

Voices From the Past

Living Experiences in Fremont,
Madison, and Teton Counties

By Clendon Edgar Gee

April 19, 1980

Tape #48

Oral interview conducted by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Joel Miyasaki July 2003

Brigham Young University- Idaho

Harold Forbush: This is an interview with Clendon Gee concerning his experiences of living in the Upper Snake River Valley. The interview is being conducted by Harold Forbush on the 19th of April, 1980 at Rexburg Idaho. It's a pleasure Mr. Gee to welcome you here for this interview, and I express appreciation for the opportunity. Will you kindly state your full name, your date of birth, and place of birth, and present address?

Clendon Gee: My name is Clendon Edgar Gee. I was born the 29th of July 1908 at Ashton Idaho. My present address is Sugar City, Idaho.

HF: Now, I think it's important that we know your father's name--of course his surname would be Gee, but your mother's name also and something about their country of origin, their ethnic background.

CG: Well, my father's name is Edgar Lafayette Gee. My mother's name is Mary McKenna Cunningham. They both came from Utah to this country. Now, my great-grandfathers joined the church back in Nauvoo and came early into Salt Lake Valley and settled around Salt Lake and my Great-grandfather Gee at Tooele and my ancestry goes back into England, Ireland, and my ancestors have been over here for many years--came in the late sixteen hundreds. And so they've been in America for a long time.

HF: Now to the one who looks through the phone book or newspaper occasionally you'll see the name Gee, G-E-E. To your knowledge are those having this surname in the Upper Snake River Valley all akin to you?

CG: I think most of them are. My great-grandfather was a polygamist had three families and about twenty-five children. And they have scattered out over the Western states and there's quite a few of them in Southern Idaho down around Gooding, Burley, Oakley--in that area. There's a lot of them in Utah. But, there's another family who spells their name the same way but pronounces it "jee." They're no relation as far as we know. But I'd say most of the Gees in the Utah, Idaho, Nevada are related.

HF: Would you access any particular attribute that the Gees have? Physical attribute, characteristics, or a mental attribute that they seem, you know, in a positive way, something commonplace among all of them.

CG: Well, I don't think of anything in particular in a physical way except that they're nearly all large people. Big, tall, most of them are over six feet in height that I know about; and they, a good many of them have a tendency to go bald-headed early.

HF: That's interesting. Not white hair, but bald, huh.

CG: Yah, they've been people that wanted education. For instance, my great-grandfather was an attorney and he helped write the first territorial constitution for the state of Utah. And my great-grandfather Cunningham was an officer in the Nauvoo legion, and at one time came out here to Fort Lemhi to protect the Saints from the depredations of the

Indians. And they were faithful in the gospel, but some of their posterity has pulled away. But they've been generally known as people who help build up the country.

HF: Wonderful. Concerning this building up, I note that apparently your parents moved from a settled area to a situation where they did some pioneering. Tell me about that.

CG: Yes, My folks came with their parents from Lewiston in Cache Valley and settled over at Ora west of Ashton. My grandfathers, well, my Grandfather Gee settled over there and homesteaded there. My Grandfather Cunningham homesteaded--just about a little over a mile--about a mile and a half north on the Island Park Highway. North of Ashton, right on the north, right on the highway, on the north/west side of the road. And they were good friends in Utah and so their friendship continues up here and after they'd been up here about two years, my parents were married. And when my father married he homesteaded out in Ora, also.

HF: And did this mean that he also took a hundred and sixty acres or something like that?

CG: Yes, they homesteaded a hundred and sixty acres.

HF: What was required in order to prove up on a homestead, to get a patent from the U.S. at that time?

CG: Well, they had a dollar value on the work that had to be accomplished, you had to be able to house and work the ground, farm it, you know, and then show that you were making an effort to establish a home. And you had to work at this for five years, and then you could get a deed to the land. And so that's what they all did.

HF: Now your grandfather had settled on a hundred and sixty?

CG: Yes

HF: And then your father. I'd imagine had to become twenty-one before he could do this?

CG: He did. He was twenty-one when he filed on a homestead

HF: Would you like to share with us Mr. Gee all the tradition that seemed to be handed down as to what things were like when they first homesteaded in that Ora area, Ashton area.

CG: Well, there seemed to have been quite a few people coming from Utah that settled up there about the same time. At one time, Ora was a little community, you know, you know there's one road up there where there's home up on both sides of it still. And they had a church and a school, and at one time I think they had a little store, it never amounted to much. But they came up there and broke the ground out of sod and made farms and built homes out of logs. In fact, the last time I was out to my father's

homestead, the log house was still there. Now, it had been added to, since he was in it, but it was still there.

HF: That would make that home how old then?

CG: Oh, let's see. He must have homesteaded that around 1900, so it's pretty old.

HF: That's truly quite amazing

CG: Yah, and I don't think anyone lives in it right now, but while people were living in it they kept it in pretty good repair. And so it stood through the years. Those people came up there and they had to build irrigation systems. They watered, over in that area, they watered their land from Sand Creek, and they dugged their ditches and got water out to the land. It was really quite an undertaking when you think you had to do all with the teams and scrapers, shovels and so on.

