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JAMES (JIMMY) GRAHAM Tape #1042

Interviewer: Judy Reich - newspaper article December, 1975

Where did you come from when you came here? From Coal Creek, Colorado. Up Coal Creek Canyon? No, it's down by Canon City. It's a little mining town down there.

How long did you work as an organizer? I think probably five or six years. Somewhere along there. It was the American Federation of Labor. Were mine workers part of that? They were affiliated with it. Did they break away later or am I thinking of something else? Am I thinking of the CIO? At one time.

Wasn't there a problem when you were with the AF of L with the craftsmen and industrial workers? The industrial workers were started? The CIO, yeah. Was that while you were involved? Yes, it was goin' on then.

Were the coal miners considered craftsmen then? No, industrial. Because you have a lot of trades in coal mining, actually, crafts trades but they're all covered in the one organization. Were they with the CIO? The coal miners? The national president of the United Mine Workers was one of the organizers of the CIO.

Did the mine workers go in with the CIO then? When the AFL and CIO broke apart? They were separate and then they went together.

What did you do as an organizer? Did you just try to get more people in the union or --? Yeah, you talk to groups that are working in whatever industry you're trying to organize.

Did you work with others; did you jsut work with coal miners or did you work with other groups? Yeah, we worked with other groups besides the mine workers.

And when were you in the legislature? Lets see, '31 - I think '31, '35 and '37. That's pretty close. What kind of things were you working on in the legislature. Do you remember any bills or special things then? I introduced the first Old Age Pension Law in Colorado. Did that get through? Yes, and then it was declared unconstitutional. It was declared unconstitutional? Uh-huh. What was unconstitutional about it? I can't just remember. It was the forerunner. It came back then and we finally got it. So it did go through and then they wiped it out then? Well, then that led to the re-introduction. Then there was another bill? Uh-huh.

Then, during that time, we sponsored unemployment compensation, increase in Workmen's Compensation.

So, it seems like you've been involved a lot in workers' rights and unionizing and that sort of thing. Yeah, I've been listed as a nasty radical. Well, that really changed things for middle class America. It helped them to climb and get up and it helped the women. Right. There were great differences between the people who owned the companies and the people that were working and just had to do whatever work was available. I really started bringing up the middle class. Uh-huh.

As a very small boy, I remember the scrip that you heard of in mining towns. And the company store. The company put out money. And you could only trade it at their store. This was in mining towns, the mining companies? Yeah. Coal mining companies. Oh, I see, the mining companies had something set up at the local stores, is that it? They owned the store. Oh, they owned everything. Yeah, they owned the houses; they owned the store. And so for wages, they would give you this scrip thing and get it right back. Yeah. When was that? Oh, that was back from the 1900s, say from 1900 and even before, up to, well after the big strike, it was pretty much stopped. But I'd say from 1900 until the end of the big strike, it was in use. You've heard Ernie Ford sing that song, haven't you? Oh, "I Owe My Soul to the Company Store"? Is that what he's talking about? Why sure. That was one of my favorite songs, too.

Did your dad ever get involved in trying to stop that scrip stuff? Well, before he became an inspector, he was active in the United Mine Workers. In fact, he was active before they had United Mine Workers. It was called the Knights of Labor. So that's how you became involved, probably? Uh-huh.

Did you have just a sister, did you say? Yeah, just a sister. So she wasn't involved in coal mining, probably? No, she just married one. Oh, she married a coal miner and then moved away later? Well, no, they lived here. And he was also a professional baseball player. Oh, did Denver have a team? Oh, he was owned by the Philadelphia National. He played in the major leagues and he played in the Coast League and the American Association. Also in the Old Western League here in Denver. What was his name? Leonard Metz. Was he involved in baseball after they got married; is that why they moved away? Yeah, he was involved prior to their marriage and afterwards too.

I was also involved with a program with the State Coal Mine Inspection Department and the Vocational Education Department on mine rescue and safety program. Were you teaching? I was teaching. What, like in high school and vocational programs? No, these two outfits financed it. I would go to the mines and teach classes.

