

This information is to be filed with the WILLIAM R. GIBBS oral history tape.

Mr. Gibbs mentioned the following names in connection with the houses in Reliance that were privately built. Martin and Jerry Stalick, Joe Kovach, Tony Kusek and the Kalans.

Mr. Gibbs mentioned doctors who served the camp of Reliance as being: Dr. Goodnough, Dr. Johnny Schurr, (sp.) Dr. Muir, Dr. Paul Kos and Dr. Burgoon.

He also mentioned Myfanwy Thomas, daughter of D. G. Thomas who married Dr. Goodnough. Also mentioned, D. G. Thomas and a Lawyer Preston.

In connection with sports, Jack Smith, coach, was mentioned.

With reference to Union Pacific Coal Company personnel the following were mentioned: John Hughes, formerly of Hanna; George B. Pryde, Vice President of the company; Butler; Marshall; Tom Overly; George Blacker; Scotty Spence; Bayless; Livingston and Chick Grasso, of Reliance.

Errors which occurred on the tape are the following:

Spring Valley is mentioned as being in Utah, that is incorrect--it was in Wyoming.

Interviewer said that the Reliance camp sprang up between the mines and the shaft--she meant between the shafts and the tipple.

The narrator said the houses built privately by people were all of rock construction--there were a few of frame construction.

The following are some clarifications of things mentioned on the tape:

Sections of Reliance were referred to by the residents by various names. The first section as you drive into town was known as "Sand Camp". Next, beyond the company store, "Middle Camp" extended to the bathhouse. The area beyond there was referred to as "Upper Camp".

"The Green Gables" refers to 9 houses all painted dark green and white which flanked both sides of the road just beyond the curve going into "Upper Camp".

*Reliance Camp  
by informant*

I have chosen the former Union Pacific Coal Company camp of Reliance, Wyoming as a topic upon which to focus my history project for Mr. David Kathka's Wyoming History Class at Western Wyoming College. There are some references to various other Union Pacific Coal Company camps and to company towns in general.

The following is a condensation of my oral history interview with Mr. William Gibbs of Reliance, Wyoming. This interview was conducted at Reliance, Wyoming on March 10, 1973 and recorded on a cassette tape.

Mr. Gibbs is a former mine clerk with the Union Pacific Coal Company (hereafter referred to as the UPCC) at Reliance. He was born at Cumberland, Wyoming, November 21, 1906. Cumberland was north of Evanston and was a UPCC camp and mine that was in operation from 1900 to 1930.

The grandparents of Mr. Gibbs lived at Almy, Wyoming, another coal camp and mine located about 7 miles north of Evanston and included in the UPCC operations. This was one of the older coal camps and was in existence from 1869 to 1900. There was an explosion in the Almy mine, about 30 men were killed and this disaster was instrumental in the closing of the mine a few years later. Both the Cumberland and the Almy mines were very gassy.

Mr. Gibbs' father's career with the UPCC began when his father was 11 years old. He started as a trapperboy. Trapperboys opened the door so the mules could haul the cars out and also these doors were used to ventilate the mine. His career progressed then to mule driver, gas watchman, who went down to inspect the mine for gas before the men went down, mechanic and master mechanic. He worked 40 years for the UPCC and never worked for anyone else.

This type of steps in employment was common for men in the mines and most of the officials came up through similar jobs in the mines to their positions in management. Aside from the companies probably hiring some technically educated people, Mr. Gibbs doesn't think the situation would be too different if the mines were still operating today. He says, "the biggest asset was in handling men." The foremen were able to do this because they had worked in the jobs they now supervised and could keep down dissatisfaction and get good production. Even a management trained mine superintendent would have to depend on his foremen to be his representative with the men.

In 1911 the Reliance area was prospected and good coal found. Mining was begun there in 1913. There were tents at first, this was common at the beginning of the coal camps even in winter. Water was hauled in from Rock Springs.

In the early days of company towns, when the UPCC and other companies were setting up operations, it doesn't appear that a great deal of planning went into laying out a camp. In Reliance, the camp extended along one road which ran between the mine shafts and the

tipple. Boarding houses were built first. In the early days, some property was leased from the company by persons who then built their own houses. This was in the area at the far end of the camp.

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Among the houses built by these people are the rock houses, still occupied. There were also a few houses of frame construction included in this same area which were also privately built. One of these houses is still in the hands of one of these early families though not occupied by them. Houses were brought in from the then defunct camps of Almy and Spring Valley, near Evanston, on flat cars. In the 1930's new houses were built in Reliance in "Sand Camp" and "Upper Camp". Residents of Reliance referred to different sections of the camp by various names. The first section, as you drive into town, was "Sand Camp", next, beyond the company store "Middle Camp" extended to the curve in the road. The area beyond there was known as "Upper Camp". In the 1940's people were recruited by the company from the midwest, Oklahoma and Arkansas. When these people first arrived in camp they were quartered in two and three room box cars, below the tipple, until more houses could be built. These new houses included "quick jobs" (no basements) in "Sand Camp". There have been three water systems in Reliance. Located in "Middle Camp" were the company store, post office, included in the store building, and "The Bungalow", which housed the community hall, doctor's offices, and in later years, a bar and poolroom. The schools were also in this area. A bathhouse and the mule barns were located in "Upper Camp". The tipple stood on the right just as you drive into camp.