HF: Now, this Sand Creek, is that the same Sand Creek where the U.S. Department of Interior and the Idaho Fish and Game work together in developing. Is that the same one?

CG: It's the same one. This conservation area the government has out there is on what they call Upper Sand Creek. That's up at the beginning of it, where it comes out, but, and of course, the folks drew the water down at the bottom, just before it dumped into Snake River.

HF: Oh, it does flow; it's a tributary then, of the Snake?

CG: Oh yes, it empties in the Snake River.

HF: Oh, I didn't know that. Where does it empty? North of Saint Anthony?

CG: Well, it's straight west of Ashton.

HF: I see.

CG: There's right in close to where the bridge crosses the river to go over to Ora.

HF: Is where it empties in?

CG: That's where Sand Creek empties in. It's below the power dam up there.

HF: Oh, I see.

CG: It isn't a big creek, but they seemed to use their ingenuity enough to get that water spread out over the land so it covered about all the land they could use, there.

HF: Was stock raising quite important to that community in the early days, do you think?

CG: Well, for the most part no, except the stock: horses you know they use all the time and cows; they had cows, milk cows principally. There weren't many people that had range cattle or sheep that were over in that area. As I told you, my mother lived on one side of the river and my father on the other side

HF: Prior to their marriage? I see.

CG: Yes, when dad went courting, he had to ford the river so he could go over to see her.

HF: How did they manage things when he wanted himself back and her over there on his side?

CG: Well, you know in the winter, this was a problem, fording that river and Dad said sometimes he'd come home and forded the river and by the time he got home the harness would be frozen on the horses so he couldn't get it off. And he'd have to leave it on all night and then take it off the next day when the sun could thaw it out. It was very different then we have.

HF: Did they have any problem in the summertime with Indian molestation, Indians, kind of, frightening and bothering them at all?

CG: No, the Indians were pretty well under control. See, they went up there in 1896, and the Indians were pretty well under control. There is one little interesting incident that I think is good to record. It's about the marriage of my parents. They were married in November by the bishop who was my Grandfather Cunningham. And then, in March they decided to come down to the Logan Temple to be sealed, so they had a custom in those days up there that they re-baptized them before they went to the temple. So they took them down to the river and the ice flowed through there and they re-baptized them.

HF: Wow

CG: And then they had a lot of snow up there at that time, so what they did, they got their sleigh fixed up with their box on it and food and bedding and things they had to have and then they loaded a wagon on the sleigh. The wheels, running gears, and everything and they road in the sleigh until they got into the Blackfoot area and then the snow was about gone so they unloaded the wagon and put it together and put their box on it and traveled the rest of the way to Logan in the wagon. And then, when they came back, they had to switch again before they got home to come in on the sleigh.

HF: That's interesting. Of course they could have gone by train from this area because train service was available here.

CG: After they got down, yah. I don't know why they didn't go on the train. Maybe they just didn't have enough money for train fare.

HF: That's very interesting. Well know you, in going back to about 1900 and so on, you mentioned these people from Northern Utah, Lewiston, Utah, and those communities pretty much came up here and settled Ora. Now, wasn't Marysville kind of a concurrent community being settled?

CG: Yes, it was.

HF: It would have been on further, much further east

CG: Oh, Marysville is about . . . yes. You see Ashton sits between Marysville and Ora. Ora is west, Marysville is east but only a mile and a half. But that was their main shopping center for Ora was at Marysville.

HF: Now Ashton hadn't been established as yet.

CG: Well, Ashton started, they started things in Ashton about 1900, that was the very beginning and of course it took a few years to develop it. So by the time I was born, it was a fare sized town.

HF: But it came about in large—real growth came because of the railroad did it not?

CG: Oh yes.

HF: And the railroad didn't go up in there until 1906. It was five or six. No, it could have been four, five or something like that.

CG: You see, as soon as they planned the railroad then they started the township at Ashton. The town site at Ashton

HF: I see

CG: And so it kind of developed, was in the process, before the railroad actually got through there.

HF: Well now, Clendon, through your own personal knowledge and maybe family tradition, do you recall some of the early neighbors that had settled in the Ora and maybe we just as well say the Marysville area.

CG: Well, there was the neighbors right close there to the folks over in Ora was George Nedrow, Joe Kerr, George Q. Brower, Fred Porter, a widow called Steen Hill; I don't remember what her husband's name was, he was dead as long as I can remember, Mansfield Andrus. These were the close neighbors over there.

HF: Now were they pretty much LDS, Mormon communities?

CG: Oh yes, they all were. All but Nedrows, Nedrows weren't.

HF: I see.

CG: Now up at Marysville. Some of the very early settlers I there were Mack Harris, Paul Egbert, and his brother, I don't recall his name right now. Paul, Paul Egbert and there was Cardingleys and Lemons, Montie Fuller, Drollinger, Cook Drollinger; they were the early people.

HF: And were they, generally speaking, from Northern Utah, therefore Mormons?

CG: I'm not sure where all of those came from, but most of them were Mormons. The Fullers weren't, but most of the others were.

HF: At what point of time then did the so called, quote "Gentiles" commence to move into that area?

