

VOICES FROM THE PAST

**MAIL DELIVERY
ASHTON, ID-WEST YELLOWSTONE**

By A. C. (Nick) Nichols

February 20, 1982

Tape # 2

Oral Tape by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Louis Clements

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Upper Snake River Valley Historical Society

INTRODUCTION

The Library of the Upper Snake River Historical Society in the Teton Flood Museum contains over 600 video, cassette, and reel-to-reel tapes. These oral interviews have been gathered to over the past years from individuals throughout the Snake River Valley. I had the opportunity to catalogue this collection over the past couple of years and was amazed at the information containing therein.

I decided that it was unfair to the public to have all of this historical information on a tape and only available to a few who had the time to come to the library and listen to them. The library does provide a service in which copies of the tapes can be made, and during the past few years, many have come in and obtained a copy of a particular tape. The collection has a lot of family stories, some pioneer experiences, a few individual reminiscences of particular parts of history, and some recorded individuals have a personal knowledge of a historical event.

I spent a lot of time trying to come up with a name for this series of stories that would describe the overall text of the message contained herein. Since they are transcribed from the actual voices of those who experienced the history the name, Voices From The Past seemed appropriate. The oral history in this volume of Voices From The Past has been taken from the interviewer with it being recorded on tape. Since Idaho's history is so young in year, the oral history becomes greater in importance. Eyewitness accounts rank high in reliability of the truth of events, although the reliability suffers as they interviewee ages or the time between the event and the interview grows. As the age of some of the cassette is progressing into the time period of deterioration of tapes, all are currently (2002) being copied onto audio discs (CD's) for preservation.

I have selected this event as one that occurred in Eastern Idaho which was experienced by the person or persons being interviewed. There was such a vast amount of information available in the library; I had to reserve many of the tapes for inclusion in future volumes. The tapes are being transcribed in order of importance according to my thinking.

Transcribing from a tape to written word is a new experience for me. I have done this on a very small scale before but to attempt to put the contents of a conversation down on a paper requires a great amount of concentration. I have taken the liberty of editing out the many "a's" that occur in an interview as well as other conversational comments. Then comes the problem of the book a challenge from the point of view of making a correct transcription and yet an interesting story. I have made a few editorial changes in view of this problem.

I would like thank the many people who have taken the time to arrange for the oral recording of an individuals story. The information obtained in this manner is, in many cases, not available from any other source. One of the pioneers of oral history in Eastern Idaho is Harold Forbush. Despite the handicap of being blind, he travels around the

whole Snake River Valley visiting with people and taping their responses. He began his career of taping while living Teton Valley and serving as the prosecuting attorney there. His lifetime interest in history got him started and since then he has been a major contributor to the collection of stories in the library. He continued his oral history recording after moving to Rexburg. After retiring from being Madison Counties' magistrate, he moved to Idaho Falls for a time and now has returned to Rexburg to continue as occasional taping session. He is to be congratulated for his lifetime commitment to the preservation of Idaho's history.

There are many others who have done some taping including several Madison High School students. Most of the student tapes are not of the same sound quality as the professional oral history collector, but the stories they have gathered over the years have provided a special look at the Depression, war experiences, farming experience, and many other subjects which can't be found anywhere else. Many thanks to them.

There are some tapes in which the interviewer did not identify themselves. These unknown records have provided several stories which have helped make up the overall history of the Snake River Valley and I thank them even if I cannot acknowledge them personally.

I hope that as you read the following stories you will be inspired to keep a record of your own either in written or tape form so that your opinion of what has happened in the world or in your life can be preserved. Many think their life has been insignificant and others would not want the years and find each other to have its own contribution to my knowledge of what has happened. Idaho is an exciting place to live and is full of stories which are unique to our area. Share them with others.

Louis J. Clements.

U.S. Mail Delivery between the Community of Ashton, Idaho and West Yellowstone, Montana between October 1950 and July 1, 1975.

Forbush: It's my joy and privilege this Saturday afternoon the 20th of February, 1982, to have the one who was responsible for that mail delivery present to be interviewed here at my home office at Rexburg and I welcome to be interviewed, A. C., commonly referred to as Nick, Nicholas. Now Mr. Nicholas, how do you spell your last name?

Alvin Nichols: N I C H O L A S

HF: What does A. C. mean?

AN: My first name is Alvin, A L V I N, then Clarence, C L A R E N C E.

HF: How did you come by the tag just Nick, taken from Nichols, I guess?

AN: Yes, just like Andy for Anderson. It seems like Nick was sort of a natural nickname and my friends started tagging me that when I think I was about fourteen or fifteen years of age and it stuck with me.

HF: And you like it?

AN: I like it better than I do Clarence.

HF: Now. What is your present address?

AN: I live at the present at 904 Fremont St., in Ashton, Idaho.

HF: Have you lived at this address for a number of years?

AN: Yes. For about 30 years, I guess, close to that anyway.

HF: You were married to the former Miss?

AN: I married Leah Clark from Blackfoot, Idaho. We got married January 9, 1930.

HF: Leah Clark, C L A R K, no E. Who was her father?

AN: Her father was George Hammond Clark, George H. Clark, on West Center Street. Her father passed away at age 96 ½ about three years ago.

HF: Now. Who was your father?

AN: My father was Alvin Raymond Nichols. He was an old timer in this upper Snake River Country. My fathers deceased. He died in 1950. But his father, who was my

grandfather, was Dr. A. W. Nichols who came with his family from Brigham City, Utah in 1885 and settled between the rivers down below Thornton. At that time when the community was first named it was called Independence, Fremont County, Idaho. I was born on that ranch on October 14, 1906, and at that time it was independence, Fremont County, Idaho. Since then I have tried to get a birth certificate from the State of Idaho and I have never succeeded because at the present time my birth place would be in Thornton, Madison County, Idaho.

HF: Did you have brothers and sisters?

AN: Yes, I am the oldest of five. Two brothers younger than I am then the two youngest ones are girls.

HF: Do your brothers reside in the Upper Snake River Valley?

AN: No. The brother just younger than I is retired and lives in Sublimity, Oregon, the next brother younger than he is retired and lived in Salt Lake City, then the next girl is retired and she lives with her husband in Kaysville, Utah, and the youngest of the five of us is a widow and she lives in Salt Lake City.

HF: So you're the only one of that family living now in the Upper Snake River Valley.

AN: That is correct, yes.

HF: Now the Nichols name, of course, is English, is it not?

AN: Yes.

HF: Did your grandfather come from England or was he born here in the United States?

AN: My grandfather and my great grandfather were born here and I think my great-great grandfather was born here too because they were early arrivals from England to the colonies.

HF: And that would probably be true on your mother's side, the Clark, your wife's side?

AN: Now I did not tell you that my mother before she married my father was May Elizabeth Russell.

HF: R U S S E L L?

AN: Yes, and her father and mother were early day pioneer/settlers in this community of Independence and Burton, Idaho. Her mother was of Holland/Dutch extraction and French/Canadian and her father at a young age had come with his parents on sailing vessels from Scotland to American and then to Utah in the early days.

HF: Having been born at Independence, Fremont County, Idaho in 1906, did you live and did your mother and father continue to live there for a while in the Independence area?

