

Biography Of:

John M. Shuster

Interviewed By:

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History Of Wyoming

John Shuster a seventy-two year old Wyoming native was born July 27, 1913. He was born in the home in which he still resides at 201 Gale St.

John recalls Rock Springs as being a dirty little old coal mining town. A town that at that time had very poor facilities; there was hardly any electricity, water and they had no indoor plumbing. The only plumbing they had were out-houses, two seater out-houses.

The ^{WAY} these out-houses were built was by digging a hole in the ground then putting a small building up on top of the hole, and there was your two seater out-house. If someone had to use the out-house in the middle of the night they had what you would call a "Thundermug" or a "Urinal" under the bed, and that is what you would use at night.

Running water in the kitchen consisted of one tap for the whole house. To wash clothes you would put a "Boiler" on top of a stove and fill it with water, and then you would proceed to wash clothes by hand. They were dried by hanging them outdoors.

Cooking was done by a coal or wood burning stove. The electricity consisted of only one light in the middle of the room. It had a chain that you would pull and the light would go on. There were no light switches or outlets to plug in to get your electrical power.

The population was three to four thousand people, which were mostly coal miners. The town has spread out a great deal since. The main parts of town were north and south front streets. K street and Pilot Butte were among main street also. There were a few American Till stores around that area also; These were grocery stores. They had no big grocery stores such as a Safeway or City Market. People would order their groceries everyday and the groceries would be delivered to them.

There were about 30 bars in the area. They would open at seven in the morning and stay open all night. There was no law of when a bar had to close. A glass of beer would cost you around a nickle, a shot of whiskey would be twenty-five cents and wine would cost around two bits.

Rock Springs started to grow in 1965. Reason being a new power plant was built and Trona mines began to come in. Five more mines then came in they were: Texaco- Gulf, Allied, Weast Vaco (FMC), Staffer, and Tennaco, which employed quite a few men. It's now probably one of Rock Springs biggest employers. Each company employs about five to one thousand employees.

As Rock Springs grew there ^{WAS} were a larger amount of crime. If a crime did occur it would have been someone that was from out of town. There were not as many robberies or vandalism.

If you were caught vandalizing, "Your parents would beat the hell out of you." There were or no such things as "Cop Cars," A policeman would walk, very few people had cars.

There was no prejudice, there were around 52 different nationalities. Everyone was alike. Some of the different minority groups in town were the, italians, fins, greeks, cilivans, germans, english, british, irish, and a lot of welshmen. When the railroad came through in 1868 employees were mostly welshmen and irishmen. A lot then stayed in Rock Springs, because they started to mine coal. These people were rather smart, they usually had a job as a mechanic or blacksmith in the mine.

John's neighborhood has changed a great deal. He says, "People don't care what your neighbor does anymore."

Years ago everyone cared about everyone else. Even as far as the other side of town. A good neighbor always helped you out, they were always handy. They were of all different groups; Italians, Fins, Greeks. But now you help yourself; no one helps you."

One of the oldest buildings still standing is the city hall. The old junior high is now a stadium. The Lalvon Temple on North Front Street is also one of the oldest buildings in Rock Springs. The Rock Springs stores are the Rock Springs Commercial, the Union Mercantile, Fins Store; most of the old buildings are torn down. There are still a few old ones on South Front Street.

Independant Printing Presses on South Front Street; a Civilian Lodge, St. Aloisius Society, an organization *arrived* organized in January, 1895. An organization of insurance companies; containing mostly Yugoslavians. The policy was if ^{you} died or got killed, you'd get a couple of hundred dollers. The dues were very cheap; maybe a doller or two a month. They would all dress the same, in a costume. The group still exists; it is more modernized now. Because of intermarriages there are a lot more different minorities in the organization. There are Englishmen, Scots." John married a Finnish woman who was in the lodge.

"When special holidays occurred everyone was off", John says. "People have changed it so much lately, holidays dont mean much anymore. On Washington's birthday, and Lincoln's , school would be let out. Also for Arbor Day. No matter what day it fell on. Today some people in this state recognize ^T Day on the 28th, wheras other states may celebrate it earlier.

Doctors could be counted by the hand. There were around three or four doctors. Medication has advanced, but the doctors have not. Back then doctors would make house calls. But now your lucky if they'll meet you in their office."

