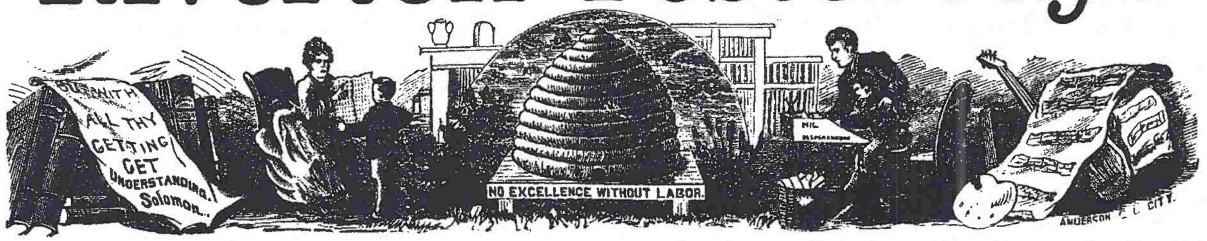
Riverton Yesterdays



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A Monthly Newsletter of Oldtime Stuff about Riverton, Utah

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Stirring Up Old Memories — with Evelyn, Vivian, and Mike (cont.)

[Note: John McCormick, a historian with Utah State Historical Society, interviewed Evelyn B. Dreyer, Vivian Brown, and Mike Crane on 12 August 1980. This is an edited transcript of that interview. Original interview is in Utah State Historical Society and a copy is in Riverton Historical Society.]

John: Why was the dome church torn down?

Mike: They figured it was going to fall in.

Evelyn: The stairs weren't good.

Mike: I recall Mr. Lloyd had a great big old steam engine and tractors and big cables that they used to try to saw that big dome in half and into pieces. They couldn't saw it down and they couldn't tear it down.

Evelyn: It was a very impractical church.

Vivian: I'll tell you the version I heard. My mother had a beer joint across the street. They told her they couldn't hear the singing in church for the music box in the bar.

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Mike: That's probably a true story, but I still think it was condemned.

Evelyn: I know it was condemned. My mother had an awful time when she had beer in there. People were against having beer there. My mother built that in 1937. The other part where the café is was built in the late 1950s.

Vivian: They couldn't make her stop selling beer because she was there legally.

Mike: She was the first legal place in Riverton to sell beer.

[to be continued]

"More Fun Than Un-Fun":
Ted Seal

[Note: Mel Bashore interviewed Ted Seal on 8 August 2002 in West Jordan. This is an edited excerpt from that transcript.]

Ted: In those days, you could set a pitchfork down and three weeks later, you could come back and that pitchfork would still be there. The only time somebody would pick that up — "Oh, hey! That's Mel's pitchfork." And they'd take it to you. Otherwise, it would still be there. You didn't have to worry. I assume that my folks did, in fact, have a house key, but I don't ever remember seeing a key to the house. We had two cars and a truck. You always knew where the keys were. They were in the cars or the truck because otherwise they'd get lost.

> He said, "You don't learn to drive like this on the farm." I said, "It's a big farm."

As quick as you were big enough to be able to push the brake and the clutch and see over the steering wheel, you would drive farm vehicles. I was about twelve when I started driving. I took eggs up to the poultry plant when I was maybe fourteen. It was long before I could get a driver's license. We took a written test and a driving test to get a license. You had to take the written test and then you had to wait. After you passed the written test, you got a learner's permit which entitled you to drive with a licensed person in the car only. Nobody else — just a licensed person in the car. You had to have it a minimum of thirty days before you could get your driver's license. I went in to get my driver's license. They did it up to the state capitol grounds so you were on the hills. I got in and the examiner said, "I will tell you when I want you to make an emergency stop just like something ran out in front of you." When he did, I did. He didn't hit his head on the windshield, but he came up close. He said, "Boy! You really got brakes." I said, "Well, yeah. Got to keep the vehicles in good shape." He said, "How long have you been driving?" I said, "I got my permit thirty-one days ago. So it was just that time." He said, "You don't learn to drive like this in thirty days." "Oh, we got a farm." He said, "You don't learn to drive like this on the farm." I said, "It's a big farm." So we parked on a hill. I did not let the vehicle roll back to the curb. So he flunked me. We didn't get off to a very good start when I said "It's a big farm."