AN: Yes, of and on, because at about that time my father decided he wanted a cattle ranch up above Ashton in the Green Timber area because he as a boy many years ahead of this he had herded cattle in that country and he thought he would like to get settle up there with his wife and myself as the first of the family. So my father succeeded in getting a relinquishment on a homestead from a man by the name of Speir, S P E I R, up on Fall River, the north side of Fall River. So you might say that was my home country because we lived up there until my mother became ill in 1920 or 21. In order to get her proper medical attention the old Doctor Hargess, who was our family physician in the Aston country, suggested we bring her to Rexburg we did for medical attention. She was operated on here and he did live in a year or two or a few years. Then she died at young age of 43 leaving my father with five of us. Then, of course, we scattered. I, myself, went to work for truck lines mostly. I worked a little bit for railroad companies too. But I just worked here and there and every place. It didn't seem to be home anymore.

HF: Did you get your schooling pretty much in the Ashton area?

AN: I got my 8 grades in the Green Timber schoolhouse School District #72, Fremont County, Idaho. The schoolhouse still stands and it still has the original bell and belfry and it is in good condition. There is a group of people that I was raised with who have purchased this from the school district and they now have the Green Timber Fellowship Club in there. I am very happy about his because my boyhood one room schoolhouse will continue as long as I live, I am hopeful, I certainly love that schoolhouse and I live that area and I love those people up there.

HF: Tell me where Green Timber is?

AN: The Schoolhouse is about 10 miles east of Ashton on the road that goes to Cave Falls on Fall River.

HF: I see.

AN: I went to school there through those grades. I had two miles each way to go on skis, webs, dog teams, on horse, on foot, or however I could make it. One of the proud things in my lifetime as a boy was receiving certificates from the country school superintendent, Harriet C. Wood, that I was never tardy nor absent for full school terms, not every one but for a few of them. I received those certificates and that was quite a source of great enjoyment to me.

HF: Do you remember this lady quite well; I mean specifically, her appearance?

AN: Oh, yes.

HF: Describe her a little bit. You know in my historical research I have run across her name many times.

AN: Have you?

HF: You bet.

AN: Well, Harriet C. Wood, so far as I know, never married at least she didn't as long as I knew her. She was a large lady, rather buxom lady. I think she was a marvelous educator. She did teach us in the absence of our teachers once in a while. She was a lady that I thought a lot of. Everyone in our area, my folks I know, thought highly of Harriet C. Wood as a country school superintendent, as a teacher, and a good person.

HF: Would you like to kinda suggest what years that she was the country superintendent, from when to when?

AN: I couldn't say definitely when she became the county school superintendent but she was superintendent, I would say, in 1912-13. In that area of time I am sure she was.

HF: Up until 1913 Fremont County embraced this whole region and so her jurisdiction apparently included all of the five counties that we know today as Teton, Madison, Jefferson, Clark, and Fremont.

AN: Yes, I would imagine.

HF: A tremendous area that she had to supervise public education. Quite a remarkable lady. Now, call to mind some of your favorite ones and maybe those who were not so favorite.

AN: Every school teacher I ever had in School District #72, Greentimber, Fremont, Idaho was an excellent teacher. I can say, and I told my own children many times, that I* never had what I considered to be a poor teacher in the Greentimber School District. As a matter of fact I will go even further and say that I never had a poor school teacher when I went to school at Ricks College. That is where I got four years of winter, or four winter quarters of high school at Ricks and the reason I never graduated up there was because I was short a credit or two because of having to work horse4s in the Fall of the year right up until the frost stopped our horses from working. Then in the spring of the year the minute the frost stopped our horses from working. Then in the spring of the year the minute the frost was out of the ground I was back working the horses in the ground. So, I was never able to spend an entire school year up at Ricks.

HF: What years actually were you at Ricks?

AN: I think it was 1921, 22, 23, and 24. I am not sure whether I started as a freshman in 1920 or 21.

HF: Of course, at that time Ricks was an academy or at least it served as a kind of high school.

AN: They had one year of College when I went there. By the way, it might help to say the Fall I started there they were still working and still completing, doing a little work, on what we called the new gymnasium building, which has been torn down, I understand the last couple years.

HF: So at that time you had all your classes in the old Spori building.

AN: Yes that is correct. With the exception of the new building, at the time they were completing it, we started physical Ed over there. That is where I got my physical Ed was in Ed new building but class work was all in the old Spori Building.

HF: Let's see. In those years, who was the president of Ricks?

AN: George S. Romney had just moved up from Mexico and was the president of this school during all of the years that I went there.

HF: Of course, his famous son is President Romney of the LDS Church.

AN: Yes, and by the way, his wife was my English teacher. Her name at that time was Miss Ida Jensen. She was a marvelous English teacher.

HF: That is interesting. Now that is President Romney's wife?

AN: Yes, she just passed away, I understand.

HF: Can you recall the approximate number of classmates you had at Ricks?

AN: It seems to me the last year I went there, there were around 275 students and, of course, at that time it that would have included the one year of College and also that time they had a special class they called the "missionary class." I think that would have included the missionary class numbers as well.

HF: I see. I suppose it was pretty much equal between boys and girls?

AN: As far as I can recall it would have been fairly even, I think.

HF: Now, you had farm chores to do in the spring and the summer back up in the Ashton country. I had many chores to do every night and morning besides going those four miles round trip.

HF: Your ranch then was two miles from the school?

AN: Yes.

HF: How large a ranch was it?

AN: 10 acres but we had two school sections up Fall River for all the years that we lived there. Plus, at that time, we had range rights from the forest reserve, and by the way it was called the U.S. Forest Reserve. It had not yet been named the Targhee Forest Reserve which it presently it's presently known by. I do not know exactly when they called it the Targhee Forest Reserve but that occurred after we left that country during my mother's illness.

HF: In the twenties?

AN: I would think so, in the twenties, it was started to be called the Targhee Forest Reserve. All the years we were there it was known as the U. S. Forest Reserve. Of course, my father later told me that 1908 was the year we had our first forest ranger. He was a man who was homesteading over in the Teton Basin Country. He left his wife and children to take care of that while he was a forest ranger over in our country. His name was James R. Hanson. He was the very first ranger, my father told me, in our area and the very, very first forest supervisor in St. Anthony was a friend of my fathers named Sam Stoddard.

HF: Interesting. They probably didn't have headquarters or a building in which to meet then, or did they.

AN: I can not remember what they had in St. Anthony but up where we lived they had a little log house, not too small a log house, and a log barn at what we called the Porcupine Ranger Station on Porcupine Creek. Some of those buildings were later rebuilt and they are still there and it is presently known as the Porcupine Guard station.

HF: Now Nick, we have talked about where you attended school, how about Sunday school. Where would you have had to have gone to attend an LDS Church service?

