Riverton Yesterdays

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A Monthly Newsletter of Oldtime Stuff about Riverton, Utah

In This Issue

"As We Go Along in Life": Elias Butterfield

Silent Movies and Malted Milk Shakes: Max Parry

"I'm Not a Baby Any More": Bruce Peterson

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Silent Movies and Malted Milk Shakes:
Max W. Parry

[Note: This is an edited transcript of an interview Mel Bashore conducted with Max Parry on 26 August 2002.]

They played music while people were roller skating in the top of the Commercial Building. They had a player piano. It was up on the stage. They had a stage where they could put on programs. We had a good time up there.

Rol-Save was just to the north of our implement store in the Commercial Building. Palmer had a clothing store on the very north end. Ardella was right on the corner — Ardella Butterfield. She put up hair. She was right on the corner. They had the post office there at one time. They had an apartment on the back corner behind Palmer's place. People lived back there. At that time, that building belonged to Riverton 2nd Ward. My grandfather [William L. Parry] said that he owned all that at one time — the Commercial Building, the old houses up through there and almost the whole town. He was pretty well to do. He bought some sheep and with the drought and so forth, he lost everything. He would have lost the store, but Dad came in and rescued the store. Dad took the store over. Dad borrowed some money from the Federal Land Bank and kept the store intact.

We lived in about three different houses before my parents built a new home on Redwood Road. The contractor was Ez Miller. I think he paid — I'm guessing at this — $3,700 or something like that for the house. They got it finished and Ez came up to the house one day and said, "Do you think you could pay me now? We're all finished. We can get this taken care of." My dad said, "Yes, I think we can do that." So my dad gave him a check in full for the house. Ez went down and paid some of his bills, but he went up to Morris and Merrill. He paid them for all the lumber and that kind of stuff with that check. It was on a weekend. They held the check until Monday and the bank didn't open on Monday. So that's cutting it close. The bank didn't open because it went broke. Morris and Merrill got stuck with the check. The contractor and my dad had paid it off. It was a tough time for people at that time. Paying ten cents for a malt — that's not very much. So things were tough.

They held the check until Monday and the bank didn't open on Monday. . . The bank didn't open because it went broke.

I was about six years old when the Depression hit. Everybody was poor. Nobody had any money. No kids were out buying ice cream cones and things like that — except me — I had a malt. But it was tough. It really was. That was when you put cardboard in the bottom of your shoes when they had a hole in the sole of 'em. You just didn't pay any attention because everybody had the same problem. One day I was in front of Palmer's clothing store. I picked up a rock about the size of a baseball. The rock was sure pretty on the outside. I wanted to see what it [the rock] looked like on the inside. I threw it down on the cement and it went right through his window. My father had to pay for that. At that time, he had glass in the store. So he just pulled a pane of glass out and cut it and went over and put it in. I was scared to death.

I was about six years old when the Depression hit . . . . No kids were out buying ice cream cones and things like that — except me — I had a malt.

We used to have a lot more snow than we ever think of having right now. On the Herriman road here — they refer to it now as 126th — you could stand on where they pushed the snow off to the side of the road high enough to reach the electrical wires on the telephone poles. But then every night the wind would come by and fill the road full of snow again. So they had to close it down. They had to open up fences off into the fields so that they could go up to Herriman because there was too much snow on the road. At that time, the road went down past to 13th West and then over and down to Tithing Yard Hill. I always thought to myself, somebody ought to buy that property. When you come up to Tithing Yard Hill clear up to Redwood Road because that's the only place they could put a road. But they fooled us and went up through the river there.

The older men in town used to come in our store a lot, especially in the winter. They used to do all their b.s.'n in our place. We had a big pot-bellied stove that we threw coal in. They'd do their chores and about ten o'clock they'd start rovin' in. They'd play checkers. A lot of 'em would sit and challenge each other in checkers. Then they'd just sit around and b.s. with each other until about two o'clock. Then they'd go home and get ready to do their chores. They'd get a bite to eat and do their chores. So they were always in there every day.

When the Depression was on, they used to bring commodities out there from Salt Lake. There was a lot of bread, oranges, grapefruits, and all that type of stuff that they could carry without refrigeration. They'd back up to the front of our building there. It would be on a Thursday. The afternoon was generally when they got there — right around noon time. The people that needed the commodities would come up there and I'd get up in the back of the truck and another one of the kids I knew. I'd move the stuff from the front to the back and then they would pass it out to the people. A lot of cheese. Lots of cheese. We called it welfare. It was the government that brought it out. They'd bring a load every week back up there and pass it out. The people who were the best known — like the Cranes — they even had to come over and get some. Even though they had a lot of property, they didn't have any money to go to the grocery store. So they would come over and get what they were allowed. You were only allowed so much. So the people who were very influential was showing up there along with everybody else. We didn't realize that everybody was in the same boat, but that's what we were in. Everybody was hungry. We all were hungry. But the welfare people used to come over there with their commodities all the time. Parry Implement was really the center piece for most stuff like that.