Mel: Could you tell me some more about your school days.

Ted: When you went upstairs to get up to the balcony of the gymnasium, there was a wooden gate that they kept locked so you couldn't go up. But you could climb around the wooden gate. There wasn't a wall there. We would do that and get into the gym. We'd jump down from the balcony down onto the gym floor and go up onto the stage and run across the bars that they had there for setting the back screens when they had a play. We'd run across those things. We'd play tag.

Mel: Did kids in Riverton respect people's crops? Was there much swiping of watermelons or that kind of thing?

Ted: Well, we were down on David Bills's farm. At that time, I think his youngest son was running it. It was after school one night in the fall. We snuck down there. We were thumping the melons to see which were ripe. We could hear him in the distance pounding on something with a hammer. We knew we were safe as long as we could hear that hammer. All at once, one of the kids said, "Hey! He's not hammering anymore!" About that same time, he showed up — right there! He just dropped in on us from nowhere and caught us red-handed.

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Mel: What are your memories of some of the characters around town?

Ted: We had Joe Newman. He was the mayor! Self-appointed! Un-elected! There was no office other than that he said he was the mayor.

Mel: He said he was the mayor?

Ted: Oh, yes.

Mel: Why?

Ted: I have no idea. I think it was cigars that he smoked. Stringham, whose drug store was on the north of us, was the Utah liquor outlet in that area. He kept liquor up in the northwest part of the store. He was the only one. His wife couldn't sell you booze. He was the only one who was authorized. On Saturday night, old "Mayor" would come across the street and never stop to look for a car. He would just walk across the

street. You'd better stop for him because he was coming across the street. He'd been doing that long before any of those automobiles had, so he had the right of way. He lived directly across the street from Stringham Drug. He couldn't walk all the way up to the corner — it was fifteen more steps. He'd go straight across the street at five minutes to six. Six o'clock was the cut-off time for Stringham to sell booze. He'd go into Stringham's at five minutes to six and get himself a bottle. He always brought it out in a paper sack holding onto the neck of the bottle and walk again across the street. You'd better stop, you idiots, because I'm walking across the street now.

Mel: Was drinking a common thing in Riverton?

Ted: Pretty much so. Oh, yes. Around the corner from us, just east of the bank building was a beer joint. That was a pretty popular place. It was built for a barber shop.

Mel: That and also Hatties?

Ted: Hatties. Of course, Hatties was much larger so it had more people participating up there.

Mel: Did you know some of the people who would visit those places?

Ted: Heavens, yes! I won't mention who they are now.

Mel: I picture Riverton as being quite a Mormon town.

Ted: It was. But there were a few of them that didn't attend church too regularly and they did the bars pretty regularly. I would go out to the store around Christmas time and turn off our Christmas decorations in the window. In those days, the Kellogg company and the soap companies would come out occasionally and decorate our store. They'd put crepe paper up for us. At Christmas time, we'd put a tree in there. My sister and I and my brother would have a little village — lights in the houses and the church. I'd go out about ten o'clock and turn that off because we couldn't afford to run the electricity all night.

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"Riverton's Main Street":
A Look Back at the Old Business District

Note: On 31 August 2002, the Riverton Historical Society sponsored a program looking back at some of the old businesses in Riverton. The following is an edited transcript of the remarks of Monte Peterson and Delbert Page.