AN: The closest one would have been about eleven miles, which would have been Marysville. However, I should state that for two or three months out of the year they had a branch for a while as I grew older, at Warm River. We never attended there much. However it was at Warm River and the North Fork of the Snake River that I myself was baptized into the Mormon faith by an early farmer by the name of Charles Walker. For the most part I attended not Mormon services but Lutheran, German Lutheran, services. Many of our neighbors in the Green Timber and Squirrels areas were German people. They had different young Lutheran ministers wanted me and my brother to go the Lutheran Church Sunday Schools because my folks were very good friends with most of those German folks and they were very good people and my folks said this was a good Christian denomination and you will not learn anything that is not good for you and we would much rather go with our neighbor children to their services rather than miss out totally. For the most of they year, with my younger brother, I would have missed any church activity unless we had gone to the German Lutheran services. So for many, many

years we did attend the German Lutheran services at both Green Tiber school house and at the German Lutheran building, they used to call it the teacherage, they built over in the Squirrel area.

HF: Are those buildings still standing?

AN: The only building still standing, I think, well there is one of the old German Lutheran teacherage building still standing on the Squirrel road or on the road that sometimes is known nowadays as the Reclamation Road. The Green Timber school house is still standing, of course, where these German Lutheran ministers did hold services. I'll never forget some of their names because of the spelling. There was Reverend Schaus, S C H A U S, and Reverend Braun. I thought that was strange how he spelled that, B R U A N. That is just a side light on my early life. So I can tell you that I did not attend our own L D S services.

HF: But you learned some of those old German songs didn't you, I guess. Did they teach a lot of this in German?

AN: Yes. Until World War I came along the German ministers conducted part of the services in high German, and part in English. Well, my brother and I being around so much of the other German children when their parents talked German a lot, we never did get to where we could talk German fluently but we did get to the point when we could understand it quite well, I cannot say we were very fluent in speaking it. We could say many German words when we were boys growing up with them.

HF: Especially swear words.

AN: We learned those swear words the very first. Both in English and German, yes. Course we had good tutorage with the other boys.

HF: Yes, they tell me that to have to work with horses and cows and things of this nature it was always an ever present motivation.

AN: That's right. In fact your horses and cows didn't understand the type of English language we learned in school.

HF: Those must have been tremendous days up there. What would the numbers be n those two communities, 300 people, in the area, say a 100 or 150 families?

AN: Well yes, at one time. I dare say there would have been a hundred families in Squirrel and Green Timber communities because at that time people were homesteading and, of course, usually, a family homesteaded 160 acres, nearly always. There were families in those communities on every 160 acres and in contrast to the present day, many of those people are going now. Instead of one farmer and his family living on 160 acres they probably will now average closer to, I dare say, 640 acres per family.

HF: Now you had a pretty tough environment in which to live. I mean the elements, were pretty tough in those days weren't they.

AN: Yes. They were. Just for example, my father would usually tell us on New Years Day that no horses would be moved out of our ranch anymore because of the different crusts in the deep snow would cut the horses legs. So my father would say, from now on it was skis, or sleds, or dogs. However you can go but you can not take a horse out of my ranch after New Years Day. The snow is deep. Most people know the town of Ashton gets quite a little snow. But twelve miles east of Ashton the snow depth is much greater. So that will give you an idea as to how deep the snow gets in the Green Timber area where I was raised and elk and deer cannot make it. They just cannot. They starve to death up in that area. The moose even have an awful rough time of it but the moose being such a powerful animal and such long legs, and then the moose's temperament is such that they are more like a Missouri mile. They can put up with most anything. They can fight off all of the predators in the deep snow. They can live on the type of forage that elk and deer cannot possibly live on. The moose will get right down in a warm stream of water, one that doesn't freeze over. Even though the snow is six, seven, or eight feet deep on the banks on each side of the stream a moose can get down in there and stay for a month or two and never get water logged. Whereas an elk, deer, or a horse gets down in there and in a few days they get water logged and they get pneumonia and they die. They cannot make it. That give you an idea how deep the snow is in that area.

HF: Yes. I probably should tell you about one when I was in there first or second grade. A bad blizzard came up and we had a new school teacher from out in the state of Washington who had not spent a winter in that area. This bad blizzard scared this young, new school teacher so badly that she refused to let me go home the two miles. While she was gone across the street to make arrangements for me to stay all night with a neighbor who lived close to the school house, after holding me up for quite a while, I still got away and got on my skis and started for home. I only got part way home and it got dark on me. It was timber then where presently it is cleared right now. The snow in the blizzard was coming down so hard and so fast and it got dark on me so quickly that I got in serious trouble. What got me in serious trouble was that I fell over a snow bank, that as rather high and broke my ski harness, my toes strap. Well, I had plenty of what we call wine leather in my pocket, my leather punch, and my pocket knife. I knew how to fix my ski harness alright enough and my binders and my toe straps. But it got so dark on my so quick that I couldn't. It was impossible for me to fix it. Of course, the snow was four and a half feet deep and when I would step of my skis, which of course, I would do because there was nothing to hold my foot on the ski, I would drop into the snow right up to my arms, right to my armpits. There is an old saying in our country where I was raised that you can swim in water but you cannot swim in snow, deep soft snow. And that is what occurred to me. Anyhow I recalled alternately crying and alternately I think swearing a little bit at my bad luck and my teacher for holding me up a while till it got too dark. Anyhow, I went to sleep right there. I was warmly dressed. My mother had made all my clothes for me and I was the warmest dressed kid in the country and at that time. I didn't awaken until daylight. The blizzard had stopped but it had also turned and come from the north. During the night a comparatively warm blizzard had gone down to 30 or 40 below

zero. So that when I awakened I was a little chilled but not frost bitten. Within minutes I fixed my harness, my ski strap, and skied the rest of the way home. I was working at that time for one these certificates for never being tardy nor absent, so when I arrived home I yelled at my mother as fast as I could get my skis off, hurry up, hurry up, get my lunch ready, get my book sack and my lunch sack cause I wanted to get right back to school on time. And I did, I succeeded. So that is just a little side light. I had lots of other experiences later on those years.

HF: You were what, six?

AN: Oh, about seven or eight, probably.

HF: Isn't that remarkable.

AN: Now all of those years up in that country and that deep snow with horses and cattle and later as my father got his first Model T and then in 1916 we got a Model 490 Chevrolet. I am the oldest and my father was a good man with the horses but a poor man with an automobile. So my mother got my uncle to teach me how to drive at a very young age because she no longer dared drive with my father with anything but horses. So I learned to drive very young. I learned so much about how to handle snow and how to get along in snow with anything, with horses, cattle run between Ashton to West Yellowstone, Montana. While I am saying it here I should state that the postal department never charged me in twenty-five years, short 90 days of twenty-five years, never charged me with ever missing a mail run between Ashton and West Yellowstone and that means crossing Henry's Lake flats all those winters and years. I was late on my schedule back at Ashton and many times in those twenty-five years. That is how come I was able to, because I had that tremendous experience, you might say from babyhood.

HF: Let's begin to get into the subject of our interview this afternoon. Let me just ask you, since you brought up the subject of your physical endurance and so on stature. How tall are you and what has been your average weight during maturity?

AN: I am between 5'9". I have averaged about 150 pounds. Right now I am a little heavier and weigh close to 160. I am a little too heavy.

HF: But it is a lot of good old muscle and bone?

AN: Yes, my body has always stood me in good stead.

HF: Well now, Nick. What motivated you to become involved with the U. S. mail delivery?

