

Wyoming History  
Oral History  
Nov. 22, 1983  
Bev Fanelli

This interview was taped on Wednesday, October 12, 1983.

The individual interviewed was Harry Jones, life long resident of Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Early Years (Approx 1-19 years of age): General Questions

Harry Jones was born in Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1909, which makes him 74 years old at this date. Harry said he couldn't remember if a mid-wife was in attendance when he was born, but the house he was born in still stands on McClellan Street in Rock Springs.

His mother arrived in Rock Springs with her parents when the mines first opened in Rock Springs. His father moved here with his family from Williamsburg, Iowa where they lived in a Welsh colony. Both of Harry's grandparents were originally from Wales and migrated to Rock Springs, but his mother and father were both born in Rock Springs.

Harry lived on West Flat in Rock Springs and went to school where the Audio-west building now stands and the original school house building is still standing behind Audio-west. There was also another grade school next to where the Park Hotel now stands and on the other side was White Eagle Motor. The creek used to run through Bunning Park on his way to school and you had to cross a bridge right by the old senior citizens building. One morning as he was going to school there was quite a bit of excitement as the night before a negro had raped a white woman and he was put in jail and taken out of jail later in the evening - he was hung off of the top of the bridge and was pushed over the bridge and shot in the back when the rope broke and he lay face down in the mud. Harry was in the fourth grade when this event happened.

Harry remembers his father having a 1916 Studebaker and his family would go to Lander and it was an all day trip as they started very early in the morning and arrived there late at night. Harry said that most of the miners walked to work. (He said they could have gone by horse and buggy). Most of the miner's houses were built close to the mines. He said #1 hill was called that because it was #1 mine and the coal was loaded right there. That is where East Jr. High School stands today. That also explains why the railroad tracks run through the town like they do as they were routed to get close to the different mines for the loading of coal. All together he remembers 7 mine locations throughout the city.

Harry says their water came from Green River in tank cars. He said that #6 mine had a spring by it and those people received their water from it.

Harry said he imagined that there were many bars in Rock Springs at the time but he didn't know the particulars as he didn't do much bar hopping.

He said there was a lot of violence mainly from the miners disputing amongst themselves and he mentioned the Chinese Masacre that took place in the old barracks, but Harry said that was before his time.

Harry said there were different churches that he could remember. There was a Catholic Church and Episcopalian Church to which he belonged, and a Congregational Church and a Baptist Church.

Every spring Harry said there would be a flood of the Bitter Creek by Bunning Park and all of the houses in that area would flood and the people would have to move to higher ground until the water subsided. There was a lot of flu and virus sickness as there was no sewer system and all of the sewage was poured into Bitter Creek.

So the flooding of the creek caused the epidemics. The old hospital was there and people went to it for medical treatment.

The coal companies had company stores which they all patronized.

Harry remembers the holiday called "8 hour day" but didn't elaborate on it.

He said that funerals were not so different then as now as there would be a parade of people up C Street to the old cemetery. He said that the Chinese had their own cemetery which is where the Highway Department is today and when the buildings were built there that many bones of the Chinese were found. Another cemetery was located where the old Fairgrounds building is and Harry helped to put in the water system there and they found bodies and bones there also.

There were some blacks in town then and Harry said they lived around #3 mine. He said the Orientals didn't mix much except that they did have restaurants open to the public. He said he used to see Indians going through town on their way to the reservations up by Lander from Utah going back and forth.

#### Early Years (Approx 1-19 years of age) More Specific Questions

Harry says he can remember playing kick the can as a boyhood game, but couldn't remember any others. As a boy he remembers having to chop wood and bring it into the house and also he had to bring in the coal.

Harry doesn't remember much about specific dating, but he does remember the difference between girls and boys, as he was raised with five brothers. The only vacations he took as a boy was with the whole family to Green River where his grandparents lived. They also went as a family fishing up in the north country of Wyoming and he remembers how long it took them to go anywhere. He also remembers going to dances at the Slavinski Dome and the Pla Mor.