CG: Well, I'll tell you. They opened up sections of ground for homesteading at different times. They didn't open up the whole country all at once. And when they opened up that land up in Green Timber and up toward Drummond, that's when the Gentiles seemed to come in because they got most of that ground. Now, when my father homesteaded, that ground was open, but I guess he wasn't the venturesome type because he wanted to settle over where the folks were, see. So he settled over in Ora and didn't get near as good a farm. It's got a lot of rocks in it, you know. It's good soil, what's there, but there's too many rock piles in it. You go up east of Ashton there in Green Timber, Drummond, and Fornam areas, that's some of the best soil in the world. And that was available at that time. But that's where most of the Gentiles settled that homesteaded. And then a lot of them came into Ashton. They came in fast because the Mormons were a minority there when I was young.

HF: Did you get any impression when you were growing up as to the relationship between the so-called Gentiles and the Mormon people?

CG: Well, for the most part, we got along quite well. But there was, there was a little ill feeling. I recall one instance where a teacher in a Methodist Church up there told their Sunday school class that the Mormons were nothing but heathens. But I think this was only a few people who felt that way. Though, when I was young there was a case where a Mormon boy married a Gentile girl and if that didn't stir the community up, you wouldn't believe. And that couple had to move, they actually had to move out of the country because of the trouble they'd stirred up. And they were the center of it so they just left and they stayed away I guess for thirty years. And finally they came back and died there.

HF: Of course back through the years, Brother Gee, the Mormon element has continued to grow and develop and gain in influence where the Gentile element has sort of waned. Wouldn't you say this is a proper assessment?

CG: That's true up in that area. And one thing that's happened is that a lot of the Gentiles have been converted.

HF: Your observation would state this?

CG: Oh yah, I know it's true. Our own doctor the Veterinary here, he was one of the Gentiles and he's converted.

HF: Stagelmeyer?

CG: Stagelmeyer.

HF: I see.

CG: They're good people.

HF: Sure they are.

CG: But they were Gentiles and most of them still are.

HF: The Hostners are still anti though aren't they?

CG: I think so. Non-Mormon, I don't know whether they're anti or not.

HF: Yah, but they're non-members. Well, now, with Ora being maybe the principle Mormon settlement up there, what's happened to it? I mean why has it disappeared?

CG: Well, the arable area of ground that you could farm was too small; it just couldn't support any large number of people. And so as soon as Ashton started to build up, Ora started to die. And the farms got larger and so it was just an area that wouldn't support a community of any size. And so now I think Ora is a part of Ashton Ward.

HF: At the time the church was there would you say it was a branch--an independent or a dependent branch?

CG: No, I think it was a ward when I knew about it.

HF: Was it?

CG: I think so. I think it was a ward.

HF: They have a little cemetery there, don't they?

CG: Yes

HF: Does the County maintain it, somewhat?

CG: I don't know I don't know how it's cared for.

HF: Let's shift now into some personal things about your formal education. And I frame my questions in such a way that I would like you to elaborate on your early education, elementary school, your teachers, some of your classmates, maybe? Any little incidents that occurred that you would think would prove interesting maybe of some historical significance as you went through elementary school into grade school and high school and so on?

CG: Well, I started school at Ashton. And I went to school there for two years, and then my older sister, the oldest one in the family was old enough to go to high school and they had no high school there. So we came down to Ricks Academy, so I went to the third grade here. And then the next year, I went to school in Ashton, and then I came down here to school in the 5th, 6th, and 7th grades. And then in the 8th grade I went to school up at what we called the Palisades School District. Actually it was the Palisade Ward but the district never had a name, just a number. And we held school in the church. We had moved up there in 1918.

FH: Now you mean Bonneville County?

CG: Teton Basin.

FH: Oh, in Teton Basin.

CG: Yeah

HF: I see.

CG: Out on the north end out there on Bitch Creek. And so I graduated from there in the 8th grade. And then I came down here to Rexburg you know, in the first year. And this is the year that they first opened Madison High School.

HF: That would be about 19...

CG: 1922 or 3

HF: Later than that.

CG: No, no, 'Cause I graduated from high school in 1927. So this would have to have been in the fall of 22 or 3. And they had two grades down there: the first and second years of high school. That's all they had in this red brick building on Main Street. And Ezra Liljquist was the principal and also a teacher. The other two years of high school were still up to Ricks. It was then a college but they had the third and fourth years of high school and two years of college at Ricks. And so I went to school there, that one year. The next year I went to school in Cache Valley, to North Cache High School. I went down to Lewiston and lived with my grandfather and his sister. He was a widower and she was a widow, and they were living together. And I went down and lived with them and my parents lived out on the dry farm. The girls, my youngers, went to school--the

grade school there in Palisades. And then my third and fourth year of high school, I came back to Ashton and I graduated there in 1927.

HF: So Ashton at that time had a four year high school?

CG: Yes, it had a high school then, yah. Sometime in there, I don't know just when they're high school started, but, sometime between the time that I was about nine years old and came back up there to finish high school, they had started a high school.

HF: Does anything remain of that high school up in Ashton?

CG: Oh yes.

HF: Are they still using part of that as their program?