AN: I really wanted to get back in the Ashton area where I had been raised as a boy because it seemed like all down through the years while I was gone from that area I had just never been content any other place. I had lived in many other places but I was not contented. I wanted to bet back in the Ashton area where I was raised as a boy. I loved

the snow, I loved to ski and to get out in the snow and I was always able to get along very well in the snow with anything. I was acquainted with those young engineers, Steve Porter and his wife Ruth, who had the mail contracts between Ashton and Yellowstone at that time. Mr. Porter told me that he was going to get moved from Ashton to Pocatello before long and he wanted to get rid of that mail run. I said, well your talking to the right person. I said, let's get together on it. We did. So with his help we were able, and also with our good postmaster in short at that time, to arrange with the postal department to allow me to become the sub-contractor under Mr. Porter, who was the prime contractor, until his contract expired. Upon the expiration of his contract I could apply and I did, and I was successful in becoming the prime contractor. I stayed with it from that stand point until I retired July 1, 1975.

HF: Had Mr. Steve Porter been the prime contractor and the carrier for a number of years?

AN: Yes. He had been for, I think, a total of five or six years. His wife ran the mail most of the time. Mr. Porter, himself, did it when he could get off from the railroad. He was a fireman and later an engineer. On his days off, of course, he would take the mail run to relieve his wife.

HF: But often she would. And this was done by vehicular means, was it not?

AN: Yes. Very true.

HF: Who were their predecessors in the mail delivery? Do you know?

AN: Well, I did know but I am a little fuzzy as I was not living there at the time. I couldn't tell you what the time frames were. I would hear from time to time. I don't believe I could tell you.

HF: All right. Let's start October of 1950 as a sub-contractor you commenced to deliver mail. What was the distance from Ashton to West Yellowstone?

AN: That distance kinda varied a little bit because of the fact that I think was originally 63 miles from post office to post office. But then as they made some changes in the highway down through the years that distance shortened up a few miles, not very many but a few.

HF: When you were delivering were there any distance changes?

AN: Yes, there were many changes in that mail run. I should pay a lot of credit and make note of some of my wonderful postmasters. I considered my postmasters on this run like my early school teachers. I really never had a poor one. In Ashton I was under Mr. Tom Hargess, Mrs. Riley, Mrs. Lewis Hargess, and Richard Swanstom. In Island Park.

HF: Now did these people follow successively?

AN: Yes.

HF: So Tom Hargess was the one you were under first?

AN: Yes, right.

HF: Now is he a brother to this Dr. Hargess?

AN: Yes he was, the brother to Dr. Ed. Hargess. He had another brother, an older timer, by the name of Dos, D O S, Dos Hargess. They are all deceased.

HF: Can you give me the approximate years that Tom Hargess was the postmaster there?

AN: He was only postmaster for a few months because he was trying to get retired. Then Mrs. Riley succeeded him.

HF: And what was her name?

AN: She has a nickname, Chick, and she is still alive. Chick Riley. By the way she later married Mr. Hargess, Tom Hargess. Mrs. Lewis Hargess was the wife of a nephew of Tom Hargess. Richard Swanstrom, commonly known as Bud Swanstrom, was my postmaster for more years than any of them. He was postmaster when I retired.

HF: So those four were the postmasters in Ashton and, of course, there is only one post office at Ashton. Do you know what classification that post office was when you started? Did it change?

AN: I am not real positive. I think Ashton was a second class post office when I retired.

HF: Now that would be your beginning point. The mail would be brought there?

AN: The mail was brought there for many years by the railroad train until, I think, 1959. It was along about then that the passenger train ceased operating between Pocatello and Victor.

HF: So in 1950 the mail came by train to the post office. It was sorted and readied and placed in your vehicle. You had to carry the bags?

AN: I had to load it, of course.

HF: Maybe we ought to go into the various postmasters along the line before we get into the classification of mail.

AN: All right.

HF: Your next stop after leaving Ashton, where would your stop?

AN: The next post office was Island Park post office which was a Pond's Lodge and still is.

HF: It has been at Pond's Lodge all during these years then?

AN: My first postmaster there was Charles Pond, the original owner of Pond's Lodge. Then his son, Horace Pond, succeeded him. Then a lady by the name of Mrs. Decker succeeded Horace Pond. Then Pat Feldsien succeeded Mrs. Decker and she was the postmaster at Island Park post office when I retired.

HF: Feldsien: How do you spell that?

AN: F E L D S I E N. Then at Big Springs there was a post office for many years while I was on that run. My postmaster there during those years was Mr. M. L. Harris. Then that post office was discontinued totally for lack of patronage.

HF: Was that in a home?

AN: No, it was in the large lodge building at Big Springs, the Big Springs Lodge. Then my post office at Mack's Inn, Idaho.

HF: Now that's M A C K ' S I N N?

AN: Yes, correct. Then my first postmaster there was Mrs. Keith (Dorothy) McGinn. M C G I N N. Then her successor was Mr. Howard Clark. By the way he is presently the postmaster at Ryrie, Idaho, if he is not retired. I haven't heard of him retiring yet. Mr. Clark's successor at Mack's Inn was Betty Van Dolzer, and she is still the postmaster there but she will soon be retiring.

HF: Sounds like a Dutch name?

AN: Yes it does. Then at West Yellowstone my first postmaster there was Alice Hansen and she was my postmaster for many, many years until she retired. Then she was succeeded by Sally Riley. After she retired she was succeeded by Donna Spainhower. Donna Spainhower was my postmaster when I retired.

HF: Those were all lady postmasters there at West Yellowstone?

AN: Yes, at West Yellowstone they were all lady postmaster during my time service. Right at this point I think I should mention that on this run to Yellowstone I also had about 35 wintertime patrons in between these post offices to serve and in the summertime that would go up to about 60, at least for the first few years of my run there. When I retired I think that my wintertime patrons would probably be 40 or 50 and the summertime patrons finally got up to around 100 totals stops on my mail run.

HF: Sort of like a rural route then.

AN: Yes, yes. Star route with rural route privileges and box delivered. Every one of those people in between post offices were required by the department to have mail sacks. These mail sacks had to be made out of canvas or some material that was good and strong. They had to have draw stings or zippers on them and it is interesting as to why that is necessary and why it was required. It was required before I started on the run. I asked why that was required. They said for two reasons. Wild animals had been known up and down that run to get peoples mail sacks and drag them out of their mail boxes because they were so hungry. They would be attracted to these mails sacks. They could smell the salinity on those mail sacks because of people handling them. So they wanted those mail sacks to be locked so the wild animals could not get the mail out of those sacks. Then there was another pretty logical reason. The big snow plows and the big rotaries have a tendency to know my mail posts down lots of times and also knock the boxes right off and sometimes topped the mail sacks right out of the boxes, right out into the blizzards, right out into weather. Well whenever that occurred of course I had to get my scoop shovel and look around to find the mail sack. It was highly necessary that I do that. My postal supervisors impressed upon me the necessity for doing just that. So I thought I should mention that. Probably right here I should mention that the first few years on my mail run it was necessary for me to use the old road around by Warm River and Bear Gulch all the way to West Yellowstone. The old road was pretty difficult in the winter time much more difficult than it has ever been since. The time they put into the new road built the road up into the air quite a bit so that the bad blizzards would blow enough of the snow over the road. I made approximately 2000 runs round trips around the old road by Bear Gulch and Warm River and the west side of Henry's Lake Flats. Of course Targhee Pass was very difficult in those early years on the old road. The Thompson Flats on the Montana side were very difficult and very bad in blizzards for about a mile and a half. I should state that when I first started on this mail run that I was meeting four working dog teams. For two or three years and then they were gradually being replaced by the snow planes. Those were the ones with the airplane propellers on the back driving them. I might state that some of my early time dog team drivers up in that country were Scotty Hutchernson, quite a famous character in that country. Others were Ernie Wuthrich, Sam Trude, Lewis Price, Harold Harvey, Ray Nickerson, and Warren Neff for a while.

