

MIDDLE SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

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ELIZABETH & JACK LEWIS, 1/22/88 Tape #1085

We're here with Elizabeth Lewis and can I ask you a few questions first about your family? How and when did your family settle in Lafayette? How? Well, my father, George Dillon, was a coal miner. He worked in the coal mines in and around Lafayette, Colorado. So that's why we settled here. What time was this; what year? Well, possibly the first time would be in 1910. Your father was a coal miner you said? Yes, my father was a coal miner. Where did you come from, like overseas or just -? No, we're Coloradoans, 100%. No, I'll take that back - my father was born in Kansas.

Do you remember like what the town was in 1910 when you first came - do you remember what it was like; what kind of stores and stuff?

Yes, pretty much. Can you tell us about it? Well, Main Street was in the same place it is now - that's Simpson Street. It was very active. On the corner was Alderson's Store which we then called the Hub Store. It was a shoe store also. Up the street was a little tailor shop; a man by the name of Samuel Lucock made suits for men. Charlie Scholes had a grocery store there and he also made doughnuts; he had a bakery there. And Bermont's Store was a great big building that you've probably seen pictures of. It later became Ham Roberts' Store and the Milagro Store that just closed up. Oh, there was the Bonelli Store just catty-corner from the Bermont Store that we used to trade at. And I believe my husband can tell you about a - what was that a blacksmith shop next to Bonelli's Store, what was that? I can't remember exactly what that was. It would be down from the library (3rd & Simpson) Oh, next was Dan Jones' Livery Stable. Oh, and on the corner which is now Senior Citizens' building, was, at one time, a nice big drug store. I'm talking to you now when I was about 10 or 12 years old, but years before that, there used to be another drug store and I think that was down on the other corner - what used to be, where Cliff Alderson's Store used to be. Oh, no, Alderson's Store wasn't that far down and there used to be Dow's Drug Store. There was Mr. and Mrs. Dow and they had a son - had a drug store there. But that wasn't when I was a young girl. I'm sorry, I'm missing two different years. It was different when my folks came here and when I'm talking about when I was about 10 years old. But we did have the Dow Drug Store at one time and we had Alderson's Store and later on, they became Alderson's store and the Postoffice. And then the corner drug store that was a drug store for many years sold out several times and became a little icecream parlor.

Do you remember, I think there was a miners' strike in 1915 or sometime around then, I don't remember quite the year. That's the big strike in 1910. It went from 1910 to 1915. Do you remember how it affected the community and the businesses? Well, I can't remember, because I was born in 1912. But my parents told all about it for many, many years. My mother told - do you want to hear this story? Sure. I was born in the last house then on Emma Street. Right across the road began the Simpson Mine.

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All that territory was the Simpson Mine and the Simpson Mine Camp. All that territory in there had Simpson Camp houses. They were little, all built alike, most all of them were built alike, little four square rooms; each of them had four rooms. And when, one night, my daddy came running into my mother and said, "Take the children and go up the street to Mathias' because there is some shooting started." Well, my mother grabbed my older brother, Herman, and me who, I think she told me six to nine months old. And she ran up the street, three or four houses on Emma Street. They did shoot, the miners and the scabs - the men that were working were called the scabs (working during the strike, that is). They did do some shooting back and forth, I understand and after they returned home; (this was probably 7:00 or 8:00 as it got dark) and 9:00 or 10:00 when they did return home, my mother said that along the room where I would have been lying in the bed, were two or three bullet holes, which they figured would probably have hit me if I would have been lying there. Oh, how scary! So that was the closest call that we had but they went on to tell of how this whole town was affected during the strike of 1910 and it lasted for five years. And, of course, all of our side of the family and all of my husband's side of the family always were and always have been union men because they had worked the long, hard hours with not a day off and they had to fight for what was right.

There were a couple of examples that Mrs. Amicarella told us about the women's role in the community. Do you remember anything about what the women did? No, not too much.