## Marriage and Family

Harry met his wife Lucille here in Rock Springs. She was living in Casper at the time and came to Rock Springs to visit her sister who worked for Mountain Fuel and then Lucille came to work for them also. They went together for quite awhile and then she went back to Casper to work there. Lucille was a Catholic and Harry was Episcopalian and after they were married in Rock Springs they went to the Episcopal Church. They had three children; two boys and a girl and they were all born in Rock Springs at the hospital.

It was awhile before they had a television, and so they used to watch television at someone else's house until they could afford their own.

Harry belonged to the Masonic Lodge in Rock Springs and various church groups.

## Employment

Harry's first job in high school was with the Rock Springs Miner Newspaper which was located in the basement of the Rock Springs National Bank building. There used to be two newspapers in Rock Springs; one was the Rock Springs Rocket and the other was the Rock Springs Miner. Later, these two papers merged and thus we now have the Rock Springs Rocket-Miner. He doesn't remember his first salary but he said he was sure it wasn't much. Then he worked for Rock Springs Ford for a couple of years, and then worked for the Railroad in Green River for a short time. He then worked for the McDermitt Grocery Warehouse which was located where the old post office is now and delivered groceries to the mine camps in Reliance and Superior. These were the bootleg days and they sold a lot of yeast, in fact,

more was sold to people there than to a bakery shop! He worked then for the Stockwar's Mercantile and BiRite Drug stores for 12 years. He was a delivery man for this company also. In 1941, Harry went to work for Mountain Fuel. He started as a janitor for Mountain Fuel in the original building and lived on Massachusetts Street, and then moved to his present address, which he had built, on Connecticut Street. In the original building of Mountain Fuel where he worked, the offices were upstairs and there were sleeping rooms downstairs where the workers could live or stay overnight if they were from out of town. He worked for Mountail Fuel for 30 years. From janitor he went to being a dispatcher and then worked in their warehouse for 5 years and then went to work on the construction crew and was a foreman until he retired. He worked all over the state being on the construction crew.

Harry was not involved with any part of the union in Rock Springs or Wyoming.

### Politics

Harry was and is a staunch Republican, but does want the best man in office, if he would happen to be a Democrat. His parents and grandparents were Republican so he didn't know much about the Democrats. His grandfather worked in the courthouse in Green River and was county clerk for a long time and deputy treasurer. Harry was active in city politics as he was living with the John Taylor family after his mother died and his father remarried (high school yrs). He lived with them until he was married. John Taylor was on the city council of Rock Springs and Harry used to help him with his campaigns. He also said that women were active in politics. Harry thinks that President Reagan is a good man and has to do what he thinks is right for the country.

## Chronological Perspective

Harry remembers the moonshine trucks that used to come into Rock Springs late at night around 1:00 a.m. when he was still doing his delivering. There were a lot of stills out South of Rock Springs on Aspen Mountain ( 12 miles from Rock Springs) and it was delivered to "these speak-easys" behind the Park Hotel. He said you could always tell the trucks that had alcohol on them as they would only have one headlight on as a signal. He remembers one time when there was a raid on the trucks in Diamondville and the liquor was dumped out into the street gutters where upon the chickens had a real good time staggering around from drinking it.

He said the depression was "pretty hard times" and many people say more meal lines than meals. There were breadlines and a soup kitchen on K Street. There was rationing in WWII but he said if you wanted something there were ways to get it by buying or trading ration tickets.

Harry did not serve in the armed forces. The depression of the 1950's wasn't as bad and their family didn't really suffer as they had their home and he had a reliable job with Mountain Fuel.

He said the boom brought many changes, but he really didn't pay too much attention as he was working construction and out in the fields and away from Rock Springs most of the time.

He feels that 60 minutes exaggerated the problems in Rock Springs "quite a bit".

Harry has always enjoyed living in Rock Springs. He said there were bad times as well as good times. Harry thinks that the biggest change is in population growth before the boom.

Harry thinks that where the future of this country is concerned that things will get worse before they get better.

Harry's words for his children and grandchildren are to stick up for their rights as if they don't get what they want, someone else will.

Harry Jones is a fine gentleman, and became very tired toward the end of the interview. I appreciate his time and thanked him.