

# Riverton Yesterdays



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A Monthly Newsletter of Oldtime Stuff about Riverton, Utah

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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.]

We sold cars for two years — in '32 and '33. After that we went into the tractor business. Farmers would buy tractors before they would buy a car. They had to have a tractor to work. More people bought tractors and farm equipment, I guess I should say.

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Everybody in the town had chicken coops in their backyard. They raised eggs and brought 'em down to the Poultry here. They sold eggs there and they candled 'em and everything. They shipped 'em off to the stores. You didn't get 'em in these little cartons. You got a whole big box full of 'em when they brought 'em out.

We did have a couple of beer places in the town. We had two beer taverns. One is still goin' and the other one is right behind that bank [Jordan Valley] they just tore down — Jennie's. It started out as a place to get hamburgers. Finally somebody figured out that it would be a good place to have a bar and bought it. It went over good. Jennie's had it for a long time. I can't remember the names, but there was about three other people that was in there sold beer.

We shopped for groceries at Dave Bills. He used to have a slaughter yard down on the canal bank. He'd kill 'em. If you wanted one killed, he'd do it for you. He'd put it in the locker for you. It's right next to where NAPA Auto Parts was. There was a big ice locker there. We'd all have a little section in there to put your frozen stuff in. When you wanted something to eat at your own place, you go down there and go in and unlock it and pick your meat out and take it home. It was a community freezer locker. Warr's owned the freezer locker. If you're looking at the old auto parts store [now remodeled into a laundromat], it's the house to the west that sets back in there. They moved it back finally. It was up in front and they just moved it back. That used to be the ice locker. I'd be interested, when and if they tear it down, to be there and just find out how much insulation is in that building. That locker was in operation during the Depression years. They had an old house there that they tore down. It belonged to Butch Madsen, who was the barber. Out in the front corner of his property, the southwest

corner, he had his barber shop. Then they put this freezer place in and then in the front, they had a service station. There was a service station that you could pull in. It was right along side of the road. They just had the tanks right there by the sidewalk. You just pulled over and filled up. So that's what was there. Eventually the service station went out of business and they tore that down. Then they moved the refrigeration house in the back there.

Leonard Beckstead's gas station was north of the Commercial Building. That's where I used to get the milk shakes. I think he was the first owner. Then on the northwest corner of 12600 South and 1700 West, there was a service station there. It was Bill Nelson's garage. He used to work on cars, change oil. He had tanks out in front of that. We had a tank in front of the Commercial Building. Riverton Motor had one. Ray Battison had one on the sidewalk in front of where the show house was. That's what they all did. They put 'em right out in front. These were all places that sold gas. A guy from Sandy used to bring gas over and they'd put it in these above-ground tanks like they still do. There were about four or five places that sold gas.

The grocery stores — we sure had a lot of them. We had Dave Bills, Frank Seal, Rolly Page, Harry Page, Meredith Page. They were all goin' at one time. At the Page

Mercantile, they had things we haven't got now. You could go in and buy clothes and sewing threads. They sold a lot of materials for shirts and pants. Everybody used to make their own. Harry Page had some hardware items in his store. Of course, Rolly was nothing but groceries. He was in the Commercial Building and then he moved over to into that bank building when he bought that. Harry lived in the back of his store. Many of them even lived there right close to their businesses. Dave Bills only lived two houses down from their store. Frank Seal lived down about six or eight houses on that side down from the red light going north. Leonard Beckstead lived in the service station — in the back part. I think he only had less than three rooms — two rooms and a bath. We had a lot more businesses than we got now. You could buy anything in town. If you didn't buy it in town, you generally could go to Penny's in Midvale. That's where most of the people would go. That's about the closest where you could buy anything real nice. But you could buy Levi's and overalls and things like that at Page's.

Riverton didn't have a Main Street look because the stores just popped up wherever they'd buy a piece of ground. There was nothing

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between those buildings they just tore down [southwest corner of intersection of 12600 South and Redwood Road] and Riverton Motor. Most of it was open ground at that time. Gwynne went up and bought that ground clear through the next road to on down where he had his home. He was right behind his store. Page lived in the back of Page's store — the big one, the mercantile. Everybody lived in town — I should put it that way. They had their farm and they would drive their teams — they'd pull their wagons up to haul hay and so forth, but they lived in the town, but they were spread out. They had their own big large gardens and things between each house, so they weren't close together.

I started working in the store just as soon as I could learn how to sweep floors. I was about eight or nine years old. I just used to enjoy sitting down and listening to the guys b.s. around that stove. That was the main thing they did in the winter. They couldn't do much out — the ground's froze, covered with snow. Everybody came down there. Not all at once, but they'd come tricklin' in and tricklin' out all day long. We furnished 'em everything we could so they could play checkers. We furnished 'em chairs. You know what the chairs was? A wooden barrel upside down that we had horseshoes in. They'd sit on them around the checker board or whatever they was doing. Most of the time, they just used to b.s. Just talk about the weather or whatever.