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When we first started out in that hardware store, everything was horse-drawn. Binders and mowers and all that was horse-drawn. We stayed long enough that we flowed over into the tractors. That was about the time that we sold the Chevrolet dealership to Riverton Motor. We sold farm equipment to everybody in this end of the county. Everything would come in a railroad car in pieces. It had to be assembled. One of my friends, Porky Flanders, and I assembled all the manure spreaders, mowers, and all that kind of stuff. There was a lot of work involved. The farmers used to bring in their harnesses off of their horses. We had big barrels. One would fit inside of the other. We'd fill the barrel about half full of oil for the harnesses. We had this other barrel that would slide down in. That one had holes in it. We'd put the harnesses in that second barrel and let it sit overnight to soak. In the morning we'd pull 'em out. You'd have to let 'em drip over the barrel so you didn't waste any oil. Had a lot of that to do. Sold a lot of horseshoes, horseshoe nails.

In the thirties, they put my father in charge of the stake farms. He had to go out and find the equipment to pull spuds or whatever it had to be. I remember one time we had to put some spuds up for the church and he couldn't find a puller — a spud digger. So he went down and he bought a two-row spud digger and he put it up. We got the spuds up and then he practically gave it away afterwards because it was the first two-row digger we'd seen. We did have tractors to pull it with then.

In back of where the Poultry was, they had that big spud pit. You'd back your truck right down in there and raise the bed and dump it out. It was right next to the railroad tracks. They had elevators that would take the spuds out and put 'em in the railroad cars. They would size them and everything down in there while we were out getting another load of potatoes. It was quite a big potato pit, I'll tell you! They used to make large crates to put the eggs in up in the Poultry. They used to manufacture 'em up there. Eldred Beckstead used to make 'em. That was all he did. He worked there and he made crates. People would come in and they'd candle the eggs and put 'em in the crate and bring 'em a full crate of eggs.

We delivered coal to the school up here where the community center is now. We sold 'em all their coal. They wouldn't let us bring it in with the trucks and unload it. They wanted the railroad to bring it in. We'd have a fifty-ton railroad car come in and we'd unload it into our trucks and then dump it into their bins. They had big bins in there under the building. We hauled coal over to the prison [after about 1950]. Hauled coal up to Camp Williams. We took it up there and we slid it out into an elevator that would take it and put it into the bin. But my father put a belt in the bottom of the truck. They had boards across the belt as it was turning. We could kick that in gear and unload it in fifteen minutes. But up to the prison they wouldn't do that because they sent the prisoners out and they wanted them to unload it. So I'd take it up there and sit there up on top of the cab and watch them unload it. They'd put six guys up there — two a-comin', two a-goin', and two a-workin'. That's just what they would do.

I'd take it up there and sit there up on top of the cab and watch them [prisoners] unload it. They'd put six guys up there — two a-comin', two a-goin', and two a-workin'.

[to be continued]

"As We Go Along in Life":
Elias C. Butterfield

[Note: This is an edited transcript of an interview Scott Crump conducted with Elias Butterfield on 10 May 1991.]

Community Improvement

Oh, it didn't get too awfully nasty — a little name calling, a little shouting on occasion.

Oh, it didn't get too awfully nasty — a little name calling, a little shouting on occasion. The day after we walked into the Pipe Line meeting, we had enough shares of stock to change the board of directors. Frank Seal was the chairman of the Riverton Pipe Line Company. He wanted to sell his stock immediately. He wanted to get out from under it. If we were going to run it, he didn't want to be involved in it. So we got the town incorporated. Our first incorporation was in 1948. A.J. Orr, A.L. Butterfield, S.R. Anderson, Meredith Page, and Eldred R. Hamilton were appointed to the town board. That's the group. But they didn't ever take office. The town board president [Arthur J. Orr] never did take office. It wasn't very long between when we were first incorporated before we were disincorporated. These people [the former pipe line officers and major share holders] went to bat against us and got a restraining order. A restraining order was put against the board and the court disincorporated Riverton. They argued before the judge that we had pushed a lot of things over and done a lot of things that they didn't like. They said that we were going to raise their taxes, gonna take their control over — things of that nature. I don't remember what they all were. One of the judge's decrees was that we would go out with petitions again. We had two people go out with each petition — one for and one against. We went to every house. I went with Elmo Platt. We had a district to go to. I presented the case for and he presented the case against. Then we said, "Now we'll need a vote on one of these two petitions — for or against." We got more for it than against it. Oh, it wasn't a landslide. It was enough to satisfy the law — something like two-thirds to a third. We took the petitions to the judge and he said, "I'll incorporate Riverton, but I'll put the opposition into the town board." The judge appointed our opposition as the town board. They put in the old water board as the town board of Riverton. That was Leslie Butterfield, J.E. Morgan, Harry E. Page, F.E. Seal, and J. Melvin

Peterson. They were the town board for that period of time until November of '49 when we voted them out again. In the general election, we voted them all out again. Oh, there was a little brick throwing. I might say this though about those individuals that thought they were against us. For example, I remember Leslie Butterfield — he was the freight agent up here at Riverton. I went up to get some freight when he was speaking civil to me. One day he came to apologize to me. He said, "I had you all pegged wrong. There were some tales going around about you that weren't right. I finally found out I was wrong." He said, "I apologize to you." A lot of that sort of thing happened. We apologized to a few, too. We kind of got the thing back together pretty good.