Are there any other things that you worked on in the legislature? Oh, gosh, a lot of them. Was Colorado - lets see '31 through '37 - they were starting to get out of the Depression around then, weren't they? Yeah, it was comin' out. Did the State have programs? Only in cooperation with the Federal Government. Most of the programs at that time were nearly 100% funded by the Federal Government but a lot of them were in cooperation. How do you think Colorado fared during that time compared to the rest of the country? Oh, I think probably we were very much better off. Why do you suppose that was? Well, there were a lot of seasonal occupations throughout Colorado. I don't know just how to put it, but I think the people were in better shape to take layoffs and periods out of work than probably a lot of other places. They were kind of used to that because of things like coal mining? Yeah.

Did the coal mining still continue during the depression? Oh, it continued to a certain extent but you know everything slowed down. Everything didn't come to a stop, but it slowed down. Like now when we're having a recession, they say that Colorado isn't feeling it quite as bad as other parts of the country. Like in Detroit where they're laying off all the auto workers. Of course, here you don't have the large industries - as much industry to begin with. No, actually, I think Uncle Sam is our largest industry. You mean here in Colorado? Uh-huh. Yeah, a lot of government agencies. Yeah, you take Rocky Flats, 'cause the government's there. IBM. And this research in Boulder. NOA, ENCAR. Lowry Airforce Base. Fitzsimmons. The Arsenal.

What do you think about the local scene, the local government here - they're going through some problems right now. I think they're about to get their feet on the floor. Have you kept up with what's going on as far as the Council? Not as much as I should have. I wasn't in particular involved. I had nothing against Jane, Williams or that. But I do think they made a mistake in puttin' her in there. Not that I - you've got to have a certain background in my estimation. She started out as just a clerk and then --. Yeah. And a lot of people thought in Finance she was good - she was good in keeping the books straight. But she didn't have a lot of background in water, sewer. That's right. They have this new guy from Commerce City - he was just put in last week. Well, he seems to have the background. I hope it's good. But Lafayette kind of has a history of having little upsets in the City Government, doesn't it? They had the guy that embezzled money and the guy that got the City in debt.

How was it earlier? Oh, the first manager we had was a prince. A heck of a good guy. I knew we couldn't keep him because he was too good. We had him a couple of years and he went on to bigger towns because he was really good. Then the next guy stole \$40,000.

Then the next one just overextended us. What was that first guy's name? Preson (Freeson) (sp?). Was that the early 1960s? Yeah, he was the first manager after we adopted the home rule. And home rule started in '58? Back there some time - I was on - a member of the convention to adopt - that wrote the charter. So you're saying here that there was the guy who embezzled the money and Flewelling is the one that overextended the city in debt. Then after that --- (can't hear)

It remains to be seen - he's got a problem.

What else can you tell me about the things that you did. You've done a lot of different things.

Yeah, I've had a very interesting life.

How did you get into city government? Did people encourage you to run? Council, or --?

I was drug into it. Did friends try to convince you to get involved? The union wanted me to run for the council. In fact, I was in Indianapolis, Indiana attending a national convention for the United Mine Workers when they sent me a telegram to have me accept the nomination for city council here. And they sent a telegram? Well, the local here. That was in 1928 - 1929, somewhere right in there. That was during the Depression or when it was first starting? Just getting ready for it. You became a candidate then? You were running? Was it the same as it is now? Yeah, run and be elected, yeah. Do you remember how many people were running? Gosh, no, I don't. At that time, the council was made up of six councilmen and a mayor. You elected the mayor? The mayor was elected, yeah. It was not a home rule - what do you call it, statutory? Statutory, yes, I guess it would be. You're pretty much controlled by state law. Where home rule gives you a little bit more freedom. Do you think it's better to have the home rule? I think so. I think they should have pretty much their own say in what they want to do. I'm a great believer in local responsibility.

So you were elected to council then? Uh-huh. How long was your term then? Two years. And then you re-ran? They held elections every two years in those days. How many terms did you have before you became mayor? Oh, gosh, I really don't know. How long were you on the council, about? Oh, I've been on - off and on up until four or five years ago. The last time I was on, I was appointed to fill a vacancy.