HF: Now did they have contracts to deliver mail or were they just dog racers?

AN: They were people who lived on isolated ranches and were caretakers mostly.

HF: I see.

AN: However, Sam Trude was still retained by the service to haul mail a post office called Rea. R E A, Rea, Idaho, which was out by the big Stoddard saw mill.

HF: Now would that be out west towards Kilgore?

AN: Right, on the Kilgore Road. Then after two or three years that arrangement was dispensed with by the postal department.

HF: You had mentioned that there were some dog team deliveries even after you got started. You have outlined the Star Route. What does Star Route mean technically under the definition that the U. S. Post office would like to us to consider?

AN: Star Route means contractor. Now the railroad company was a Star Route operator. I was a Star operator because I was contracting to provide the equipment and the services and therefore I was self employed. I even had to buy my own social security. I am not retired on any government civil service rating whatsoever. I was a self employed U. S. Mail private contractor.

HF: You had to provide your own means then of getting the mails delivered?

AN: That is correct.

HF: Were you required to be on a fixed schedule, say for example, to leave Ashton at a specified time and arrive at the points of delivery of the other post offices in between Aston and Yellowstone?

AN: Yes. I had a schedule worked out all of the way from Ashton to West Yellowstone and returned and I was supposed to return to Ashton at a certain time in order to catch the southbound mail from Ashton on southbound with the mail that I brought down with my run. Of course, with bad blizzards there were times I could not possibly meet or catch that southbound schedule out of Ashton. But I will state out of the 25 years that I was a contractor the postal department never did charge me with any failure to complete my total number runs. I can say that many times I was all day and all night on Henry's Lake Flat fighting the blizzards but when I got back into Ashton even though it was ten or eleven o'clock the following day I merely unloaded and reloaded and went right straight back. My snowplow operators were waiting and looking for me all of the time and all the way up and so I would do my level best to get back up there at the appointed times and places that they would be looking for me. I should state right here that I could never have succeeded in accomplishing what I did were it not for what I considered to be the first snow removal operators ever. They were wonderful men and in those early years, I should state also, that I was the coordinator between the snow plow operators. The reason being that there were no short wave radios at that time. So I was the coordinator taking work from my snow crew from the Ashton to the top of Bear Gulch Hill at which point we would connect up with the Mack's' Inn crew. There were two very famous crew chiefs that I should mention here. One was Pete Bailey on the Montana side who had charge many years. The one on this side was Pete Matesca who was a well known and very noted snow plow operator who just past away recently after retirement over at Nampa. I should give those men and their crews tremendous credit.

HF: Were each of those highway personnel of the respective states or districts?

AN: Yes they were. Each one of those crew chiefs would give me instructions to give to the next crew chief along the road. So that they would coordinate their effort. There were so many times since that country that terrible blizzards would have the roads closed temporarily or sometimes all night or part of the night. They did not go out in the blizzards; they did not want to waste any of their efforts.

HF: You would start out at what time from Ashton in the morning?

AN: The mail usually was ready for me to leave Ashton going north about 8:30 a.m. I tried to get into West Yellowstone around 12:00 noon and I tried to get out of West Yellowstone around 1:00 on a return trip and I was supposed to get back to Ashton by 5:00 in order to get my southbound mail on the regular southbound train or tuck after the trains quit running.

HF: For a while, you went by way of Warm River and Bear Gulch when you first started. Is that corrected?

AN: Yes, that is correct.

HF: That made your route longer between the beginning point and termination. How much longer? Four or five miles?

AN: Yes, something like that. It was anywhere between 3 and 5 miles. They kept working on the roads for many years and it seemed like each time, the work there would be a change in the route mileage. Not great changes but always a lessening.

HF: Was there a post office at Warm River?

AN: No, there never was.

HF: Nor at Bear Gulch?

AN: No, not ever. I served those people, however, that lived in those areas with their sacks, regular mail sacks.

HF: Fred Lewis?

AN: Fred Lewis, yes, for many years. He was one of my great friends.

HF: What facilities did these individuals have when, they had to comply with this mail bag provision you have mentioned. Did you go right to their house? The mail delivery?

AN: As a rule, I would put the sack in a box that they would have. On that run they used to have to move their boxes in the winter. Very often because of the snow plows. Of course, the snow plows moved that snow back with tremendous power and high banks of snow.

HF: So their homes might be down the lane or down the road for half a mile or something like that and they would have to come and pick their own mail up?

AN: Yes. However, lots of times there would be freezable. I would know that I had something perishable and I was always dressed for it and I nearly always carried my skis or webs with me in the winter months. Very often I would jump on the skis or webs right quickly down a few hundred years or whatever it might be down to their house in order to deliver the perishables to them because I didn't want anything to happen to any of my people's valuable belonging. They were good people and they were all good to me. I didn't have any enemies. I had all friends.

HF: Now the Sherwood store, did that come in this classification of delivery?

AN: For summer months only. I would go around by Sherwood store and I would turn around at Wild Rose Ranch. At the Wild Rose Ranch for many years for many years in the summer months I met quite a famous old male carrier from Monida, Montana. He is known to many people, Link Miller. Lincoln Miller. He was a great old timer and a great old friend of mine and he was one of these old time mail carriers who would carry the mail part way with a car and par way with a snow plane, and par way with a saddle horse, and part way on foot. He and I used to meet in the summer months and chat.

HF: At Rose?

AN: At Wild Rose Ranch.

HF: Now was that in the vicinity of Henry's Lake?

AN: Yes.

HF: Does Lake, Idaho ring a bell?

AN: Oh yes. Lake, Idaho was quite a famous post office and stage stop operated by the Sherwood family. When I started my mail run in 1950 the Lake, Idaho post office had been discontinued, not too long before I started.

HF: Now you mentioned Monida. Mail was carried from Monida maybe to Red Rock and then to Lake, Idaho?

AN: Yes, that's right, right up through the Centennial Valley. That is known as the Centennial Valley.

HF: That area?

AN: Yes.

HF: That lies within Montana?

AN: Yes, that lies within Montana. Then that mail carrier would come over Red Rocks Pass and around the northwest side of Henry's Lake to Wild Rose Ranch where he and I would intercept each other.

HF: So you would pick up mail that he had brought from Monida?

AN: Very often, yes.

HF: He would take some from you?

AN: Yes, if I had some for his people, he would take it back.

HF: Now in the years, particularly in the first part of the years, first years of your contract in the 50's, what was your first means of delivering the mail? That is to say what kind of a vehicle did you use?

