

BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM E. HENDERSON

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by
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Biography Of William E. Henderson

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William Eli Henderson, born January 12, 1918, St. Clair County, Marissa, Illinois, was delivered by a doctor, and no midwife in attendance.

He was educated in Illinois, and lived there with his parents until he turned 18, years old. At which time he, his brother, and brother-in-law, decided to leave Illinois, because of the depression, "you couldn't buy a job in Illinois!" They left Illinois, on a freight train, "side door pull-man," riding in a boxcar all the way to Colorado, then on to Wyoming, and on to Salt Lake City, Utah, then back to Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Upon arriving in Rock Springs, Bill was the first of the trio to get a job. It was at the Park Hotel, and he was a bus boy. The three of them arrived in Rock Springs, August 15, 1936, the weather, Bill said was nice, but the country was dreary. Bill and companions thought Rock Springs was a fairly modern town, compared to Marissa, Illinois, and there was work here. The three family members did not know that they would stay here in Rock Springs, but Bill Henderson did, and is still here, after 53 years.

When Bill was first in town there was only one railroad crossing, and it was at "C" street. In the near future Bill got to see the over-pass, the pedestrian underpass, and the automobile underpasses constructed.

By the time Bill came, and lived, in Rock Springs, there was no racial prejudices, or real ethnic segregations, except the black people did stay in what was called "Bookerville," but they did work right along with the rest of Rock Springs' workforce, in the mines and elsewhere. The Slavs, Italians, Blacks, Whites, Chinese, and all others received the same pay, and treatment from their bosses.

The town was pretty well "Unionized," and all the miners that worked at the local mines, belonged to the United Mine Workers Of America. The Union kept the people together, and sponsored events, and Holidays.

Bill took a job at the Montgomery Ward store for a short time, then in the number 6, mine for a while, where he unhooked, and re-hooked coal cars at the bottom of the mine, for coal to be hauled to the surface and stock-piled or loaded out for use by the Union Pacific Railroad.

Bill Henderson was too young for WWI, but did his civic duty with the Civilian Conservation Corps later during WWII, then also got a deferment from the military, because of the type of job he then had with the Union Pacific Railroad.

Bill remembers 32 or more bars, and prostitution, and it not really being hidden. It was accepted in the community, and people just lived and let live.

"No outlaws that I can remember" just some people that came and went. There may have been, but Bill don't really recall any such characters.

When Mr. Henderson first came to town, it was modern, to him. It had running water in most homes, a sewer system, and stores that delivered groceries to residents homes. The mines had bath houses, and the residents had cars for transportation. They had company stores, and independent stores. A blacksmith shop, a union hall, lights, 52 different nationalities, and several different customs, and religions. Everyone seemed to get along just fine, and work together.

William Eli Henderson, who came to Rock Springs, Wyoming, in the Depression era, worked at the Park Hotel, Montgomery Ward, a coal mine, and then in the Civilian Conservation Corps, and Union Pacific Railroad, raised a family, two sons, and helped his parents when they came to Rock Springs, Wyoming, is a noble, and honorable man, that is worthy of praise, and notoriety in Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Bill is now a retired railroad brakeman, still living in Rock Springs and is enjoying it well. He enjoys riding his mountain bike around town and travelling around the country seeing other places as well, with his wife Betty, of 49 years, who is the daughter of a late local coal miner.