

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Jean R. Tracy - Life Experiences

By Jean R. Tracy

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Box 2 Folder 48

Oral Interview conducted by Lyle Joseph Tracy

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Brigham Young University- Idaho

LT: This is an oral history. I am Lyle Tracy. Today, Sunday, March 28, 1976, I am going to interview my father, Jean R. Tracy. The general topic will be The Idaho Falls Area in the Earlier Days. Mr. Tracy, where were you born?

JT: I was born in the Idaho Falls area in 1917.

LT: How long have you lived in the Idaho Falls area?

JT: I have lived in the Idaho Falls area all of my life, approximately fifty-eight years.

LT: Where were your parents born?

JT: Both my father and mother were born in the Ogden, Utah area and came into Idaho about 1890 and settled in the Snake River Valley.

LT: Mr. Tracy, what is your occupation?

JT: I have been a farmer all of my life until recent years. Approximately 1968, I ran for Bonneville County commissioner and was commissioner for one term, then decided to go into the real estate business. At the present time, I am a licensed real estate broker in the State of Idaho.

LT: Okay, Mr. Tracy. Thank you. What were the times like in the earlier days, say for instance, when it was in the wintertime?

JT: I started to school in about 1922 at the Crowley Schoolhouse which is located on Highway 26 or commonly known as the Ririe Highway and the Crowley Road. At that time, there were eight grades in that little brick schoolhouse, one room. One teacher taught the eight grades. There were eight rows of seats, and each row represented a grade. When the teacher would teach the class, she would stand at the head of the row of seats to designate which class she was teaching and what subject. At that time, there was no well water and we would have to go approximately a half mile up to the neighbor's place, which was the closest well, and carry drinking water in a bucket down to the school. Each one would drink what water they wanted from a long handled dipper. We would dip the water out of the bucket with this long handled dipper and each one would drink out of that. The schoolhouse was heated with a big potbellied stove in the corner of the building. There was no stoker to the stove, and we would go down to the basement and carry wood and coal up and hand feed the stove in order to keep the building warm.

LT: Were the winters in the earlier days colder than they are now-a-days?

JT: It seems to me like they were much colder. We had much more snow than we have at the present time. In those days, as we went to school, we had no buses, everyone had to walk or ride horses or go in little sleighs that the horses would pull. There were no snow machines or ski hills as we have at the present time. I remember that my father used to go down on the Snake River approximately where the LDS Temple is at the present time, where Willow Creek used to go into the river, as it made it easier to get out onto the ice. The ice would freeze on the river

approximately eighteen inches deep. I have gone with my father many times to cut ice, load it into the sleigh, and haul it back up approximately one mile east and two miles south of the town of Ucon where we would store this ice in a big ice shed we had. We would insulate with sawdust. We would place the blocks of ice approximately six inches apart and tamp sawdust down around them and was able to keep ice all summer long until winter came again because there was no refrigeration units and everyone had to use ice boxes. The blocks of ice were approximately eighteen inches wide and eighteen inches thick and three to four feet long. They would weigh approximately two to three hundred pounds.

LT: Mr. Tracy, what was your father's name?

JT: My father's name was Adam Herbert Tracy. He came into this country before the 1890s and herded sheep for the Ritchie Brothers Sheep Company. Ritchie Brothers used to come into the mountains back in the Bone area and Montpelier area then back into Utah until one summer. They sent a scout ahead. This scout came over to the Iona Hill, looked over into this valley and could see a few haystacks located on Willow Creek and on Snake River. He went back and reported this, and the boss came and secured enough hay to keep their many herds of sheep throughout the winter and for lambing. Instead of going back into the Utah area, they came back to the Ucon area and settled on Willow Creek.

They would lamb their sheep out on the mountain just east of Iona. As the lambs got older and the green grass grew, that ground was all free open range from there clear on back and they would work their way on back with the sheep as the feed grew until they would be back on the forest over next to the area of Swan Valley, Red Ridge, and Big Elk Mountain.

LT: Mr. Tracy, what was the amount of your education? You said before that you had gone to grade school at Crowley School. Would you tell us more about the Crowley School on up through your education?