The first school in Reliance was a three room house on the hill in which Grades 1 through 8 were taught.

The UPCC valued education very highly and contributed fully to the schools with no complaint. When the camps were organized the company furnished a school house and hired a teacher until a school district could be formed.

A school of brick construction was built in "Middle Camp" about 1929 which served Grades 1 through 3 and 7 through 12. Grades 4 through 6 were still held in the little school on the hill. There was also a separate gymnasium building which housed the cafeteria. The first school was converted into a high school in 1954 when a new grade school was built on adjoining land. This high school building later housed the infant Western Wyoming College.

After the mine shut down the school system was absorbed into School District No. 4 in Rock Springs. This absorption was accomplished very smoothly. The Reliance district had been well financed because of the high tax base provided by the UPCC operations. The school buildings at Reliance were modern and the grade school is still serving the children of Reliance as well as some Rock Springs children, living in outlying districts, who are bused out to the Reliance school.

Even in the beginnings of each camp there was a little company store. The first store in Reliance was in a three room house in "Upper Camp". The building that houses the "Local Grocery Store" now once served as the second company store and also served as a school and the community hall.

The UPCC stores sold everything, meat, groceries, furniture, clothing, shoes and maintained bakeries.

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The UPCC, as well as other companies conducting retail store businesses, used a form of credit called scrip. They also carried charge accounts. In Reliance, scrip consisted of coupon books in various amounts up to \$20.00 made up of perforated paper slips in amounts ranging from \$1.00 to 5¢. Metal and cardboard scrip was also used. An employee could obtain the scrip at the company office. It was not necessary to pay cash for it. An amount equal to the total amount of scrip obtained would be deducted from his wages.

The scrip system worked fairly well but abuses were made of it such as charging \$20.00 worth of scrip at the office and then selling it for \$10.00 cash. Many people used to be continually in debt to the company store. They never drew any money because they bought beyond their earning capacity. It was possible for an employee to receive a slip listing his wages that would show no balance on it--just two "rails" at the bottom indicating he and/or his family had spent his whole wage at the company store. Mr. Gibbs says, "a miner's life was very physical. The miners lived well. You could tell from what they bought that they weren't going without anything. If there were no company store people would have gone hungry or would have been on some type of relief."

Religious denominations in the camp included a Community Church and a Latter Day Saints Church. A Catholic priest from Rock Springs also came out to say Mass. These activities were held in the little school house on the hill and in the Union Hall near the present "Local Grocery Store" in "Middle Camp".

Doctors who served the camp at different times were Drs. Goodnough, Johnny Schurr, Muir, Paul Kos and Burgoon.

Companies which operated towns did not expect to realize any monetary gain from the operation of the town. Towns were constructed because of the remote locations of the mines or logging areas. Employees needed to live close to their jobs and then services had to be provided for their benefit. Schools, store and community activities. In Reliance, at one time, an employee could rent a house for \$10.00 a month. This included lights and water, before meters were installed. This amount was checked off his wages.

A Community Council served as a planning committee and coordinating agency for all community activities. Reliance was a lively community with a terrific community and competitive spirit. Whenever a family needed help, in time of illness, emergency or death, the whole community could be relied upon to give support. When the mine closed down there were regrets not just for the loss of jobs but for the loss of the personal relationships as well. The UPCC gave money for development and continuation of various activities. Garden contests were held with prizes given for the most attractive yards, etc. People also improved the interiors of their homes, at their own expense, even though they knew they would have to leave it all if they moved. The Community Hall, known by the residents as "The Bungalow" harbored dances, parties and films. The Women's Club met here. One recollection Mr. Gibbs has of the activities held in the Community Hall is that his

father made the coffee for them. He used a copper boiler filled 3/4 full of water and a flour sack filled with coffee and tied off, boiled until the strength approximated that desired.

Sports activities contributed to the strong community spirit in all the camps. The UPCC went so far as to put ex-professional ball players on the payroll. Their main function was fulfilled during the baseball season. The camps offered the finest competition in the state.

The UPCC published a monthly magazine with news of activities, etc. of all the camps.

In connection with the mine work itself, and to make the people more safety conscious, the company conducted safety meetings and offered various inducements such as first aid training and contests even involving youth groups. Prizes were also offered consisting of paintings, etc. and even automobiles.

When the mine in Reliance was closed in 1954 many of the houses were sold to the employees occupying them. Others were sold to other employees and some were sold and moved out of camp. When the houses were sold all the lots were sold with them.

