's eggs out of that damn building! I guess there'd be forty or fifty kids; see, it's right by the school house and they built the church — they started to build it and they run out of money. We kids used to gather bird's eggs all through it. I don't know how many years it was that it stayed there before they finished it.

Mel: Was it just open while it was under construction?

Ren: It was. It was all open. It had the roof on and the windows were all in and they just run out of money, that's all. And I don't

remember the year that they finished that dome.

Mel: Did the people in town think it was a beautiful building?

Ren: Yes. Well, it was. It was really nice, but it was so much wasted space. It took so much to heat it. Well, anyway they abandoned it and then they tore it down and some of 'em really raised a fuss. Some of 'em wouldn't speak to one another for quite some time.

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Mel: So there were two sides to the thing?

Ren: Well, those that worked so hard to give money to build that thing up — why, they hated to see it thrown away, but it got so it wouldn't handle the population.

Mel: Was it too small?

Ren: Too much wasted space. See, they only had five rooms in the floor space and then they had the big auditorium upstairs. Well, it just wasn't big enough to take care of the ward.

Mel: Could you describe what the chapel upstairs looked like?

Ren: They had the stairways on the outside and it went up that way to the big auditorium. They had choir seats over on this side of the stand and on this side too. It was round inside.

Mel: Did it have long wood benches?

Ren: Yes. That's all they had was benches, then. There was an aisle down the center and I think there was an aisle on each side of the center, too. It was a big place. The pulpit was up on the west side.

Mel: Was it fairly well lit in there? with windows?

Ren: Oh, they had beautiful windows. They had the colored windows. It was a nice building. It's too bad they didn't keep it 'cause it sure would have been a relic! It sure would have been a relic.

*Lorenzo M. "Ren" Howard,
interviewed by Mel Bashore, 2 March 1985*

When I started going more frequently 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. It was cute. The dome church was really built up nice. Our rooms were small. 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. It was beautiful in the chapel. It 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. It was lovely inside. It was all hardwood and shiny. The dome was real pale blue — like the sky. We didn't 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 — whoever did it made a beautiful chapel out of it. When I went to Sunday School, we used to come in from the back. 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.

*Viola Nokes Dowdy, interviewed by Mel Bashore,
18 September 1986, edited transcript*

Mildred: I went to this old domed church first. I went clear up to the top. I had one church teacher — his name was Henry Bills. His dad was David Bills. He had come home from a mission. He insisted on calling us brother and sister. I remember saying distinctly to him, "I am not your sister!" I must have been a smart-alecky twelve-year-old. We were back in that side of the church with just a cotton drop across.

Laurel: Tell me about your recollections of the old domed church. I understand the kindergarten classes went to the top.

Mildred: We went to the very top. Hattie Bills was the teacher. Emma Bills was a teacher. They're the only two that I can remember.

Laurel: You went all the way up those old stairs?

Lovell: The young ones were the only ones that could climb the stairs!

Mildred: That building had beautiful stained glass windows in it. I've often wondered what

happened to them. They should have been priceless. They were just simply gorgeous.

The young ones were the only ones that could climb the stairs!

*Lovell and Mildred Densley,
interviewed by Laurel Bills, 31 August 1986*

The Riverton 1st Ward decided to build them a new building along in the late '30s because of the hardness to heat and maintain the old domed church. It was almost an impossibility to heat it in the winter time. They decided to build them a new, more modern building. They started the building, I think, in '40. They saved the benches and pews — everything they could [from the old domed church] — even the glass windows. But the Church wouldn't let them put the glass windows into the new building. They arranged for this building and they got started on that as Pearl Harbor came in. That stopped the construction and it sit there for several years without being able to do anything. So they continued to hold their meetings in the school house. The domed church had been torn down. They made arrangements to meet in the school house while we were tearing it down. Then due to the war, they had to remain in there that much longer.

*Elvoy Dansie,
interviewed by Scott Crump, 25 January 1986*

Reid: The old domed church had two floors in it. The bottom floor had wooden chairs — wooden slat chairs — the old type chair. The baptismal font was in the back. It opened up with doors that you lifted up and put right up. After you closed them down, you'd have a lesson room in there. There was

Above the floor of the chapel, there was a stair that wound up around part way into the dome. There was a room up there. It would be about thirty feet above the main floor of the top chapel.

classrooms. Upstairs it had nice benches like we have in our chapels now all polished and varnished. And it had stained glass windows in the windows. Then there was a room farther up where the kindergarten class would meet. [Aleen Steadman Nielsen Schreider was one of the kindergarten teachers — Maureen Steadman's sister. Mildred Densley was a teacher, too.] Above the floor of the chapel, there was a stair that wound up around part way into the dome. There was a room up there. It would be about thirty feet above the main floor of the top chapel.