Side 2: (Started out in middle of conversation so didn't type)

Do you think the Democrats have a chance this time around? I I don't see how they can lose if they get a good man. You think Ford is not very strong? Has the incumbent ever lost the presidency election? It happens sometimes with mayors or councilmen, but the presidency? Yeah, but there's a first time for everything. Times are changing. You think that's possible? I think it's very possible. Of course, Ford wasn't elected. No. That's right. I think if the Democrats come up with a good strong person, I think he'll be elected.

Is Lafayette - do you know what the political climate is here, is it conservative or liberal or has it changed? Today, I don't know. But it's always been democratic and liberal. Probably because of the union and all that? I imagine, all of the background of it, yeah.

Did your wife - did she work at all or was she involved in anything - well you said you had a restaurant up there for a while - did she help? Yeah, and she worked at Lowry Field for a while as a telephone operator.

What did you call the restaurant? Jimmy's Lunch. Did you enjoy this? It was really quite different from the other things you were involved in. Yeah, I enjoyed it. We worked ourselves to death. Then we sold it. It takes a lot of time when you're in your own business, doesn't it? We were open 24 hours a day. Oh you were? Yeah. Did you get a lot of business in there at night? Oh, yeah. There's quite a bit of traffic along here? Oh, yeah, we had an enormous truck driver business. The toll road wasn't here (Highway 36) and the roads out east weren't there (I-25).

What did you do after that? After you stopped with the coal mining and you stopped the restaurant? I went back to the state as Deputy Secretary of State under George Baker - he was Secretary of State. I remember after we closed the restaurant, he called me and asked me if I'd take the job. And I said, "Yes" because I didn't have a job. Then I worked for the county in the road department for four, five, six years. This was after you were Deputy Secretary of State? Uh-huh. How long were you Deputy Secretary of State? Oh, what was the term then - two years, I guess.

What did you do as Deputy Secretary of State? Well, signed papers, is about all I can think of. What kind of things did your office do? Well, the State Liquor Department was under the Secretary of State at that time. We had to issue all those licenses. Pretty near all licensing was done through the Secretary of State - like your Cosmetology Board, Barber Board, your Real Estate Board, Pharmacy, all of them. And

your corporation - if you opened a corporation, it had to be filed with the Secretary of State. If you incorporated a company, it would have to be filed with the Secretary of State. Were you working down in Denver then? Uh-huh. Most all of your election laws then came under the Secretary of State. Like, petitions would have to be filed with the Secretary of State. The candidates had to file their campaign expenses with the Secretary of State and all that kind of stuff.

What do you think about this business of fair campaign laws and people releasing their campaign expenses and stuff like that, you know, and account for where the money came from - you know, since Watergate and all this money being funneled into the re-election - you know, the Re-elect the President Committee or whatever it was? How do you feel about this? I think it's a good idea. Were you aware of any of that going on when you were working down there or did that ever come up? Oh, it's always been a part of people donatin' and wantin' special privileges for it. That's what I always thought.

Did you have to check on sources and how much money would come from certain companies or something like that - campaigns, did you check on those things very much then? Not so much in the early days there, we didn't. There was some check on it. Of course, we've had checks on it for years and it never amounted to anything. I guess you need a real big scandal like Watergate; people become aware of it then. Then they start clampin' down, at least for a while. Until the next scandal comes along and uncovers something else, I guess.

When they started Civil Service jobs and stuff like that, that was because of scandals going on, wasn't it? Well, yeah, that's right. If you elected a Democratic governor and legislature, they put all their friends in and the other people were out. And if you elected a Republican set-up, then they'd kick all the others out and they'd go in. Even if it was someone that was qualified. Yeah, it made no difference. Of course, that still happens, I guess. To a certain extent, yeah.

So, then after you did that, you worked for Boulder County? Yeah, for the Highway Department. What were you doing there? Were you working on roads? Well, I drove a truck and I also got to be a supervisor of a district. Were you working on roads out here in this area? Uh-huh. See, there were three districts. And you were working in one of the districts that included Lafayette? Yeah. Were there other places; was Louisville included in there? Yeah. And part of Boulder. Erie and Superior, were they involved in that at all? Superior, not Erie because Erie's in another county. That was before Broomfield was a town. How long has Broomfield been there?