Monte Peterson

My grandfather started with David Bills in his store. He worked for him until the early 1930s. In 1938, Grandfather (Louis W. Peterson) — they called him Lute — went down to the northern portion of the Page-Hansen building and started a store there — a meat shop. That's how he got started. He started down here right off Church Street, just north of the old elementary school. Using materials from the dome church, he had a confectionary built on the north side of that building. It was attached to Peterson Market. In fact two years ago when they were tearing that down, I knew there was some granite blocks from the dome church that had been buried on that property. I found a row of granite blocks right at the edge of the road which I think could have been the foundation for that confectionary. I have the granite block. They moved the confectionary portion over to make Gus McFarland's café. Grandfather built that as well. The building south of the old store was an appliance store which my grandparents run as well. Above Gus McFarland's café, my grandmother Grace Peterson had a sewing shop called the Smart Shop. Annie Mae Sanderson sewed for her and a number of other women. Edna Cowdell worked in the confectionary. They were very involved in that whole area — the café, the appliance store, apartments above the appliance store, the store itself, and the confectionary. He started out in Page-Hansen's till they built the other buildings. He moved over there about 1941. About 1946, Delbert leased that building. In 1950 my parents, Bruce and Donna, started their own store. They were there for one year until the lease expired, then they went back down the street to my grandfather's building. In the early 1960s, the levels of floor between the old store and the appliance store were different. When they expanded the store into the appliance store, there was a ramp. I remember vividly going up and down that ramp with a grocery cart. In 1969, we joined next to Anne [Riverton Drug] in front of our current location and built an 8,000 square foot store there. In 1974, we added 2,000 more square feet to make it 10,000. We added two more five years later, making it 12,000. In 1984, we went the other direction closer towards the drug store and took that field. That was in 1984 and that made the store 24,000 square feet. In 1989, we added another 12,000 square feet on the back. That made it 36,000 square feet in 1989. In 1996-97, we tore it all down and started over. Now we're 44,000 square feet and I think Albertson's is 56,000.

Delbert Page

They hired me as the gopher. I'd go to Salt Lake for this and I'd go there for that.

I first started at Riverton Motor when I was twelve years old. I worked there with my brother, Selyf. He was the night watchman. He worked in the daytime as a mechanic and then as a parts man, but he was a night watchman when I was twelve. I was born in 1916 so add twelve and that's what it was. In duck hunting season, we'd get up a little early and he and I would go hunting ducks. Then he'd go back to work and I'd go to school. Those were the good old days. When I was a little older, they hired me as the gopher. I'd go to Salt Lake for this and I'd go there for that. Grease the car, change the tire. I did everything that was hard work including sweeping. I enjoyed it very much. I'll tell you how Riverton Motor started. Ford Motor Company had such a nice machine that they would have liked to have gotten a lot more business. They was having dealerships available if you had $500 and a place to go in business. Uncle Gwynne and a fellow by the name of Terry and Orin Berrett got together and each put up one-third. Gwynne was the boss, Terry was the sales manager, and Berrett was the bookkeeper. They needed a salesman. Gwynne asked our dad [Thomas I. Page] if he would be the salesman. Dad didn't want to be tied down, but he said, "I'll help you get started." And that was it. So he was their first salesman. I guess it was around 1936 when I first started to sell cars. I was over the used car lot which was on the north side of the building. We had as high as thirty used cars along that place! We had to put some in the back. I used to go out and keep the batteries charged. When they went down, I'd take them out and recharge them and put 'em back in. We didn't have a battery charger on wheels. You carried the batteries to the charger. At that time, we had about five dealerships in Riverton. I had a job and I liked automobiles. It's always been in my blood. I knew the automobile dealers in Riverton — all of 'em! All five. I sold used cars with my brother, Ron. International trucks. I had a good time at Butterfield Motors. Then I went back to Riverton Motor. I had a wonderful time. Sold a lot of cars. I worked there for about eleven or twelve years. It was the best job I ever had in my life. I made good money. I made lots of friends. I made so many friends at Riverton Motor. I just really enjoyed the job. All of these businesses in town were so nice. That's our history here in Riverton. But you know what? Most of Riverton is gone and hauled away in the truck — like Monte's old store, the bank, Rol-Save. All of them. So if we got any memory, you've got to have it here [points to head]. You can't go look at it. I want to thank you for all you're doing for all these people who want to remember a little bit about Riverton. It's been very enjoyable.

A Summer in Riverton in 1928 with Grandpa and Grandma Madsen

[Introductory note: Brigham D. Madsen, a new *Riverton Yesterdays* subscriber, had a long and distinguished career as an historian. He was on the faculty of BYU, Utah State University, and the University of Utah. He has roots in Riverton. His grandfather was Carl Madsen and his grandmother was Annie Crane Madsen. His father was Brigham Andrew "Brig" Madsen, who was born in Riverton in 1891. Following are some excerpts from his published autobiography [*Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Western Historian* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 28-31] pertaining to Riverton and Riverton people.]