AN: My first vehicle was one that I purchased from Mr. Porter, the former carrier. It was a V-8 Ford panel truck. I already had a jeep station wagon. So I would alternate between the V-8 panel truck and jeep station wagon. For a few years I did alternate like that between them. Then I purchased probably the first six cylinder Jeep station wagon in the upper valley. I purchased that in Idaho Falls from Mr. Bill Sayer. His boy, Ronnie Sayer, is the present Jeep salesman and dealer in Idaho Falls. But that very first one that I purchased had what was known as the six cylinder lightning engine in it. They had not yet started calling that vehicle the Jeep Wagoner. But they started calling it within the next couple or three years after I bought that one.

HF: Was it a 4-wheel drive?

AN: It was a 4-wheel drive and I learned something in about 8 months with that. It was very expensive to operate on my mail run. Remember I had to furnish everything. So that was quite a consideration to me. I learned something else. I learned that in the bad blizzard on Henry's Lake flats that if I couldn't go with a two wheel drive vehicle I couldn't go with a 4-wheel drive vehicle. In other words I had to have the benefit of the big, huge snow plows or the rotaries. So I just kept that one for 18 months and then I traded it and got my first Volkswagen in 1956. I had a lot of misgivings about that Volkswagen. It was so under powered. I thought that little air cooled engine in the back would start melting out at any minute on me, getting so hot. But as a matter of fact, I would up this mail run with Volkswagens. I had such tremendously good success with them. I found the little hot running Volkswagen engines would not drown out in the bad blizzards on Henry's Lake Flats. I had that sad experience on all my water cooled engines.

HF: Now would this be a typical Volkswagen car?

AN: Yes.

HF: It wasn't a truck?

AN: My first ones were all VW panel trucks. For many years I purchased VW: panel trucks. Then gradually the mail situation changed a little bit and the Star Route carrier from Bozemen, Montana, whom I use to meet in West Yellowstone every trip, began getting more of the mail load that I had been getting previously. So gradually my mail load got down to the point where I could sometimes use a smaller vehicle than the panel trucks. So, actually, I would up using the little VW cars. I used to take the seats out of all my VW bugs, all but the drivers seat, and I could literally haul a whole pick up truck of mail. The postal department, as long as I kept the mail dry and in proper condition, that compiled with their requirements.

HF: Give me an estimate or comparison of the weight of mail when you first started and with its dwindling condition when you ended.

AN: When I first started I had as much as twelve hundred pounds of mail, parcel post. When I retired I dare say I was not hauling more than an average of maybe four hundred pounds.

HF: So it shrank two-thirds?

AN: I shrank quite a lot as the postal department changed their modes of operations, you might say the gate ways of the mail movement.

HF: Let's see now, Nick. I want to make sure; did you mention the distance, the average distance of a round trip each day, the mileage you put on your vehicle every day delivering the mail?

AN: Well, of course in the summer months I diverted at the Flying R. Ranch and went north around Henry's Lake. So that added a few miles in the summer months. Then, of course for many years I was dodging off and going over the Big Springs and then back to Mack's Inn which was an extra ten miles round trip. So my mileage in the winter and the summer varied a little bit. Then it seems like you spin your wheels a lot in the snow and ice at certain times of the year. My vehicular mileage records changed a little bit.

HF: Kind of give me a rough idea what it was in the winter time?

AN: Round trip in the winter time, it seemed like my speedometer would usually show about 130 miles in a round trip in the winter months.

HF: And in the summer months?

AN: In the summer months, of course, including the extra twenty miles would be about 140 miles round trip. It just seemed like in the winter months your tires, your

speedometer mileage, goes along with the revolution of the tires. In the winter months your tire revolutions were more per mile than in the summer months because of the slippage.

HF: Now you are required to make your mail deliveries alone. You couldn't take a passenger with you.

AN: I hauled passengers all the years on my mail run. As a contractor, as long as nothing happened to my mail load, I was ok. By the way, since you asked me that, I should state to start our on my contract they required that I carry a gun, nothing less than a 32 caliber. The reason for that being was that there were no banks in the town of West Yellowstone. All of the money had to leave West Yellowstone and with ergo north with that carrier to the Montana banks or come south and it seems that most of it came south at that time. That included all the receipts from the various post offices along the route. So there were tens of thousand of dollars sometimes in the summer months in currency that I was hauling. My postmaster in Yellowstone would never tell me the exact amount but lots of times she would follow me right out the car. She would say, "Here we don't load this sack now until you get ready to leave. And don't you take your eye of from this sack today."

HF: But she wouldn't disclose what was in it?

AN: She never would disclose the amount.

HF: But you knew it was currency?

AN: I knew it was currency and I knew that there was a lot of it, the way she would act. I could tell that.

HF: You carried it out there for her as a gentleman?

AN: Oh yes, definitely. She just followed me out. Anyhow I was real happy when the postal department deleted that from my contract. So I did not have to carry the gun. That worried me all the time.

HF: Then what did you use?

AN: During all the years I was on the mail run I used a German army 32 caliber Mauser in a shoulder holster. I got permits from both Montana and Idaho to carry a shoulder holster and I carried it right under my arm and nobody knew that I had a gun only my postmaster knew. Even I forgot it sometimes until I would go to bed. It was a flat, little gun and light little gun. It held thirteen shells in a clip. It was a semi-automatic. You could put those thirteen out of it almost before you could bat your eyes that many times. It was a kinda dangerous little gun. I made a mistake of letting one or two friends borrow it once or twelve to take on hunting trips. One man shot a hole between his big toe and little toe with it. He didn't only shoot once. Before he could quite pulling the trigger he

cut the shoe right off from between his two toes. Things like that worried me and I quit loaning it.

HF: Did you ever have occasion to use it in connection with you job?

AN: No, but I thought I was going to one time. Just one time that I was real jittery. That was coming out of West Yellowstone in the middle of the winter and it was about 40-45 below zero, terribly cold day. I was all alone coming back from Yellowstone that day and I saw these two men walking. As I got closer to them I could see that they were strangers. I didn't know them and I knew everyone up and down the road, but I didn't know these two men. Then I could see that they were very poorly dressed and both of them bare headed and both of them rubbing their ears with their hands and no mittens on and no gloves. I had no idea who they were but, of course, I could hardly see men out in that kind of weather walking north of West Yellowstone. I knew the number of miles before they could even get warm at that time. Nobody lived within a few miles there on that stretch of road. So I slowed down and I decided to give them a ride. As I got stopped they opened the door, the one man was a quite large man, six foot, two or three inches tall, and I say weighed 220 pounds. The other man was about my size. The big man especially, I got a look in his eyes as he climbed in. I didn't like the looks of him even one little bit. I didn't know what to do about it at the moment. It did put me on my guard. Anyhow, he said, "Can I sit in the back?" I said, "No, you cannot. There is mail back there and I don't want anybody back here. You can sit here." There is only the single seat beside me. He said, "There are two of us." I said, "That smaller man can set on your lap." The big man demurred a little bit at the time. I said it's that way boys. If you want a ride that's how you will have to ride." I just knew that I had a couple of bad ones. I was uncomfortable. I kept trying to talk to them and I couldn't get much of it of them I said, where are you boys headed for?" They said, "Oh just south, anywhere to get out of this cold country." That was all that I could get out of them. Anyhow, I got along with them pretty good until I got down to Bear Gulch and it was beginning to get dusk a little bit in the timber at that time of the winter. The big fellow said, "You got to pull over right here. We have got to get out to have a rest stop." I said, "Well boys it is only twelve miles from where we are to Ashton. I'll be there in just minutes. Let's get there. I got to catch a mail run there. Let's just set right. We can make it that far." The big guy got real snarly with me at that. He said, "Say, I told you to stop." Right quickly I made up my mind that I was going to have trouble. I was thinking, trying to figure out what to do. By that time I had approached the lip of the steep hill that goes down to Bear Gulch, going around the sharp curves and the snow banks were up real high. The big rotaries had cut snow banks. They were up seven or eight feet high on each side and the road was narrow so I made up my mind what I would do. I pulled over to the right. I knew that I was pulling to the right close enough that he could only get the door open against the big snow bank and that he couldn't get around the door and the snow bank. In other words when I stopped I knew that he had to slide back along the side of my car. I knew that when the other man got out that he had to do that too. By that time I was getting real jittery and I had even unbuttoned the blouse of my shirt because I carried my gun in this shoulder holster underneath my left arm. While they were getting out I hurriedly unbuttoned this one button. That was all I had to do to get that gun. I had my mind made up. In the meantime