CG: Oh, they use all of it.

HF: The plant today?

CG: And they've added to it and it's an elementary school now.

HF: Oh, I see

CG: But it was elementary, high school and everything at that time.

HF: Probably the one building?

CG: One building. We had worn out an older building and it was mostly not in use. Except, when I was there my last years of high school, we held shop classes in the basement of that old school house--the one I started to school in the first place. And that's about the only use they made of it, it wasn't safe, you know for the kids. And so we just used it for that purpose.

HF: Now, the little school in Ora must have lasted only a year or so?

CG: Well, no, it lasted quite a while.

HF: Did it really?

CG: Yeah, it did, you know, they just have one room school is what amounted to for a long time. But it lasted quite a while

HF: Now did I understand correctly that you did not go to the Ora school, you went to Ashton

CG: No, I never did. I was born at Ashton see we'd left Ora before.

HF: And did they have a small school over at Marysville?

CG: Yah, they had elementary over there.

HF: I see

CG: But soon after, they closed the Marysville School and all the children come in to Ashton. So at the time I was there in high school, they still held elementary in Marysville. But soon after that they abandoned it.

HF: How about some of your teachers or anything of a historic nature that occurred during these years. I think it's interesting to get a glimpse of our teachers. Some of them I'm sure had a profound effect positively on your life. Maybe you'd like to give some credit.

CG: Well, as I look back, the teachers that impressed me. One of them was D. W. Nielson. You know he taught here in Rexburg schools many years. And I really enjoyed him.

HF: Now he's in the temple presidency?

CG: No, that's his son that's down there.

HF: Oh, okay. Then what was his name then? When you say D. W.

CG: Well, I just can't remember his name. I just can't remember his name. It seems like everyone called him D. W. Nielson. But another teacher I well remember was Olin Jeppson. Now he was a native of Rexburg and he taught me in about the fifth grade. And, I had a teacher also down in Utah the year of school there, and I can't recall that man's name but I think he's the man that instilled in me an interest in history. I've always loved history ever since I took his class. That was the second year of high school. But that man just made that so real, just made it live for us. And I wish I could give him proper credit by giving his name, but I've forgotten it over the years. I see his face and I can well remember some of the things he taught us at that time. Some of the subjects that were important. I just really loved history ever since.

HF: That's interesting.

CG: I also had Ezra Liljquist when I was in my first year of high school. He taught us Algebra and he's one of the teachers I enjoyed very, very much. He was a fine man and an excellent teacher. And he was from down here in Lyman or Archer somewhere. He's a native around here to.

HF: Did your path ever cross that of Ezra Stucki?

CG: No, he came into the school system after I was through. My wife taught here in school—in the Rexburg schools a few years when he was superintendent and she really enjoyed working with him. And when I got into college, I went two years--about two years here at Ricks.

HF: What years were those?

CG: 19-, I came down the fall of 1927. So it would be 27 and 28, 28 and 29. And Ray J. Davis I believe was the outstanding teacher in my college.

HF: He taught science didn't he?

CG: Science, uh huh.

HF: Biology and Botany?

CG: Yes, about everything with science, he taught it.

HF: Just a little short man?

CG: Yeah, he was short.

HF: I knew him quite well in the Southern Branch when I first went down there.

CG: Yes, he went down there from here. Merrill Beal, Sam, you know he's the historian, you know him. He was teaching over here, history. He was one of my favorite teachers. Miss Henderson, I can't remember her first name, but she taught grammatiks, a very excellent women and teacher. I enjoyed her very much. Hyrum Manwaring taught religion and I never did really understand religion until I got into his class. He was really good. He told it in such an interesting way that it made you just, just love the Bible. He taught the Bible. That can be kind of dull, but he made it interesting. He was a good teacher.

HF: How large was the campus in those years?

CG: Two hundred students.

HF: You had the Spori building and the Old Gym?

CG: And the Old Gym and that's it.

HF: And that's about it.

CG: Well look, the back of the Main building, the administration building, there was their heating plant. They had the heating furnaces back there and they also, in that room, had a couple of classrooms that we used. So we had that besides the other two buildings.

HF: Can you recall, Clendon, entrance fees, how you paid your tuition. Did it have to be in money? Could it have been in commodities or do you recall anything about some of those little details?

CG: As far as I know, it had to be paid in cash. I never heard of anyone paying it in commodities. But your tuition was about thirty dollars a quarter. I do remember that. And then it would take a few books besides that.

HF: You had to arrange for your own housing off campus. They didn't have any campus housing?

CG: No, none at all. You just arranged your own. Of course most of the students were from the immediate area though we did have a few from far distances. I mean the Southern part of the state. We had some from Bear Lake area; we had some from down in the Burley area such as that, you know.

HF: Was it still known as an academy at that time.

CG: No it was called Ricks College.

HF: It had graduated from that status then?

CG: Yes.

HF: Academy and so forth and it was called Ricks College? I see.

CG: We still had two years of high school up there. When I went there, Ruth Bidulph was still a high school student. Ruth Barrus she was a high school student there when I went there to college. I was just a little older then them. But they didn't get those other two grades of high school moved out of there for several years after that.