If there was anybody that liked to fool around, it was my father and my grandfather. My father had a habit of taking his bib overall straps, flipping them both at once, and his pants would drop all the way down. Only men would come in there. The girls didn't want to be seen in there. If somebody would come in and was horsing around, especially a younger person, he would take 'em down and he would holler at me, "Get that rake handle out of there." He'd get 'em down and he'd put one handle down through their legs and they'd be laying on the floor like this — two rake handles. They couldn't get up. Oh, my dad — he'd do about anything! A great jovial guy. He could flip those overall straps so fast that the overalls would fall. Everybody wore overalls. But he was quite jovial. A few of 'em come down that tell big stories. There was always somebody that exaggerates.

Only men would come in there. The girls didn't want to be seen in there.

**"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 Affairs

The city hall was first located in Gwynne Page's store when he was president of the town board. After he went out, then it come down to Butterfield Ford. Salt Lake County owned one acre up where the senior citizen's center is now. When Elmer Seal was president and I was on the city council, we got Salt Lake County to give us that acre of ground and we built that building that's there. And at that time, we bought a fire truck. We hired Selyf Page to be the fire chief for \$25 a month. We got a bunch of volunteers to work with him. The north half of that building was a stall for the fire truck. The back half of that stall was a place for George Usher to keep his water supplies. Over on the left side was the city offices. In the back of that was a little recreation hall.

Town board meetings were held once a month. The Lions Club met on the second and fourth Monday and the city fathers met on the first Monday. We'd just go there and there'd be a bill to approve, complaints to listen to, and things of that nature. We never did have an agenda when I was working there as a clerk. We just discussed what was happening in the community. There were five members on the town council and I think the town board president was one of the five. He had a full vote with everybody else. If you wanted to speak at the meeting, you could just show up or you could make an appointment in advance — just say you were going to be there. The meetings lasted a couple of hours.

Some would run for re-election, but not all. I was appointed when I was on the town board. Shorty Cardwell asked me if I'd come on and I told him yes. I voted on an issue. Some of the Hamiltons were there. Two days after, Eldred Hamilton came down to the garage to tell me that they were going to see that I wasn't re-elected. Do you know what I said to them? "That's very interesting. I'm not running." That's why my tenure on there is very short.

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**"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: I enjoyed working in the store. I stocked shelves. I did that for the first year then I started cutting meat with my dad. I did that all the rest of my life. We got our meat from a packing house down in Midvale — Fritz Bills. That's the brother to that Jed Bills. They'd deliver it. We used to go out and kill calves. Once in awhile, we'd kill pork, but not too often. In the store my dad sold the run of groceries. All types of canned goods and fresh meat. In the winter time, the produce was pretty limited. They'd have carrots, potatoes and onions, and I think, lettuce. We'd get it out of Salt Lake. It probably come in from California. We didn't raise any beef.

Mel: What was the Smart Shop?

Bruce: Well, she used to make aprons and other things she would sell. She got hooked up with J.C. Penney's one time. They liked her aprons. They were good ones. Finally they said they'd take everything she had. So it was pretty good for a month or two. Then they come and said, "Hey, we got to buy those for less." They knocked your price down and they got control of you. That's the way those big companies do.

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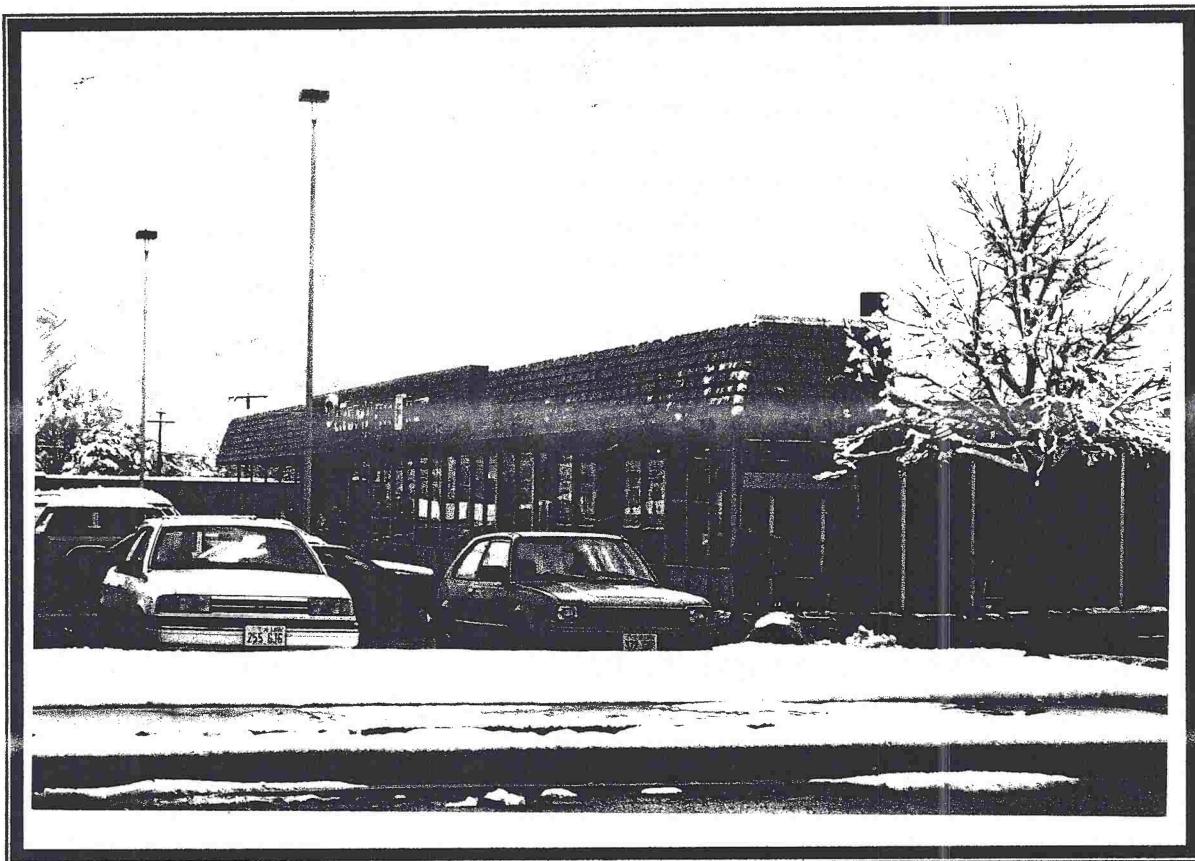
Donna: They started to tell her that she had to put the stitchings farther apart and they didn't hold together as well. The business was based a lot upstairs in your house, from what I understood. Addie and some of 'em sewed upstairs. Didn't she sell dresses, too?