as they were getting out I slipped my car into first gear and it was downhill anyway. Just ahead of me the road made a sharp bend. I thought if these fellows do have a gun and they started shooting at me I will just bend down and I will make it around that sharp bend before they can do much about it. So I drove off and left them right there. I didn't hesitate. When the smaller man got out I just let the clutch out and drove down that hill as hard as I could go and left them standing right there. When I got to Ashton I didn't tell anyone about it as I was a little chagrined being so close to trouble. So I didn't mention it to anybody. I no more than got home in my house when I got a call from the sheriff of Fremont County, at that time R. Guy Hill. He called me and asked me if I had seen a couple of hitch hikers anywhere on the road that day. I said "Yes." He said, "Describe them to me." I did. He said, "What did you do with them?" I said, "I left them off at the head of Bear Gulch." He said, "Man alive." Then I told him the circumstances. He said, "One of them, well their both bad men, they are escaped convicts from North Dakota and the other is an escaped convict from Oklahoma." I found out later that the officers got them somewhere in the Salmon country in some isolated cabin. That was the only close call that I had.

HF: Now, Nick, when you commenced being a contractor in 1950, what classes of mail, what seemed to be the nature of your delivery in the first part of your service?

AN: I was empowered under my contract provisions to haul all classes of mail including specie. That word is S P E C I E and as they applied it at that time, it meant valuables. Any kind of currency, any kind of valuable documents, any kind of registered mail and certified mail, I could haul. I did haul it all. For many years because of the fact there was no bank in West Yellowstone I was hauling great amounts of currency. In the spring of the year and in the fall of the year I would haul great amounts of every expensive jewelry. The people that owned the stores in West Yellowstone, Smith and Chandlers. Many of you hearers of this tape will remember the big Smith and Chandlers store in West Yellowstone. They also had another bigger store like that in Las Vegas Nevada. In the fall of the year when they would open the store in West Yellowstone, they would have huge boxes with great amounts of jewelry coming in these mail sacks from Las Vegas to West Yellowstone. So I would be hauling very valuable cargo through the mail. It was unlimited. I could haul anything.

HF: In those days too, didn't ranchers and so forth, especially their wives, do a lot of mail ordering, you know, from Spiegel's or Montgomery Wards? Didn't you get a lot of stuff like that?

AN: Yes, in fact, I would get entire mail sacks full just for one rancher, one mail patron. I would often times get entire mail sacks loaded with parcel post for just one patron. That would occur very often especially in the earlier of the mail runs that I did.

HF: I recall in the spring of the year going into the Driggs post office and listening to little chirps from chickens. Did you ever have to deliver poultry?

AN: I delivered baby chicks numbers and numbers of times, usually right in the worst blizzards. Right there I am happy to state that I had many good friends who were truck drivers running on the same road with me. In fact I was friends with about all of them. Lots of times I had trouble keeping them warm in my outfit. So I would get these trucks drivers before we left Ashton. I would stop these truck drivers who were friends of mine. I'll say, "See, if there is nobody riding the cushions with you today, how about me putting three or four big boxes of baby chicks up there with you. How about it? You follow me and I will get them out of there at this patron's ranch between here and West Yellowstone." We could stay together and I would hurry up and get them and deliver them so that he could go on again. They were such good friends of mine and I had helped so many of those boys so much in the blizzards and one time or another that they were very happy to do this for me. They did that any times. I'll have to tell you a funny one. One time when I had the 4-wheel drive vehicle one of my good friends was stuck on Targhee Pass on the ice and had torn up his chains. He needed a little pull. He said, "See, with the 4-wheel drive maybe you can give me just enough of a pull so that we can get this rig over the hill." I said, "I believe we can do it." I turned around and hooked on degrees below zero. I thought I as was getting enough heat from my vehicle back there but I was back and hit the frozen icy pavement. I didn't know it and I just kept on going. I got the truck on top all right. He jumped out and came around and I had a couple of passengers that day with me. The truck driver was laughing. He said, "What are you hauling mail driver, ping pong balls?" I said, "No." I had forgotten about the eggs. I said, "What happened." He turned around and said, "Look at them still rolling down the highway." So we went and picked up a couple for them, of course, it dawned on me then that they were frozen harder than a rock. I picked one up and threw it down hard upon the pavement and it bounced right back up. I said, "Hey I caught it on the first bounce." My first passengers and the truck drier just howled. So I got the passengers and the truck drive out and we picked up all the eggs. I put them back the case and took them on into West Yellowstone into this tough old Charlie Walker, who was running a café in West Yellowstone. Good friend of mine however. I took them in and said, "Charlie, look at this." I picked one out and I threw it down and it hit the cement floor in the back of his café and it bounced right up and I caught it on the first bounce. He took the cigar out of his mouth and he said, "Aw that is all right Nick." I said, "I'll pay you for them, Charlie." He said, "You don't need to. I'll pout them herein the Sharps freezer and I'll just use them frozen. You don't owe me anything." So that was just one of the funny little things that happened.

HF: I suppose down through those twenty-five years you had occasion to accommodate just so many people, delivering mail for them, COD's, or whatever. Is that right?

AN: Yes that is right. I knew the people so well that most of them I could trust 100%. Because of the fact they would have COD's coming very often they would say, "Hey, Nick, rather than leave that COD when it comes up, rather than leave it at Mack's Inn or Charlie Pond's, if you got money in your pocket, you advance the charges and sign for it and bring it on up and give it to me and I'll pay you when you get here. That way we can have the utilization of that product that much sooner." I would say, "Well, of course, be glad to do it." And I did. I am glad to say I only got beat very few times in those twenty-

five years by people. Normally it was people who were coming and going living in the area for a short time. My old steady people never beat me, none of them. They were great people.

HF: You had commented something about the various classifications of mail as you commenced. Did that change, the various types of mail, from the beginning to the end?