HF: In other words, Madison High had their two freshmen and sophomore years, but they'd always finish up there at Ricks College.

CG: That's right.

HF: You know, what did you actually seek to attain, what was your goal in going to college?

CG: Well, my main interest was agriculture. And I never wanted to do anything but farm, but I wanted to learn all I could about farming. And along with that I took a lot of science. I had almost two full years of science. And history, I pursued history to. But my first interest was agriculture. That's all I ever wanted to do.

HF: Did you go beyond Ricks College?

CG: No, no, I didn't.

HF: What particular jobs or positions have you held down through the years, you know, by which means to provide for your livelihood. You might just...

CG: About all I ever did was farm. I was farming when I got married, and I stayed with that dry farm until I got so crippled with arthritis I couldn't handle the work. Then I sold it and I got a job keeping books in a potato warehouse. So those two things is all I've ever done.

HF: Now where was this farm?

CG: It was up in the Teton Basin out on Bitch Creek. My father got it when he left Ashton and I took it from him.

HF: Was it a hundred and sixty?

CG: No, we had, I think he had four hundred when he first went up there. And then he got more. So he probably had about eight hundred when he left it and turned it over to us. And then we added a little to it. So we had nearly eleven hundred acres out there.

HF: You and your wife?

CG: Yah, and then we rented some more and a little later we bought more over south of Tetonia at Cache. And then we rented three hundred and twenty over west of the river from Cache.

HF: Well then, the main farm, where you had your home was within Teton County?

CG: Yes, uh huh.

HF: In other words, it was south of Bitch Creek.

CG: Right on the bank, right on the south side.

HF: I see, and did it go down pretty close to the rim of the canyon?

CG: Yeah, the river was the boundary on the north. The creek, Bitch Creek was on the north and the east also. Bitch Creek bounded it on the east and the North.

HF: That was quite a spread in there then. A lot of pretty much timber ground on it.

CG: Quite a few quaking aspen and then of course on the canyon sides there was pine. But there was quaking aspen patches. I always thought there was just enough to make it look green. It kind of interfered with the farming, you know, but I never tried to move them because I liked them.

HF: Well, with that in, those years, I'm assuming it was completely dry farming.

CG: Yes.

HF: Has that changed?

CG: No, it still dry farming. It still is.

HF: In other words you practiced the summer fallowing and then plant the next year.

CG: Yes, summer fallow half and plant half. That's the way we did it.

HF: Who were your neighbors right adjacent to you?

CG: Clarks Harshburger on the West, Ally Ricks on the South, Osten Neely on the East, they were the close ones. Elmo Lamont on the North; he was across the creek. And Southwicks, Harold Southwick on the North--old-timers up in that country.

HF: Some LDS and some non, right?

CG: Yes, Bud Harshburger did not belong to the church, but his wife did, and his family did, and he's finally joined, but he didn't at that time. Ricks were of course and Neelys. Lamonts were, but Southwicks weren't. We had a smattering of Latter-day Saints up through there, but through Teton Basin, part of it, of course, the majority of them were, but you get over north of there in Fremont County and the majority of them aren't or weren't.

HF: Pretty primitive in that country, wasn't it?

CG: Yeah, we built a lot of roads after we went up in there. Most cases they had them fenced off, you know, but there'd never been anything developed. You'd just go down between the fences. But we graded them, put in culverts, in some cases actually built a new road entirely where there'd never been roads before. We had to do it to get out to the land we had. But it was not a very good trail. So we did quite a lot to see the country developed in that way.

HF: Where did you send your kids to school?

CG: Well, when our children were old enough to go to school, we moved to Sugar City and we've been there ever since. They went there through high school and came to Ricks College. My wife and two of my daughters graduated from Ricks while it was four years and one daughter got three years of college while it was there and she finished up at the BYU. But the others all went through Ricks and then went on to other places. We were too isolated up on the dry farm to get to school. And they finally closed that so there wasn't any school closer than Tetonia you know.

HF: Did you experience an obvious benefit when the railroad came through there in about 1912?

CG: Well, it was there before we went up. See we went up there in 1918

HF: You went up in 1918?

CG: Yes.

HF: Can you recall some of the projects that maybe the community worked together to develop? Maybe governmental helped such as dams and so forth. Wherein agriculture could be improved and you know convenience to the residents of the area.

CG: Well, I saw the construction of the Ashton Dam by Utah Power and Light Company for the purpose of generating electricity. And they began this generation in 1913. I saw the power lines built and we were on the road between the dam and Ashton. And it came into our home as they brought the line through. That's the first electricity that we had and before that we used coal and kerosene lamps, lanterns. Very soon after this electricity came in, they also were working on a project over at Jackson Hole, the Jackson Lake Dam and the freight that had to be brought in there for that construction was hauled from Ashton over the mountains with teams. And I made quite a few trips over there with my father, hauling that. This work continues for several years. I remember even after we moved away from Ashton it would be 1919 or 20. We were still hauling material over there when we had time. But the bulk of it was done about 1915--16 along in there.

HF: What do they call that road?

CG: Well, we always called it the reclamation road.

HF: And that went from Ashton, approximately from Ashton to Jackson?