Do you remember like any of the social events and stuff that they had in the town when you first came here? You mean during that strike? No, not during the strike. I don't know what time period you want. Just like, when you were younger. Well, of course, all of our activities as I lived in Lafayette and I grew up in Lafayette - most all of our activities were centered right in the school house. Almost everything that we did was either in the school or it was down at the Jewel Theater. We went to the show on Friday night and Saturday night for a nickel or a dime. And they always had continued series shows Friday nights so you'd have to see what was going to happen Friday nights, so you'd always try to go back. Then, everything that went on at school was of great importance like the Junior Class Play, the Senior Class Play or the Lions Club or whatever social function went on in the school house; we all tried to go to the school house. The firemen put on different things - different kinds of entertainment. You went to see what the firemen did. In latter years, you went to the firemen dances. The Lions Club tried to entertain. And it was many, many years later before there was anything to do with Girl Scouts or anything like that. And there were lakes around and some of the different groups would go out iceskating.

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You know, you mentioned about the miners that your family were, but do you remember about what role agriculture had, farming and stuff? Yes, there was a lot of farming going on all around the land. Lafayette was very concise and compact right here and all around us was land all the way to Longmont. All open fields which now all the land is being sold out and into homes and little acreages.

Can you ask you some questions about the church, the Methodist Church, would that be all right? Yeah. Do you remember how the Methodist Church started in Lafayette or when you first went? Well, when I first went - when I first started going to the Methodist Church, our church had burned down - this church that was on Geneseo had burned and my oldest son was being baptised. Well, let's put it this way - my son was being baptised down in what we called the Rocky Mountain Store building which is now the new building on Simpson Street that houses the - what's down there? The office building - Scripps Howard, etc. That two story building and I went down there; I started down there 'cause he joined church and became a member. And then I really became active in the Methodist Church after the church was built up on the corner. You mentioned the church being on Geneseo, do you remember how the money was raised to pay for that being there? No, I don't.

You talked about a fire; there was a second fire and do you remember where church was held? It was in the Rocky Mountain Stores - is that what you said? Well, I believe that was the place. That would be the second fire.

Did you help in any way getting that church built? That church? Yeah, the new church being built. No, not really. Not until later on - it was built and then I helped raise money. What were the main projects of the church, like for raising money? Well, mostly, I helped with the Lions Club dinner and we served dinners and got money that way. Did you have any missionary projects or community projects? Oh, yes, we always had missionary projects. But that didn't go to the church; that went to the missionaries.

Can you remember how the agriculture affected the church? Well, agriculture affects everything. If the farmer doesn't make any money, it seems like nobody has anything. It was as true then as it is today.

Do you remember about the coal mining and how the miners' way of life affected the community? and the church? Well, it was the same with the coal miners as it was with the farmers; if the coal miner worked and brought his money and his paycheck home at

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night or at the weekend or every two weeks, then he spent his money in town and the money went around and everything comes. But if there wasn't any money spent then the businesses didn't prosper.

You know, in different places like the strike and different depressions like that - how did the church affect peoples' lives? Well, I think that the church played a big role in the peoples' lives. And, I think, maybe this is just a personal opinion - but you get closer to God when you're down and out than you do any other time. When people are happy and jubilant and things are going real good, you sort of forget and when things get tough and you see other people in need and you get closer together and there's a tie that binds and then your church has more meaning.

Okay, it talks about here - the organizations that you were involved in, about like Sunday School, Youth Groups, administration board, music, Vacation Bible School - do you remember anything about those? Yes, I had a part in most all of those.

There's a few questions maybe I could ask you, I don't know if you do or not - either a recipe like from your mother or your grandmother or maybe some pictures or old articles when you first came here - do you have any of those? Well, I'd have to think about that. I do have a basketball picture, I'd say that was taken, possibly, maybe 1927 or 1928 if I can find it - it's rather large. Okay, well maybe sometime when you're thinking about it, or something. Well, I was going to give it to the library if I haven't already given it to them. Okay.

Thank you for all your help and maybe if you didn't give it to the library, maybe we could see it.

(Jack) - You were talking about there used to be a laundromat down there. You're going to talk about that? Do you want to tell us?
(Elizabeth) - You tell them. Well, this was down in the 400 block on Main Street (Simpson) it used to be what was called the Rocky Mountain Company Store. All the miners that worked in the mines, and especially the Columbine Mine near Lafayette, traded at that store. That was a great big store that had the meat, the vegetables, the canned goods, the dry goods, you name it - they had it - that was everything in one. You hear the song, "I Owe My Soul To The Company Store" - you think it's funny - you think it's a joke, but to our family and to a lot of other coal mining families, that is a truth - you wouldn't have enough to eat - the head of the house would go into the office, the mine office, and he would say, "I need a \$20. coupon book". They would issue him a \$20. coupon book. Maybe in three or four days or a week, he would go back in and say, "I need another coupon book for \$20." Or \$10. or whatever he had to have. When payday came around,