We voted that we would sell the Riverton Pipe Line Company to the town in a Pipe Line meeting. Then the town of Riverton went to bat for $90,000 on a bond issue and paid the stockholders off. It was all done legal and above board. There was no cheating of anything or anybody.

Elmo Hamilton put my brother, Joe, over the cemetery. It was decided that we would go in there and revamp the cemetery. The way it started originally, the Church had set the cemetery up. It was a non-profit organization controlled by the Church. There was a time you couldn't even buy a plot in the Riverton Cemetery because they didn't have any. The Church signed it over in a hurry. They were trying to get rid of it. It was a headache. There'd be two forty-feet square plots back to back plus a road. We decided to go in there and tear all those roads out and make smaller lots so we could sell some additional plots to people. I guess we made them 12x20 instead of 40-foot plots. We sold cemetery plots for $12.50. They were twelve feet by twenty feet — enough to bury five people. It was a little better with four, but you could bury five. It was like all the old cemeteries. We got grass planted in there. We got all the rubbish out of there and got grass planted. It took about two weeks. We put a water system in with ditch water pumped out of there so we'd have water at the cemetery. We got that all beautified at very little cost to the people.

There was a time you couldn't even buy a plot in the Riverton Cemetery because they didn't have any.

"I'm Not a Baby Any More":
Bruce Peterson

[Note: This is an edited transcript of an interview Mel Bashore conducted with Bruce and Donna Peterson on 21 October 2002.]

Bruce: Old Joe Newman used to sit on a chair out there by the light. Old Joe Newman.

Mel: I've been told that he was the self-proclaimed mayor of Riverton.

Bruce: He'd have been a good one, I guess.

Mel: Do you remember the Tinker Man?

Bruce: Oh, yes. I was scared of him. I was just a kid. He used to go around and solder pans and sharpen knives. He had a horse and a wagon. He had a car. He said, "It's a good car, but it won't run."

The Tinker Man had a car. He said, "It's a good car, but it won't run."

Mel: Did he live right here or did he go from town to town?

Bruce: I think he lived here, but I'm not sure of that.

Donna: I remember him coming by home, pots and pans hanging on his wagon.

Bruce: Hen Bills went on a mission. He had a girl friend he liked pretty well. When he come home, she'd married somebody else. He was devastated. I'll tell you another story about Hen Bills. He come home one night and he'd been drinking. He seen this porcupine so he started following it. It went up over a hedge. So he run and got a pipe wrench. When it come on the other side, he hit it in the head and killed it. If that had fallen on him, it would have killed him. But sure enough, he killed it.

My dad started up a little market on the north side of the Page-Hansen store about six years after he quit David Bills. He borrowed, I think, six hundred dollars to start a business. He expanded there, I think, three different times. He bought the old

dome church house and tore it down. It's too bad they didn't save it. You don't see buildings like that any more.

Mel: What are your memories of the dome church?

Bruce: The upstairs was the main chapel. They had programs down below. They just had a bunch of wooden chairs — about four or five in a row.

Donna: You kids climbed around on the dome.

Bruce: Yes. Crazy thing. They had a ledge about that wide around the dome. We'd get out on that thing and walk around the top on the outside. You couldn't get me to do that again!

Donna: Did it have a baptismal?

Bruce: Yes, it had one. It's where I was baptized. It had a basement for heating. The reason the church moved out of there was it was too hard to heat. Too expensive.

Mel: Did your dad involve you with the chores in his business?

Bruce: Yes. I started with him in 1938. I was just out of junior high school. My brother Kenneth was two years older than me. He liked the store, but he didn't want to work in it. He'd come in the front and ask Dad, "How's business, Dad?" Dad would tell him and Kenneth would walk out the back door. That was it. He got killed in that bus and train accident. I remember coming home. They let school out of course. My brother was a senior and I was a sophomore. I'd come home and Mother didn't know if I was on the bus with Ken or not. I just happened to wait for another friend. Could have been gone early.

Kenneth would come in the front door and ask, "How's business, Dad?" . . . . and walk out the back door.

Donna: It was his bus and he just happened to wait and go on another bus.

[to be continued]

RIVERTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Death Notices

Violet Page Hamilton (93); widow of Eldred Hamilton; parents were Florence Jeannette Crane and Thomas Independence Page; six children

Ann Eloise Dowding Webster Gardner (93); widow of Lyle Douglas Webster; owners of Webster's Hardware Store