Mr. Gibbs' recollections of mining are as follows:

A "slope" was driven down the pitch of a seam. It was driven down as far as desired, say 200 feet, then an "entry" was driven straight in. "Rooms", in which the actual mining was done, were up from the "entry". (up the pitch of the coal) The first mining was done by pick and shovel. The coal was loaded into wooden cars which held a ton of coal when the sides were built up. Mules brought these small cars out to the "landing" by the "slope" (where the "entry" turned off the slope) and then they would pull the empty cars up to the rooms. These empties had been dropped down on a steel cable by the hoist. The empties were cut off; the loaded cars were hooked onto by the hoist and brought out of the mine. The cars were then put onto an "endless rope" which took the cars down to the tippie. A man was there to "sprag" them. They were dumped and the coal went into a "shaking conveyor set-up" to shake the coal down and the railroad cars were loaded. Later, operations were improved and a coal "maul" cut the coal out of the "face". A belt conveyor was used also shuttle cars and a locomotive brought 25 to 30 cars down to the tippie.

An incident that happened at Superior, Wyoming in 1913 or 1914 is one that Mr. Gibbs remembers seeing. He was 7 or 8 years old at the time. A Chinese miner had been caught in a mining machine. He was so badly cut up that he died. Railroad ties were piled up and his body laid on top. He was cremated on the spot. Cremation was the Chinese custom.

The Superior, Wyoming mines opened in 1906 and closed in 1962, the last UPCC mine in Wyoming to close. The Reliance, Superior and Stansbury, Wyoming tipples were all built about the same time. They were of metal construction and had a concrete bin. Stansbury mine opened after the Reliance mine and closed later also. It was located

a short distance from Reliance. The Stansbury mine and a new mine at Superior, the D. O. Clark mine, were very modern mines and had very efficient "slack screening plants". The coal was separated into different sizes, "lump", "nut", "pea" and "slack". "Lump" went to the stations along the U. P. Railroad line. "Slack" was used for stokers.

All the UPCC mines were opened to provide fuel for the railroad, the transcontinental link. The government grants of every other section along the track right-of-way provided that any coal mined be used only to fuel the railroad. The mines closed when the coal became too expensive to mine and the railroads converted to diesel fuel.

Mr. Gibbs thinks that mining will be carried out in this area again. There are 17 seams of low sulphur coal in the Reliance area alone. It will be a different type of mining than ever before conducted here, utilizing modern machinery and belting the coal out of the mine.

BIOGRAPHY OF William Richard Gibbs.  
(Give name in full. Use separate sheet for each individual.)

PRESENT ADDRESS P O Box 6 Reliance, Wyoming.  
Street City State

(If insufficient space is allowed for any question, please use additional sheets and attach to this form. This form is for use in collecting data on deceased as well as living persons.)

1. Present occupation or profession (give dates): Retired.
2. Occupations followed in the past (give dates): Tippleman 1924-1928.  
Mine Clerk 1930 - 1954 , Maintenance 1955 - 1972.
3. Date and place of birth: November 21 , 1906  
Cumberland , Wyoming.
4. Date of moving to Wyoming: Lived in Wyoming since birth.
5. Full names of parents (give mother's maiden name):  
Richard Gibbs.  
Agnes McPhie.
6. Names of brothers and sisters and to whom married:  
Sarah Isabell - Married to Glen Sprewell. Charles - Married to Donna Edmonds.  
Martin - " " Dorthy Sessiona. Elizabeth - Deceased.  
Richard -DECEASED  
Earl McDonald Deceased.  
Robert - Married to Rhea Bangerter.
7. High schools and colleges attended (give places and dates):  
Rock Springs High School at Rocksprings, Wyo. 1921 - 1924.
8. Places of residence after leaving Wyoming (give dates):
9. Military service (dates of, rank held, area of service, awards received, etc.):  
No Military Service.
10. Political offices held (dates and place of service):  
No political Office held.
11. Political party affiliation:  
None.
12. List clubs and societies of which you are a member:  
Jim Bridger Council , Boy Scouts of America.

STATE OF WYOMING  
COUNTY OF \_\_\_\_\_

13. List offices held in these societies (give dates):

Camping chairman - BSA.

14. Religious affiliation:

The Church of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints.

15. Hobbies:

Hiking , Green House Gardening.

16. Publications, works of art, etc. (please list if any):

17. Marriage(s) (Give name of wife or husband, date of marriage, names and birth dates of children. Give the information for each marriage if married more than once.)

Darhl Louise Draney , May 6 , 1932.

Richard P Gibbs - March 18 , 1935.

Donna Ruth Gibbs. - Feb 18 , 1933.

Laurel Gibbs. - Feb 28 , 1937.

Patricia Gibbs. - March 17 , 1943

Wilma Dee Gibbs - Nov. 17 , 1946

18. Remarks: (Please add any pertinent information on your life not covered above, using extra sheets if necessary. Reminiscences will also be appreciated.)

1928 - 1930 as a missionary for the church.

A Member of the Boy Scouts Of america for over 35 years, having received the silver beaver award from that organization.

Was a member of the board of education for Thirty consecutive years.

19. Attach a photograph for the permanent historical files if you have one available.

20. Date of death:

Information by William R Gibbs. Date filled in 2-27-1973

When the form is filled in as complete as possible, return to:

WYOMING STATE HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT  
STATE OFFICE BUILDING  
CHEYENNE, WYOMING