Carl and Annie married in the Logan temple on November 30, 1887, and spent a two-week honeymoon with Annie's relatives in Clarkston before settling down in Riverton. Throughout his life Carl Madsen maintained his strong faith in his church, raised twelve children, operated a successful farm and small building business, and eventually served three missions to Denmark. He converted an older brother Niels, who immigrated to Utah in the fall of 1886 and also settled in Riverton. He was the only other member of the family to become a Mormon.

Annie, in addition to raising Charley and Mary, had ten children of her own: James Emanuel, Malinda Annie Elizabeth, my father Brigham Andrew, William Carl, Etty Keturah, Alice Fanny, Frankland Alonzo, Annie Johanae, Desna Gwendolyn, and Delilah Jean.

He was strict but fair, hard-working, a man of integrity and honor. He also had a fiery temper. I remember one day when a young heifer, that he was training to enter a stall, balked. In sudden exasperation, he jabbed her with a pitchfork, shouting, "My soul, I'll teach you to do what I want you to do." The heifer immediately jumped into her stall, and I immediately decided never to cross Grandpa Madsen.

He jabbed her with a pitchfork, shouting, "My soul, I'll teach you to do what I want you to do."

He was opposed to the silent movies of the time, believing them to be not only frivolous but a menace to moral values. It was with some trepidation, therefore, that his two youngest daughters, eighteen-year-old Desna and sixteen-year-old Jean, and I sneaked out through a basement window to see Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheik*. To my great relief, we were not apprehended. I was, however, caught one sabbath afternoon after church swimming in the canal with three cousins. I was confined to my room for the rest of the day without supper, although Grandma was able to get cookies and a glass of milk past his vigilant guard.

Grandpa did not observe his church's precepts in one particular. He just could not give up his taste for Danish beer, and Grandma indulged this

peccadillo by often sending me to the village store to get a half dozen bottles of his favorite brand, always packed in a large grocery sack so the neighbors would not see what they already knew. I rather enjoyed these weekly journeys into sin in behalf of my otherwise circumspect grandfather.

When I was in the LDS Mission Home in Salt Lake City in July 1934 for a few days' training before I left for my mission to Tennessee, he drove the twenty miles to Salt Lake City so that I could spend the day with him at Riverton. It was early Sunday morning. There wasn't much traffic, and Grandpa barreled through every red light and stop sign, both coming and going, for the whole twenty miles. When I expostulated the first time that he shouldn't break the law this way, he answered, "My soul, there aren't any other cars in sight and besides this is the way I always drive in Riverton." That was a harrowing experience.

I sat in the adult class of Riverton Ward's Sunday school that day and watched my grandfather with amusement and admiration as he took on the entire class, contending that the Holy Ghost, or Comforter, was actually our Mother in Heaven, the wife of God the Eternal Father. He would neither shut up nor sit down, much to the teacher's exasperation. I have some of his religious notes which include such self-imposed questions as the following: "After we have gained our Salvation, and are worthy to mingle with the gods, shall we again become Mortel, and go Throu Life Exspirience, like our Father Adam," "in given a Revelation, could there be any chance of making a mistake when it is not given verbely," and "is it reasonable To believe That God is the actsuel, or reall Father of The Billions of spirit That has lived on This Earth."

My grandfather . . . took on the entire [Sunday school] class, contending that the Holy Ghost, or Comforter, was actually our Mother in Heaven, the wife of God the Eternal Father. He would neither shut up nor sit down.

Carl Madsen died in 1947, surrounded by most of his numerous family, and secure in the knowledge that there was a place waiting for him in heaven where he would be reunited with his two wives and where he could continue preaching the everlasting gospel. My father told me that about an hour before he died, he asked to go to the bathroom. My father and his younger brother assisted him to the toilet where Grandpa relieved his bowels. My father handed him a goodly portion of toilet paper, but Grandpa immediately tore off a single sheet and handed the rest back to Dad, exclaiming, "My soul, there is no need to waste things!" All of Carl Madsen's descendants treasure this little incident as utterly typical of Grandpa. [to be continued]

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