CG: To Jackson Hole. It went up through Squirrel Meadows over the mountain, near Lake of the Woods. It now crosses Grassy Lake Reservoir, the dam, it crosses the dam, the road does. Before that we just went down the canyon and forded the creek.

HF: It bordered some of Yellowstone National Park territory didn't it?

CG: Yes, yeah, we came right on the south border there of the park. And it was a five day trip. You could make it a trip, a week. Three days over, two days back.

HF: What kind of hauling equipment did you have to haul your material?

CG: We had wagons, four head of horses on a wagon. It worked out pretty good except that you went over the mountain. But that is the best pass to get into Jackson Hole of any place in the country--far better than Jackson Pass. The mountain is lower, the slope is more gradual.

HF: It would be the ideal place to have a road, but aren't you a little bit surprised that the government hasn't put an improved road up in there.

CG: Well, the people up in Teton Basin have had too much influence. Well, that's been considered a number of times, but there's always too influence from up in Teton Basin to let it go that way. And now they don't want it for environmental reasons so there never will.

HF: That would be an ideal place to put a highway. Now, were you around to participate in any way in the construction of the Grassy Lake?

CG: No, I was there when it was being built, but I didn't work on it. My brother worked on it.

HF: Now what, does that benefit for water storage and irrigation purposes or just flood control.

CG: No, that's for irrigation. The people around Ashton never did have enough irrigation water until they got that Grassy Lake Reservoir in. Now it isn't a very big one really, but it just supplies the difference between success and failure. I know on our farm there we run out of water late in the season every year and finally after they got that reservoir in, they seemed to have sufficient.

HF: What river is that on?

CG: It isn't on a river, it is just on a, I can't think of the name of the creek now. It isn't a very large creek either.

HF: But it's in an ideal area, ravine so it's compounded to quite a little water?

CG: Well it holds back a fare amount. And then it runs down and empties into the Fall River. And then the water is taken out of Fall River and let down over Marysville and Ashton.

HF: That isn't Conin Creek

CG: No, that isn't. Cascade Creek or something like that. I'm really not sure.

HF: Now, how about the Island Park Dam?

CG: Yes, I saw it under construction; I was up there. I didn't work on it, but I was up there when they built it. It was always especially interesting because, just about ten years before, I had worked on that railroad ranch that's over in the valley, Sheridan Valley, where the reservoir covers now. They had a big ranch over in there. We cut two thousand ton of hay over there one year. And they'd bring cattle in there and feed them. And then when they put in the dam, that's where the water backed up and covered that whole thing.

That has made a big difference to the water for our area. You see what we do, we buy stock in here, in that reservoir and even up in Teton Basin, they had to buy shares in that Reservoir, or else you can't get a drop of water out of it. So what they do is trade water. And we're allowed to use the water in the creeks in Teton Basin, and the people down here use out water out of the Island Park Reservoir. But we have to take the water what we get down here in Sugar City and Rexburg. We have to that out of Fall River. We trade our reservoir water, Island Park Reservoir water for water in Fall River. And just before Fall River empties into Snake River they've built a canal that runs across the country through Chester and that area over to Teton River. And then we take the water out of Teton and irrigate our area. Before that we run short.

HF: Now they've devised some real fine methods and the people up in Teton Valley share and buy shares like you point out. They trade back and forth and it makes for a good utilization of the waters. Now, the other important dam that of course is going to be important to us was the Teton Dam on the Teton River. And that ill fated dam brought some calamities to us. Before we go into to that, I'd like to go back, down back. When you people moved to Sugar City, your family and so forth then you pretty well sold your ranch I guess?

CG: No, I traveled back and forth for twenty-five years.

HF: Oh did you?

CG: I stayed up there some, but I did a lot of traveling. I guess I was down three or four times a week.

HF: But your family stayed right in Sugar City?

CG: Well in the some I had some of them with me. But they were always here for school.

HF: And I suppose that there were others in like situation, weren't there? Do you know of anyone else?

CG: Well, Clark Harshburger did the same thing. Yeah, he finally moved here to Rexburg and traveled back and forth. But he sold out up there before I did so he didn't do it so long. But in general, at that time the people moved up in the summer, the families moved up to the dry farms during the summer. As where now, very few of them do it--nearly everyone travels.

HF: Once you got down here then, pretty much permanently, you commenced to do work as a bookkeeper in one of the potato houses.

CG: Well, I did that later, I sold the dry farm in 1963 and I did most of my work. I worked pretty steady at it from then on, I worked pretty steady in the wire house.

HF: For whom did you work for?

CG: At first I worked for the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, and then I worked for Best-Pack Potato Company.

HF: Now what overall program did they have, these two companies?

CG: Well, they just bought and packed and shipped potatoes, fresh potatoes. No processing, it was all fresh potatoes.

HF: That's become quite an important segment of employment hasn't it?

CG: That furnishes the bulk of the winter work we have in this country.

HF: Now your work was done right there in Sugar City?

CG: Well, when I was working for the A & P Tea Company I worked in New Dale-- Drove up there every day. But working for Best-Pack, it was right up there in Sugar City in the old sugar factory.