Bruce: I guess she must have done. She must have got a little line of clothing.

Donna: Gals liked to be employed in the confectionary. The local ones are still alive that worked there. Edna Cowdell worked there once.

They started an appliance store on the side and apartments above that. The Smart Shop turned into a café with an apartment above. That turned into a restaurant. It was Art and Gladys.

Bruce: Well, Dad owned it. I don't know how many years he operated it. He got my brother-in-law and his wife to take it over. They worked hard and they made a little money. I guess McFarland kept after Dad to sell it and finally Dad sold it to him.



Peterson's Food Town, ca. 1985

Mel: What was the Depression like for you?

Bruce: Well, I wasn't really old enough — only eight or ten. Dad raised chickens. I remember they used to bring up fish in the winter time from the lake down there. They used to net them. Of course, when it froze over they couldn't do that. They'd bring 'em home and put the fish in a big barrel and light a fire and cook 'em. Some of the smaller ones were better fish. We'd eat 'em because we were hungry. We had four or five acres at our place. Dad planted a garden. We used to have to go out and weed it. My dad had a good reputation for being honest. Grandpa had a little store up in Lark. He changed the spelling of our name to Peterson so the bunch of Swedes up there would trade with him. Most of the other family would spell it Petersen. Everybody just called my dad Lute.

He changed the spelling of our name [from Petersen] to Peterson so the bunch of Swedes up there would trade with him.

Mel: Did you ever pull any pranks?

Bruce: I remember one of the pranks we used to do. We used to a flour sack and fill it full of paper. We'd put it alongside the road and people would see a good sack of flour and they would stop and pick it up. We had a wire attached to it and we'd run with it.

Mel: Did you ever push over an outhouse?

Bruce: I didn't, but my friends did.

#### Death Notices

Bruce Peterson (80); husband of Dona Withers; parents were Louis W. and Emily Grace Vawdry Peterson; three children; grocer

Elizabeth "Beth" Steadman Bills (95); widow of Leo DeMont Bills; parents were James and Mary Ann Winder Steadman; six children

"I Can Remember":  
Eldred and Violet Hamilton

[Note: This is an edited transcript of an interview Mel Bashore conducted with Eldred and Violet Hamilton on 29 January 1986.]

Eldred: I was born on September the 30<sup>th</sup> 1901. My father's name was Reuben S. Hamilton. He homesteaded forty acres on the corner, just off of 13200 South where that big white house is. His brother, Thomas M. Hamilton, came out and joined with him.

Mel: What are your early memories?

Eldred: I used to draw water out of the well with the old buckets — run one down and the other one would come up. We had a little well there just off to the side of the house. I remember when they brought the electric lights into Riverton. They had the drop cord and you turn the lights on with this button on the light switch. Before that we used coal oil lamps.

Violet: That's what everybody used — coal oil lamps. You'd have to clean them every day. I can remember my mother cleaning coal oil lamps — so busy cleaning them in the night.

Eldred: You'd have to clean them with newspaper. We had a coal oil lantern that we'd carry out to the barn so that the light would cause any fires. . . .

Violet: The Birkenshaw family used to put on the picture shows. They were silent pictures. They had their daughters play the piano. I thought — if I could only play like that. I was just a kid.

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The Birkenshaw family used to put on the picture shows. They were silent pictures. They had their daughters play the piano. I thought — if I could only play like that. I was just a kid. They had shows twice a week — Mondays and Thursdays. When they started the shows, we thought that was something really scrumptious.

[to be continued]

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