Let's see, when did they start Broomfield - 20 years ago? 18? That's the craziest town, I think, the way it's set up - you know, there's the shopping center. You can get lost, can't you? There's no stores on streets, there's just the big shopping centers with big parking lots in big circles, like.

Did you retire then after that? After working with the county? Uh-huh. When was that? Oh, I guess I've been retired 10-11-12 years. Ten years, I guess, anyhow. Your wife just died recently? Yeah, she retired too.

Your family - your children and grandchildren? I have two grandsons and four granddaughters. Did you say you have two sons and a daughter? Two sons and a daughter. (Looking at pictures).

You have really done a lot of things. It's amazing. All Effie said that she knew for sure was that you had been mayor.

How do you feel about Lafayette? Are you really in love with the town? Oh, yeah, it's home, you know. The roots are here. I suppose you must know an awful lot of people here too if you've been on the council and with the union. You know, I used to know everybody in town. Now, I don't know anybody. You know a lot fewer people. As a comparison. A lot of new people have moved in here. Oh, yeah, very much. How do you feel about the way it's changed and grown the past few years? Of course, the whole state has and Lafayette has too. Does it bother you at all? Yeah, I don't like it. You don't like the growth? Well, I know we have to have it, but you know ---. I know it's got to happen and it is happening. I bet it was really different a few, just maybe 10 or 12 years ago than it is now. Yeah. There's a lot of people coming out from the east coast and all the crowds they have there and the pollution. Yeah, we're a commuters' town now, a bedroom town now. It didn't used to be so much like that? No. The miners lived here and they worked the mines right out of town.

How about in Louisville? Do you have a lot of friends over there? Yeah, I had a lot of friends in Louisville. I still have some, I think.

Can you tell me, did anything funny or unusual ever happen here? Do you recall, anything memorable?

Did they have periods of drought out here. I don't know about Colorado - Oklahoma got really hit, in the '30s, I think. Then in the '50s, I think there was the other drought, but not as bad.

We had one in 1930-1-2-3, somewhere along in there. It wasn't in here, mostly it was out east and southeast. Oh, yeah, sandstorms.

Coal Creek (shopping center) and the whole business about it. Do you know much about that? I sure don't; I don't know too much about that. They say they've been kickin' that deal around for a long time. That's what I've heard people say. I just wondered if you thought it was a feasible thing or if it will ever get developed? Do you know that much about it to be able to say? That's one of the major things that they're talkin' about right now and tryin' to get the water system upgraded so they don't have water restrictions. Well, I think it's probably gonna happen. I think maybe the Federal Government is gonna have to step in somewhere. I think we're gonna have to have some kind of a reallocation in the water. Someway down the line. But this whole eastern - east of the mountains here is gonna be hard up for water, as more and more people move in and more uses for water, it's gonna get less and less because we only have so much. And you can't take it from agriculture because we gotta have the food.

That's one thing that I would think would stop Colorado from getting too much growth because they can't support it; they don't have enough water. They can only build so much and have so many people if you don't have water, they can't stay. They have to either control it or if they get too many people in, they would eventually have to leave. And they can't get too much heavy industry. Maybe in the development of oil shale, it's gonna pull a lot of people in there. It might pull some of these people over there; it might relieve this condition, I don't know. But I think it has a possibility of relieving this eastern slope. The growth seems to have slowed down the past couple of years, they say. I believe it has to some extent.

I think they're gonna have to come up with some new ideas on what would you call it - I think we're gonna see less and less of lawns and things of that kind. I think our landscaping is gonna - or should take on a new dimension. Because I don't think we're gonna have the water. A lot of people are putting in stones and things like that. Uh-huh. I think it's gonna have to come to something like that. Because I was in the mountains all summer and my lawn just went to pieces here. If I'd been home, it would probably have got more water but the people takin' care of it --.

What did you do in the mountains this summer? I have a cabin at Grand Lake. You spent the whole summer up there? You betcha. Were you fishin'? Oh yeah. I don't fish in the lakes. I like to fish on the stream.

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How do you like being retired? Do you kinda miss --?
Yeah, it takes a little getting used to. Of course, then
there's nice things about it too. Oh, yeah. You can take
it easy, for a change. That's right, and then I kinda mess
around town.