HF: Clendon, would you recall now for us the positions that you have been called to serve in the community. I presume mainly there in Sugar City, and also some of your church positions. Can you just organize yourself a little bit there and share those things?

CG: Well, I think about the first public position I had down in this area was on the school board at Sugar City and I served there two different times and one of the things we did the first time was reorganize the school district. I was on the county reorganization committee.

HF: About 1947-48 along there?

CG: Well, I think between forty-seven and forty-nine. It was to be done by forty-nine. And I think it started in forty-seven, so we reorganized the school districts and they're what they were made at that time, right now. And then . . .

HF: Now what did that really entail?

CG: Well, we had to hold. Well, an area, say, like a school district, like Sugar City say, the way it worked in this county. Sugar City made a proposal that we form a school district around them involving Teton, New Dale, Wilford who had been coming to our school, with high school, also Edmonds school district. So we, this county committee had to go around to individual school districts and hold meetings and get their feelings, see, about the organization. Well, now then we had to. They called public meetings and the people voted whether they wanted to join that kind of a district or not. Now Teton voted against it and they went to Saint Anthony and still do. New Dale voted for it, Wilford, who had previously used our high school. They voted to go to Saint Anthony also. And Moody was included in there and they came into the school district, Sugar and Plano also.

HF: And that would mean that they would abandon their school plant?

CG: Yes

HF: Where they were locally, and the economy they have and then they would transport, bus the kids into the central area.

CG: Well, for quite a few years they held their elementary school in their own area. They had a school at Moody, they had one in New Dale, and they had one at Plano. And they continued with those for quite a few years. I guess they come in, maybe, what, twelve years ago that those were finally all closed. I think Moody was closed before that, but it would be about twelve years ago that Plano and New Dale schools were closed. And all the children were brought in here.

HF: Did you enjoy that service?

CG: Well, yeah. I did. I quite liked it. At this same time, I had another opportunity to serve. I and Wilford Jenson were appointed by the governor to organize a soil conservation district here in Madison County. And so--this was in 1948--and so we did that. We organized this conservation district and it's still in operation. And I served in that capacity for ten years.

HF: Now what was the purpose of that?

CG: Well, the idea was that the government would furnish a service through technicians. And they would open up an office here in the county and it's been here ever since. And these technicians would go out and work with the farmers and one service they did is they'd survey the land that nearly all of it needed leveling at that time you know. Hadn't been too much of it done; and so, they surveyed the land and staked it out so the farmer could level it, get it so it would irrigate properly. And furthermore they'd help the farmer work out a farm program, a rotation or anything else that would improve the farming situation. They helped with irrigation systems, they just done a world of good in this state.

HF: A lot of erosion projects or projects controlling erosion I suppose?

CG: Yeah, controlled erosion, yeah. Of course that covered the dry farms to principally, see. But, they've done us a world of good here, and they still are; they still help a lot. Another thing I did. I've served on the Sugar City Town Council for about eight years and since the flood, I have been on the Planning and Zoning Committee for a little over three years. I was also appointed one time to be on a county planning and zoning committee. And we worked up a zoning ordinance for the whole county and the county rejected it. That's been twelve, fifteen years ago and they still haven't accepted one. And that covers most of the public activity I've done. I've served in the church. I've been in Bishopricks for about nineteen years. And I served on the high council for five years. I've

been a stake patriarch for about nineteen years, and I've taught a lot of classes. I guess I've taught twenty-five, thirty years in Sunday school classes and Priesthood classes.

HF: You've kind have carried on the tradition of the Gee family of giving service and making things better than when you first saw them or whatever?

CG: Well, that's been our goal to be good citizens and good church members. And the family's cooperated and they're doing pretty good work to.

HF: I've got another question or two here. You might wish to express yourself about the philosophy that a community should have, maybe, their own self help, self reliance and things of this nature. What's your feeling about that?

CG: Well, Harold. I find that a lot of people disagree with what I think about this. While I think operating as an independent people and taking care of ourselves, we've done some marvelous things. But I think we're slipping and the thing that worries me so much is the message that comes to me over television. Where day after day after day it's reported that some group or organization says, "Well, we can't function unless the federal government gives us a grant or loans as some money or something." And now the police departments are saying, "Well, we can't have a good police department if the governments going to cut off these funds they've been giving us." And why can't the people of Idaho support their own police department? Why do we have to run to the Federal government for so many things? I think we're a wealthy enough state that we don't need to do that. You know that perhaps we've got more millionaires per capita in the state of Idaho than any other state of America. We got nearly twice as many as any other state per capita.

HF: That's interesting.

CG: Yeah. We got over twenty six percent, or twenty six millionaires for every hundred thousand people. And the nearest state that comes to that is eighteen.

HF: We have a tremendous potential here and I share that feeling in large measure with us and haven't you detected this same dependent attitude, paternalism attitude in consequence of the flood?