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maybe he'd go and stand in line and all of his money had already been issued out in coupon books. Maybe there would be money left, like in our case, for rent, and maybe there wouldn't be. Maybe my mother, because my daddy wouldn't do it, but maybe my mother would have to face the landlord and say, "I don't have the money for you today". Then we would have to economize the next two weeks and not get any coupon books so we'd be able to pay the rent the next two weeks. But you had to be really careful or you'd draw out all your earnings in coupon books. And that store was there for many, many years. Now there is a lady by the name of Anna Snyder Barrowman who is still alive, that worked there for many years, that would be able and probably willing to give you a complete history on that.

Okay, thank you very much; is there anything more you want to tell us?

I'll talk to Mr. Lewis, Jack Lewis, right now and he's going to tell us what happened during the miners' strike. Well, when there was a strike, all the guys that could, took off and they homesteaded east of Greeley - a whole bunch of them. They took their wagons and whatever they had with them and went down there and homesteaded. They didn't have nothing to go on, so they didn't have nothing to lose. They didn't have anything to gain so they didn't have nothing to lose. So we stayed out there - I was born in 1910 and until '18 - so we stayed out there eight years. And my mother got hay fever and we had to go back. Then when you came back, you had one heck of time getting a job in the mines because all the scabs had the jobs and the guys that had been union - they couldn't get a job. So that's the way it was. Down at the Simpson Mine, they had what they called a bull pen; they had a big fence all the way around there and them guys that came in here from Virginia and all them places, they stayed there. They didn't come to town, because if they did, they didn't go back. That's that. Was it hard on your family? You're not a-kiddin'. My dad always had a big garden and everything, we always got by, but - we even ate potato peelings. (Elizabeth - Oh, Jack.) Well, they're eatin' them today. Anyway, we had a big garden and my dad would work out during the day whenever he could get a job. We finally got by, but my ma used to save everything - canning - and we finally made it.

Was your family from Colorado or did your family come from somewhere else? I think my dad, years ago, came from Ohio - years and years ago. My mother come from Iowa. But the biggest part of the time, they were around here. They were here around 1893 or something - they went to the Congregational Church. Then when they left the Congregational, they went to the Methodist. After they went to the Methodist, Kelly Scofield was my teacher when we went to the old church down there. They had a big room in back of where the preacher stands up there - that's where my class was.

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The laundry used to do a lot of business. They used to do laundry for all the coal miners, you know, from all the mines. Roy Crawford was the owner at that time. And he was there for years. And they done a big business. And then he was crippled up more than he was. And you wouldn't believe it. But anyway, he was so crippled; you'd think he was a drunkard. But he drove that laundry wagon and he'd pick all that stuff up and bring it in and his wife, and well, there were four or five gals that used to work for them. Until they made apartments out of it, for years and years, that was the laundry. They had them big washers just like they had anyplace else.

This was a real town before they got the idea of progressin' it.

(A lot in here not understandable so couldn't type it)

Over at 409, they had a dairy for many years. Until progress come along and knocked that off. They had a lot of stuff here before, a whole little town, before everybody came, huh? Yeah, before they put the - like I say, progress. What was the population; do you have any idea? Probably 2,000. 1500 to 2,000. In that neighborhood.

Do you remember about the government? What type of government or what kind of law enforcement? About the same as it is now, only not so many of it. I'll tell you one thing - they had one cop, one cop, and he had to do the clerking and if there was a water leak, he'd go and dig it out and if he had to arrest somebody, there he would be, and put him in jail, with his muddy clothes on and that was Louie Starkey and he'd tell you the same thing but the poor guy can't do it now - he ain't here. But that's the God's truth. And he was the cop and the water guy and everything.

Did they have trials? Did they have juries? They had trials but they had what they called - J.P. -Justice of the Peace. See, they had that in them days and you had to go to him. They had a couple here, and one guy I remember, I never will forget him, you had to ???????? (can't understand, so couldn't type). I had to go down there a couple of times with somebody else and he'd say, "Now wait 'till I get the book". Now they just take a recess and look at the book later, huh? Yeah, that's right.