"Mail was delivered like it is today. There were dress codes, people were all dressed the same. Clothing was made of wool. There was nothing made of synthetics. Everything was warm because houses ~~were~~ not built like houses of today, with insulation. The only insulation back then was old bags and gunny sacks stuffed in between the walls."

John graduated from Rock Springs High School in 1932, 53 years ago. Children mostly wore overalls in school. Those who were well off were more nicely dressed. Clothes were mostly hand-me-downs.

Children all had chores. John would bring in the wood; a week's supply. He would get up early to heat the house. Bread was baked twice a week.

John was the last born in his house. His brothers were born in a hospital. His house has changed a great deal.

There was no such thing as dating. You would just go to the dances and meet people. No one had a car so you would have to walk. For other entertainment they would go to "polka parties" and when they got older they would go to American ^{DANCES} ~~Parrels~~, where you would do the polka and the foxtrot. You would have to be home at midnight on a Saturday because you would then be in Sunday, and you had to go to church on Sunday.

John met his wife, Odessa, on 1939 and they married in 1943. They were married in Lackstone Virginia. John was in the service and Odessa worked in Washigton, D.C. for the government.

There was very little T.V. and radio in in 1941. They had allot of radio programs such as "Amos and Andy", and "Jack Benny". They had music like Paul Whiteny, Chet Fields and dance bands. They could'nt buy records.

There were no social groups; only lodges. Lodges would have large flea markets and large festivals. People would donate lace, pillow cases, etc. Lodges would also have Polka Festivals.

John's first job was washing windows at five cents a window, ten cents for big ines, plus a free meal. Minimum wage was cheap. John's father would make a doller per ton of coal; or a doller a day. A doller would go a long way back then; you could go to a grocery store and come out with cash.

People would work more than light-hour days, John's father would get up at five a.m. to go to work and get off at four p.m.. He would work ten hours. They would also

have to walk to work, no matter what the weather was like.

There were no paid holidays or vacations. The only time you would get off work was if you were sick. The work at the mines wasn't steady; it would depend on the demand for coal.

There has always been a local newspaper; The Rocket Miner is almost a hundred years old.

There were strikes. You would only miss 24 working days, or eight weeks if you were to work only three days a week. Then the Union stepped in and you had more working days, and better wages.

"Whether was rough because houses weren't built for that type of weather. Winters are just like winters today, but your much warmer now."

School would start at 8 a.m. and get out at 4 p.m. with an hour for lunch. Children had to walk to school as there were no buses.

Politics was'n't a big subject as it is now. They would vote and have a party to celebrate and promote just like they do now. There is no great difference between President Reagan and our previous presidents. President Reagan has more problems.

"World War Two didn't pay much. I started out at \$21.00 a month. That was the wage to get shot at."

The Boom brought a lot of foreigners into town. They spent their money freely. "There was a lot of rif-raf. A lot of crooks and thieves."

"The '60 Minutes' segment was correct about the corruption, but the town has always been corrupt. The Mayor would pocket money paid on fines instead of writing it down for the record. There was about a half dozen sporting houses on K Street and just as many saloons."

"The town has changed for the better but we have to go along with the flow. Years ago if I had five dollars in my pocket, I'd be a capitalist, but now five dollars doesn't take you anywhere."

"The U.S. has changed to be a big bunch of legitimate gansters. Then, all politics and crooks out for the money. Things have advanced, though."

"People still made it through the Depression, although there was little money and few jobs. Soup was eaten five days a week. On Saturdays or Sundays roasts or a chicken was the meal."

John only knew what a turkey was when he visited friends. There were no such things as bread lines. If you were in a jam your neighbor would help you out.

"One of these days the U.S. is going to be blown up!" This is John's comment on the future of the U.S.

Some special messages from John: "You can never tell the depth of the well by the length of the handle pump." Also a good old time story: "One Craner (Yugoslavian) comes into a bar, then another comes in and sits down. There is an empty stool between them. A woman then comes in and sits at the empty stool. The first Craner reaches over to the other Craner and says 'It's a trick!'

John has a message for his kids. His children are going to have to sweat it out like he did. He never got any help like his kids do now.