CG: Well, I think it's developed since then. But you know this started way back in the thirties when Roosevelt was trying to let the nation out of the depression. And he started all these government give-a-ways. And the trouble was that they were fine, they got us going again but they never stopped. They just kept coming. And now it's got so Harold, that our politicians use this. They want this; they want the Federal government to give the states money because they can come back to their constituents and say, "Well, I got this money for you." And that gets them re-elected. That's one of they strongest arguments they put forth when they run for re-election is all the money they've brought into Idaho. And that money never needed to leave Idaho, it just as well as stayed here and it could have been used a lot better. But it goes back there and we lose at least half of it in administration and we get a little bit back. And we've got to thinking, "Well, we can't

even function unless the government comes along and gives us a boost.” That’s wrong. That’s not the old spirit of the church and the early, and our early church leaders have said,”We have got to prepare ourselves to be an independent people. “And we’re becoming just as dependent as fast as we can. You see this little trouble has hit us in this country since Carter is trying to control inflation. There’s somebody being hurt and they’re crying their eyes out, and I’ll bet you Harold, they cry so loud, that the government will stop trying to control inflation. I don’t think they’ll ever make it work because the people just won’t make the sacrifice.

HF: Now, we talked about the capability to be independent and to think for ourselves. And perhaps one of the shining moments of that occurred when the flood waters of the Teton Dam came and Sugar City was right in the pathway of the dam and virtually washed every home away there in Sugar City. What did the people do before they knew that they could ever get help? Share some of those things--some stirring stories that can be told.

CG: Well, I think for starters the first thing that people did and I think we were just like nearly everybody else, we went over there and started digging through the mud, trying to get out things that we might salvage. That was our first move. And it was a long time before we knew we’d get help on that. And people worked themselves and I’ll tell you it was a marvelous thing the way the church sent people here.

HF: What was the extent of the damage, and then what did the people do literally, with the help of the church in getting things restored?

CG: Well, we went in the homes, and if the home could be salvaged then the mud was cleaned out and the furniture taken out and clothes cleaned up, dishes preserved and if it could be preserved it was taken care of. Anything like that, people got to work on immediately and in our community, the help that came in would go to the school gymnasium and then each ward had a representative there, and they would know beforehand who needed help that day and then the help was divided among those people. They went out there to the homes and cleaned mud and did everything they could to get us people back into a living condition. And then Ricks College opened up its dormitories so people could go there to stay. We were fortunate enough to rent an apartment from my wife’s sister and so we had a place to live. And this was quite a traumatic experience to some people. You know, I think as I looked over my family I believe that my wife and I took this better than the kids. And I think the reason was that we were more accustomed to hardships and trials. We’d lost things before, not through floods, but in different ways you know. This wasn’t exactly a new thing to us. But I found that it took my boys, I figured, two or three years to recover from the shock of that. And to be able to settle down and go ahead with the business at hand, you know, like they had done previously.

HF: Do you have any feelings Mr. Gee about the rebuilding of this dam? Do you think it’s going to come about?

CG: I do, and personally I would look for it today. But most people won't. But I think in a few years, after this is a little further behind us that there'll be enough support for it and we need it. We actually need it. I believe that the dam can be built so it's safe, or as safe as any structure. And so I see no reason why we shouldn't.

HF: In the same location?

CG: Well, I don't know about that. They say they can make a dam safe there. But I don't know. Maybe there's better places. But I would say wherever the engineers determine is the best place.

HF: But there's certainly a need for it, isn't there?

CG: There is. We're using so much water in Idaho that we got to preserve it all. And we need that

HF: And also the energy crisis. We can generate electricity in these streams that we have. It looks to me like there'd be many sides to develop and do something there.

CG: Yes, I think we'll see quite a lot of that in the future. Electricity drawn from the streams in a different way maybe some of this turbine programs like Idaho Falls is putting in now. That isn't the only place you know that one of those has worked. They've worked in a lot of places.

HF: And you're not putting billions of dollars into it, you're just putting something much smaller and the communities themselves can do it

CG: Yeah, that's something that a community could do, or a county or something like that you know. And I think we'll see some of that in the future.

HF: Well now as we come to a close here, I'd like to ask you a question or two about your personal family. To whom were you married and when and where? And give me something about the background of your wife and the name of her.

CG: Well, my wife was Erma Ricks. She was born at Sugar City. Her father was Ephraim Ricks who grandfather was Thomas E. Ricks. Her folks came in here with Thomas E. in 1883 and brought a Mormon colony and her people have been here ever since. She was born in Sugar City and except for a few years that we lived up in Teton Basin she's been here all of her life. She taught school about twenty-six years. She was teaching before we were married and after all our kids were in school, she started teaching again. We were married in November 25, 1932 in the Logan Temple. We have eight children four boys and four girls. The boys have all gone on missions and all our children have college degrees. They're giving a service in their community and in the church. And we're happy about it.

HF: How wonderful.

CG: We have two daughters living in California. We have one son in Fort Collins, Colorado, two daughters in Utah, and three sons in Sugar City.

HF: I--that brings us to a climatical peak here in this interview. After all, it's said that one should have joy in his posterity. And with eight children and I suppose many grandchildren now to. You do derive a lot of joy from your posterity.

CG: Well, our family's the main thing in our life. We've given our life to raising them and preparing them for society. And now were getting some blessing from them.

HF: Thank you Brother Gee, I really appreciate this today.

CG: You're welcome.