Mel: Was the ceiling painted with little stars on it?

Reid: Yes. I recall that, too. It was quite decorated real well in the top of it. When you looked up at it, it was designed in culicue designs similar to when you go to Washington, D.C., and look up at the

ceiling in the Capital. I don't recall about the stars on it, but there may have been. They had the old glass sacrament cups in the trays. The old organs they had. Downstairs, was a foot-pedal organ. You'd pedal them and they was old. It was probably a 1915-1920 model.

Mel: What was your feeling when the building was torn down?

Reid: I had a lot of feeling about it on account of in 1940, I helped tear it down — on an assigned project to help tear it down. That was volunteer help.

Mel: They didn't contract out for its demolition?

Reid: No. I don't think so. I recall working on it at different times to help tear things apart. There may have been some contract work on it, but I didn't know about it. It was volunteer work to knock bricks apart and tear things down. I didn't have any feelings about it because I was younger at the time. There may have been some older people [who had feelings]. You have to forget about those things and go on.

*Reid Nokes,
interviewed by Mel Bashore, 8 October 1985*

Rulon: It was about that time [1908] when they finished the tall meetinghouse — put a roof on it. They had it up to the square and it stood for quite a few years. Then there's four of them raised the money to finish building it — put the top on.

Mel: When did they stop using the meetinghouse on the Lower Road?

Rulon: Well, it was, like I say — it was about that time, because that was the last funeral there [his brother's] and the next funeral, they tried to get them up around them steps and one thing and another. There was only two or three funerals held upstairs in that tall

There was only two or three funerals held upstairs in that tall building because it was almost impossible to get a casket up there.

building because it was almost impossible to get a casket up there. Well, you've seen the picture of it. And then on the east side, you went up so high when you went in. Then you went down just like . . . these here where they play basketball — have the seats. That's the reason why they quit using it. It wasn't practical. It was about forty feet from the roof down to the floor. It took a ton of

coal to heat it in the winter time so they give it up. They tore that down and condemned it in 1939. Bert Gilbert and his boys, and I and Marion and Del, my two oldest boys, and Penny Silcox cleaned the brick for the 1st Ward meetinghouse. Now it's the 3rd Ward. We cleaned the bricks and hauled them all over. Then the war broke out and we couldn't finish building it so we used the school house for quite a little while to hold our meetings in.

*Rulon Dansie,
interviewed by Mel Bashore, 6 February 1986*

Riverton Ward Chapel Razed.

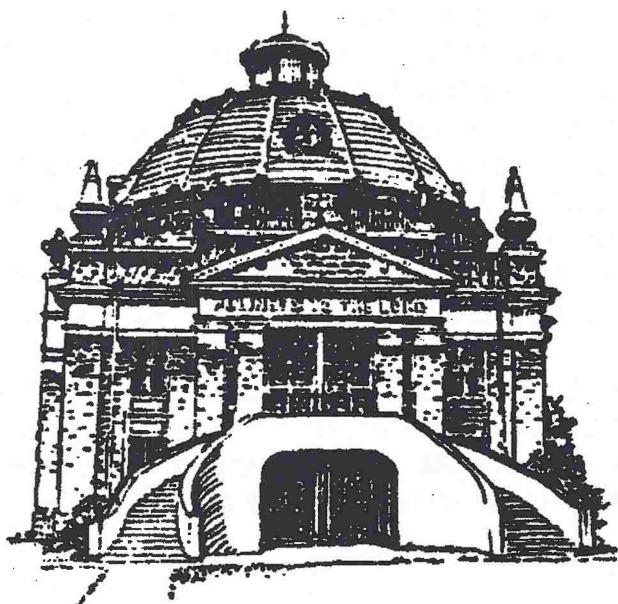
Wrecking of the present chapel of the Riverton First Ward will soon be completed to make way for a new building to replace the historic Church edifice built in 1890 by early settlers. Preliminary work was begun Thanksgiving Day by men and boys of the ward who helped in moving furniture and fixtures.

Meetings have since been held in the Riverton Junior High School. Crews of men now have torn down more than a third of the structure.