JT: I went seven years to the Crowley school. In my eighth year, I was the only eighth grader and when it came time to be in the eighth grade, so I transferred to Ammon. I went to Ammon for my eighth grade and freshman year, and then transferred up to Ucon for my sophomore, junior, and senior years. I remember the winters were so bad that we would have to ride in bob sleighs drawn by horses in order to get to school from Beeches corner into the Ammon area. Some of the kids that lived in the Milo and Shelton area and Ririe students would go and stay with the people that lived in the Ammon area for a month or so during the winter because it was hard to travel.

LT: What kind of transportation did you have in those days? Did you have to walk or ride a horse or buses or what?

JT: I remember when the first school bus came into the area. A man by the name of Joseph Bailey who used to live approximately a mile north of the Crowley school, which is now the Country Store Boutique, bought a brand new Dodge bus in 1930. It was a glass-sided bus. Before that, for a year or two, we used to ride in an old truck with a canvas top. I remember us kids when the new school bus came and we knew he was coming with the bus, we all went out in the road and welcomed him because it was such a nice big bus with glass windows, which would carry about twenty-five students. It had no heater in it, but we thought it was great.

LT: Okay. You went to high school in the Ucon School. Would you tell us a little more about the school itself in those days?

JT: The Ucon School didn't have a regulation size gym like they have today. They did teach most of the subjects, however, that were required at that time. We used to go over about a fourth of a mile east of where the school is now to play basketball in an unheated big building that they used for the community dance hall at that time. It was only heated on certain occasions. We used to go over there and practice basketball in the wintertime without the hall being heated. I played basketball in the new gym in Ucon, which was built in 1935 in my senior year. It was one of the few gyms around at that time.

LT: How much wood would it take to heat one of those buildings during a basketball game or during a night?

JT: In order to heat the building, the fire would have to be started at least by noon in order to get the chill off. People used to go to the ball games and leave their coats on for most of the game. It had to be fired up long enough before the evening and it would take a big armful each time you filled the stove with wood. It would take about all you could carry on your arm and that would have to be filled about every thirty or forty minutes in order to keep a good hot fire.

LT: Where would you get most of this wood from?

JT: Back in the early days, coal was expensive and hard to get. I remember several of the neighbors would go to the cedars on the Westside of the river just off the Arco Highway out towards the AEC facilities. They would cut these big cedars down, load them on their sleighs, and haul them back. They would have to go in the wintertime when the big cracks and the crevices were full of snow and ice so that the sleighs wouldn't fall into the bit craters. The only time they could get out on there would be in the wintertime and they would load their sleighs with these big cedars. Sometimes the temperature would be thirty or forty degrees below zero. All they would have to keep them warm would be a tent and sometimes not even that if the weather wasn't too bad. They would haul this wood back and use that for burning, and sometimes in the earlier days prior to that when the pioneers would clear off the ground, they would use the big sage bushes for heating wood.

LT: Would you gather wood from the Kelly's Canyon area and have some supply of wood on hand for the winter?

JT: Yes. Some of the pioneers would go up into the Kelly's Canyon area and get the lodge pine pole and use that for wood. Back in those days, there was no bridge across Snake River, and to get back over into Kelly's Canyon or the Heise area, there was a man by the name of Rapp that had a ferry. We called it Rapp's Ferry. We would go up to Rapp's Ferry and ferry across the river and go on up into Kelly's Canyon. I remember on several occasions when we would have the horses go out onto the ferry. When they would go out onto this boat and see the water moving past them, it was quite a challenge to put a team of horses and a wagon onto this ferry, especially if it had a load of wood on it. As we would near the bank on the opposite side, and the

horses would see the ground moving towards them, they would have a tendency to back up and this would back the load of wood over the edge of the ferry. So it was a challenge and took a real horseman and good horses to accomplish this endeavor.

LT: Where was the ferry located at or its approximate area?

JT: It was located between where Heise is now and Kelly's Canyon. I think there is a cable across the river up there now designating approximately where the ferry went across. Usually the ferry would go across the river, and in several cases where the river was wide and the water moved more slowly than where it was narrow and swift.

LT: What were some of the things you would do for recreation in the earlier days?

JT: On the piece of land where my house stands now, this piece was homesteaded through the forestry act. There was approximately fifteen acres of land where my house is and the little pink house just south of my house that the early pioneers would build a dance floor, which consisted of approximately the size of two large rooms. This is where they had the boxing and wrestling ring and the square dances. This is what they did for recreation back in those days. Later on walls were built onto the floor and built two more rooms on the back and there has been many young couples live in that house when they got married. The house still stands and is now a fairly nice, livable home. This particular area was called "The Grove," due to the fact that they had to clear some of the trees out to build the floor for the recreation. I remember when these trees still stood and we used to thrash out in the grove as it was called. Then there was a school house in this area too on the George Byram property, which Bill Kepler owns today. This school was called "Hard Scrabble" and that wood building still stands today. They use it for kind of a work shop or tool shed.

LT: Can you tell us something about what you remember as a boy, how the city of Idaho Falls looked to you?

JT: I remember when I was a young boy and would go to Idaho Falls, I remember when there were some board sidewalks where C.C. Anderson's or Bon Marche is today. There was just a big hole in the ground there and they had a wood railing around it and a board sidewalk. I recall a fellow one time dropped some money down through the cracks and he was tearing some of the boards up to get the money out of there. On the west side of Idaho Falls, over where the West bank is, this was mostly all sage brush and there wasn't any buildings there at all. When the circus would come to town they would settle over in that area. I remember a story was told that a few years before my time, the elephants got on a rampage on a hot day and decided to go down to the river and take a dip. When they got in the river, it was deeper and swifter than they thought it was. They were afraid that they would lose their whole herd of elephants. They ran back to their tents and took ropes and chains, and one of the trainers was going to swim out into the water and get on the back of one of the elephants and see if he could get him to swim out onto the bank and then the other elephants would follow. There was some rumor that they did lose two elephants, but the story as I remember it was that they got them all out safely. I remember when the circus wagons would come over to a parade and the horses sometimes couldn't pull the circus wagons thought the deep dust or sometimes the mud. The wagons would have cages of

tigers and lions and circus animals. On occasions, they would have the elephants come along and bunt into the back of the circus wagons and push them through. It seemed that the elephants could move the wagons where several horses couldn't budge it. Later when that area started to build up and they had the experience of the elephants getting into the river, they used to set up their circus tents in the 16th street area. There was a creek down through there they called Crow creek, but not so much water for danger as the river. I remember as a small boy staying with my sister on 16th street watching the circus come to town and setting up their tents. All the circus people [were] bringing their animals down to the creek for water. In recent years, of course, they have been moved into the area of Lewisville Highway near the Smith Chevrolet and Hart Pontiac with circuses.

I remember the area north of Idaho Falls was all sagebrush. The jack rabbits used to be so thick that they would move into the farmers' crops in the summertime and eat their wheat and hay. In the wintertime, they would move in and undermine the haystacks and tip the haystacks over. The farmers used to get together in the wintertime and have what they called rabbit drives. They would choose up sides and they would drive out through the sagebrush in bob sleighs and the ones that could get the most rabbits would get a prize. I remember when my brother and I used to ride with my dad and as they drove out through the sagebrush, they would shoot the rabbits, and he would take one side of the sleigh and I would take the other and we would load the rabbits. They would do this several times during the winter to clear the rabbits so not to have the menace of rabbits in the summer to the crops. Now that ground out through there is all prime farming ground and most of it is good potato soil.

LT: About how big were the sleighs that they would use to load the rabbits on?

JT: The sleigh boxes would be about twelve to fourteen feet long and about four feet wide and usually two feet high. They would usually have several hundred rabbits in each sleigh in just one afternoon. The rabbits were thick and they had two shooters. My dad usually shot a twelve gauge shot gun. He would shoot out of one side of the sleigh and one of the other fellows would shoot out of the other side of the sleigh. They would have a driver for the horses. They would have a nice team of horses on the front of the sleigh. It was really quite a nice bit of recreation, plus they had to do something to get rid of the rabbits. This was about in 1925.

LT: Could you tell us, as you remember, what it was like when the first electricity came into this area?

JT: Yes, I can tell you what it was like before it came into the area. I used to do all my grade school work by the light of a kerosene lantern. That is all the light we had until about 1928. Then the electricity came down our road, and I remember the first 60 watt light globe we saw. We thought it was really a lot of light. The following year after that, my dad bought his first radio. This was about 1927 when I heard my first radio broadcast. We were down to the neighbor's place and the following year my dad bought a radio, and we've had a radio in the home ever since.

LT: What was the first radio program that you can remember?