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Unidentified newspaper clipping, dated 15 December [1939],

*Robert W. Turner
papers, Riverton
Historical Society*



"I Drove a School Bus": Ken "Bus" Silcox

[Note: This is an edited transcript of a Riverton Historical Society program held on the evening of 3 December 1986 at the Riverton City Hall.]

I'm like Joe Butterfield — I can't remember things. The other morning, I was sitting on the edge of the bed with one sock in my hand and I had the other one on and I had to ask Roberta whether we was getting up or going to bed. So that's the way it goes. I've got a card here that my kids sent me. It says — history tells us that the Pilgrims never drank, never messed around, and were always home in bed by nine P.M. It makes you wonder what the hell they had to be so thankful for, doesn't it.

I drove number thirteen bus. Crackerbox, they called it. It held about eighteen to twenty students. It had seats on each side and a row in the middle. It wasn't seats, it was a bench in the middle. But the seats was on the side. We got our wages cut when I drove. I guess it was my

We got our wages cut
when I drove. I guess it
was my looks. I don't
know what else!

looks. I don't know what else! But anyway, we got a dollar a day. It was back in when it was tough times — '29 to '33. It was a drought along with being a Depression. That dollar a day was the only money that come into the house — in Dad's house. We had eggs and butter and milk and stuff like that. We had a few animals to supply us with. When the drought hit, we didn't even raise enough hay to feed the cows. We had to get rid of a couple of them and just keep two so we'd have the milk. So I guess it wasn't all a loss — you know — the dollar a day. I don't know what we'd a done without it — probably starve to death. Maybe that'd been good. I don't know. But anyway, it was a lot of fun. I drove the route. I kept the bus at Dad's place. They moved the portable building in. It wasn't much of a building, but it was a bus garage, I guess. I'd go out in the morning and get the old bus started before I milked the cow and let it warm up. I did have anti-freeze in it so we went ahead a little bit from what Elias and Joe and the rest done. I drove up the cemetery road to Bluffdale and picked up all the Bluffdale kids and then come back along Redwood, down to Draper and to Crescent and then over to Jordan. I only had one route.

In 1932, the Jordan School District run out of funds and they stopped in March. In order to graduate I had to go to night school for three months in the summer so we could graduate. Then they never had enough money to let us graduate in '32. We had to wait till the class of '33 come along and graduated with them.

Death Notices

Marell R. "Tish" Tischner (86); died in Salem, Utah; husband of Laura Whitaker; parents were Michael J. and Lillie Tischner; raised in Riverton, graduated from Jordan High School 1934; worked for Birrell Bottling Company

Mabel Jean Langford Newman (85); wife of Moss Simmons Newman; parents were Robert Stanley and Keturah Madsen Langford; mother of Sandra and Marsha; Jordan Valley School teacher; founding member of Riverton Historical Society

Russell Heber Neilsen (84); died in Greenville, South Carolina; husband of Pauline Culbertson; parents were Niels J. and Evelyn Walker Nielsen; siblings still living are Norma (Evans), Maxine (Nelson), Ruth Margene (Pixton), and Kenneth; born in Riverton; Union Carbide supervisor

Ardith Georgia Bills Norton (93); died in Tooele; wife of James Carl Norton; parents were Gerald W. and Ethel Jane Snow Bills; born in Riverton, lived most of her adult life in Springville

Notice

We thank Beth Bowen for years of devoted service to the Riverton Historical Society. Since 1984, she has scanned newspapers and other sources, clipping news articles and obituaries pertaining to Riverton. She placed these clippings into binders. She also contributed death notices that have printed in this newsletter. Her compilations were considered of such value to the city, that they copied all her binder pages for quick access in the city offices and public library. Future generations have her to thank for compiling the more recent history of Riverton. Thank you, Beth!

Next Issue

Riverton Dome Church: Reminiscences and Recollections (cont.)

"I Drove a School Bus": Willard Bills

"When That Thing Happened in My Life": Lovell and Mildred Densley

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

We are issuing an open invitation to wards, churches, families, and other groups in Riverton that would like to hold Sunday evening musical gatherings at the Crane House. The dome church organ is a community treasure that should be heard by as many people as possible. Those of us in attendance at the organ recital know how meaningful it was to listen and sing to the accompaniment of that historic instrument. We would like others to experience that same special feeling. We have to limit the size of groups to about thirty people, but that makes for a very intimate, manageable, and special gathering in one of Riverton's wonderful old homes. To schedule an evening, contact Karen Bashore (253-3020). Groups will need to provide their own organist.