JT: The one I remember the best was "Amos and Andy."

LT: Could you tell us a little bit about some of the cars that you've owned and some of the experience you've had with automobiles?

JT: The first car that my father purchased was a 1917 Dodge. They had what they called a "touring car" and it had side panels that could be buttoned onto the sides to kind of warm it up. There were no heaters in them at that time. I remember when the folks would go to Idaho Falls in the winter, they had a big iron that would weigh about fifty or sixty pounds that they would put into the oven before they left and get it warm. They would put it into the car for mother to put her feet on as they went to Idaho Falls. When they would take a trip to Ogden or to Salt Lake or Utah area, they would get up early in the morning and take them all day. It was a big day's drive. They would have several tires tied on the sides of the car and they would expect two or three blowouts on the trip. In those days, the tires were big high pressure tires and the heat would cause them to expand and blow out. They had a lot of tire trouble. I remember some of the more sportier cars were just a one seated car and they had what they called a "rumble seat" in the back. It was an open air seat about big enough for a couple to sit in. I remember one car that my friend had was approximately a 1929 Ford Roadster that you could take the gear shift off the floor and set it up underneath out of the way so more people could sit in the front. It was quite a classy little car. One trip I remember we took up to Fall Creek Road, instead of crossing Swan Valley Bridge we went back up into that area and it was a nice little car. The first V8 car that I saw came into this area was one that the neighbor had purchased. He was racing with one of his other friends. This V8 was about a 1933, was racing with about a 1930 Chevrolet. The V8 had so much more power that he seemed to be fishtailing down the road and the Chevy just couldn't keep in his dust. That was my first experience in seeing a V8. The remarks were that the V8 engine would never last because the pistons were laying on their sides and it would wear out on the lower side of the piston. Just never buy a car like that because the V8 would soon be out of the market.

Then I remember the first airplane I saw come into Idaho Falls. It was brought in on a truck and the wings were taken off. It was an airplane similar to a piper cub. They assembled the airplane and one of the fellows got in and flew that during the war bonnet roundup or one of the celebrations. This was quite a thing to see this airplane in the air. Then they disassembled it to haul it to another area. This would probably have been in 1926 or 1927, when I remember seeing the first airplane in Idaho Falls.

LT: What do you remember about some of the earlier grocery stores or stores in general?

JT: I remember my mother making butter. She had her own print and own paper, butter wrappers, with her name on it. Many of the pioneers back in those days did this. They would take their butter and eggs to the Lincoln Merc [Mercantile], which the building still stands, they would trade their commodities for groceries that they didn't have. Some of the stores would do this in Idaho Falls. I remember they had a store in Idaho Falls called the "Golden Rule" which was a dry goods store. They had a store which was called the CW& M, which was Consolidated Wagon and Machine Company, where people could go in and buy wagons, white topped buggies, and supplies. I remember being with my father and he showed me where the livery stable was. Where the cowboys and other people would ride their horses to town and the people at the stable would charge for taking care of the horses to feed and water them. That was located

down where the city of Idaho Falls Electrical building is, just on the east bank of the Snake River. I remember when the first grocery store came into town where you could serve yourself. It was called Pay 'N Takit, and it was located on the corner of Broadway and Shoup Avenue. People could go behind the counters and take groceries off the shelves much like is done today. Before that or in the area of 1930, you would give the clerk your list of groceries and they would go behind the counter, box it for you, and you would pay for what they put in. now we have a more modern system like is used today.

LT: What do you remember about some of the first farm equipment that you used or your father had?

JT: I remember when we used to do all the farming by horses, there were no tractors. I remember when we used to thrash with steam engines. The farmers would get up early in the morning and start at daylight in the fall and thrash into the dark because there were only one or two thrashing machines to do all the thrashing. It wasn't until about 1935 or so that the tractors came. I remember we bought our first tractor in about 1940. There were a few tractors before that. This was just a small tractor and some of the farmers were quite reluctant to put those rubber tired tractors out onto their fields to cultivate potatoes. You can see how things have progressed. The combines back in those days did not have a bulk bin on them. The combines in the field would sack the grain and dump the sacked grain out on the ground, and the farmer would come along and load the sacks onto the truck. They didn't handle the grain in bulk like is done today.

LT: Thank you very much Mr. Tracy. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by further researchers.