AN: Yes, towards the latter part of my years as the mail carrier the postal department made many changes. They made changes in what they called the gateways approaching the town of West Yellowstone especially. Much more of the heavy parcel post type mail began flowing through the Butte, Montana and the Bozeman, Montana gateways. The Star Route carrier began carrying more and more of the tonnage. That allowed me to use a smaller vehicle towards the latter end of my service as the mail carrier. The classification of the mail itself did not change much. It was the flow of the mail through these various gateways that the department was utilizing.

HF: You had a change in the source of your mail as to how it was delivered to Ashton. First of all it was the train and then subsequently it was a highway truck?

AN: Yes. However for a few years we had what were called HPO's, highway post offices. I am sure there will be some of the people listening to this tape sometime or other who will remember big, huge bus type vehicles that were highway post offices operating between Pocatello and Ashton. They operated just for a few years.

HF: Was that Wycoff?

AN: No, it was the post offices own, what they were actually, these highway post offices, were patterned after your railway mail post office cars. There was a mail clerk sorting the mail all of the time on the HPO and they had a special driver on it. A regular mail clerk was on this highway post office all the way from Pocatello to Ashton.

HF: They would have the mail all sorted by the time they got to Ashton and deliver it there. Then they would go back to Pocatello and deliver it at the various post offices.

AN: But that situation only obtained just a few years, maybe three or four years. I am not totally conversant as to why the postal department discontinued the highway post offices. I heard it was costing too much money in the operations. It didn't lend itself as well as the railway post office cars had lent themselves.

HF: What comment would you make about the tourist business in those twenty-five years? Did you see much of a change? What impact did that have on your mail carrying duties?

AN: Yes there was quite a change in those twenty-five years. As the roads got better and better all the way to Yellowstone Park the tourist traffic increased. There was another phenomenon that took place. That is that people from California and other states far

removed from our country began coming into the Island Park and Henry Lake Country and also on the Montana side too, in the Hebgen Lake area, and buying up summer homes and buying up private ranches and sub-dividing them into many building units. I could not believe my eyes as to the number of new people coming in the last few years I was on my mail run. That condition obtains today. I can hardly believe the number of new condominiums that are being built at the Island Park Lodge area. It is just amazing to me.

HF: Well then, if you were on there today you would be delivering to a lot more recipients of mail, wouldn't you?

AN: Yes.

HF: Or what has the post office done? How has the system adjusted to this change?

AN: The present carrier is delivering to more and more patrons than I did. His mail load is not any heavier, so far as hundreds of pounds are concerned, I don't believe. Most of his mail nowadays seems to be first class mail and they no longer use the sacks that they had to use when I was on the mail route. It seems as though they are forcing these people to get their mail more at the post offices than they used to with me. The present mail carrier does not have the time. His instructions are to not do the things for the people quite like I did for the many years. Although the present carrier is a very fine man. I am well acquainted with him and he would do people a favor as fast as I would accepting that he may be more limited by his instructions at this time than I was.

HF: Nick, from the beginning point to the ending point of your service covering twenty-five year period, was there much change wrought in the physical means of receiving and distributing the mail in the post offices themselves? You know in the mechanics of it.

AN: There has been some changes. For example, the postal department, of course, instituted the zip coding the latter part of my years. That made of some changes. That changed the flow of mail again through different postal gateways. So it did make some impact on it. So far as the postal clerks in the post offices themselves...

HF: Is it pretty much distributed and sorted by clerks?

AN: Yes, still is.

HF: Not mechanical?

AN: No, not in our little local post offices. That type of mechanical work was for the bigger post offices.

HF: Do you think the same approximate number of personnel still is required as before?

AN: I think approximately the same. Very little change.

HF: There hasn't been a reduction in personnel?

AN: Well, I keep hearing that there has been some reductions. I hear that they are so much tougher with the postmasters on their extra help situations but I'm not too conversant with it. Since 1975 I'm just like any other postal patron. While I do fraternize a little bit with the present postal people in my town I don't get into the mechanics of it anymore.

HF: The mails must go on. It must go on, be carried out. What is the exact phrase?

AN: When I first started, I took it very seriously myself. I took it so seriously that I meant to get the mail through and I did, no matter how long it took. I cannot recall the exact wording of this famous phrase but anyhow the mail must go through. Come gloom of day or night the mail must go, but anyhow I took it seriously. I'm glad to say I did take it seriously. I had practically no mail complaints in the twenty-five years as a mail carrier and I am sure that this list of postmasters I read a while ago would back me up in that statement.

HF: There were times, though, when you had problems getting the mail through?

AN: Oh yes. The Henry's Lake Flat is considered by truck drivers to be probably the worst blizzard stretch on any state or federal highway in America today.

HF: Why is that?

AN: Well, because the deep snow, and because of terrible winds. There is nothing to break the wind there for eight miles across that big open flat.

HF: Is that just before you get to the line?

AN: It is back this way from the Montana line.

HF: Is that eight miles all within Idaho?

AN: Yes, that is all within Idaho. There seems to be natural elemental weather phenomena over the Henry's Lake area there. Towards the spring of the year, that is this time of year, February, March, and April, there seems to be big warm air masses coming in from the Pacific Ocean. At the same we have cold air masses coming from the frigid Arctic and they meet head on over the Henry's Lake Flats. Those mountain ranges coming in at angles cause the hot air, the warm air, and the cold air to become terribly turbulent. The old dog race drivers, like Scotty Hutchinson, said that we had what they called spinner blizzards on Henry's Lake Flats. They have them no other place. That obtains for fifteen or twenty minutes while this and cold air meeting head on, causes turbulence to such a degree that the blizzard will come from a full 360 degree circle just like a vortex. It seems to not occur anywhere else that I have ever heard of. I am well

acquainted with many truck drivers who haul perishable commodities from the Imperial Valley in California and even in old Mexico clear to Anchorage, Alaska, and they say that the only place that worried them at this time of the year is that, really seriously from the standpoint of terrible blizzards, is Henry's Lake Flat. They figure if they can cross Henry's Lake Flat safely and successfully that they have to it whipped for blizzard conditions clear to Anchorage, Alaska.

HF: That is about an eight mile stretch?

AN: Yes, eight miles each way.

HF: Now that would be on Highway 20. It used to be called U.S 91 or 191?

AN: Yes, U. S. 91 to Idaho Falls and then 191 from Idaho Falls to Bozeman. Ahead of that, when I was a boy traveling up there, it was just called the Yellowstone Trail or the Yellowstone Road. Right at that time, too, when I got to Pocatello on the way to Salk Lake, they would say you are going on the Salt Lake Road. If I was going to Montpelier or Cheyenne they would say you are going on the Lincoln Highway. If I was going west to Boise or to Portland they would say you are going on the Oregon Trail Road. You are going on the old Oregon Trail Highway. So that is how much it has changed in my short lifetime systems.

HF: Isn't that something. Well, you have witnessed mail delivered by dog sled, haven't you? Now you personally haven't done it though?

AN: No, I personally have not carried it by dog sled. But I am personally acquainted with many dog sled drivers such as Smoky Gaston, who hauled it for many winters between Monida, Montana and West Yellowstone. Sam Trude's two daughters hauled it from the Island Park country to West Yellowstone across Henry's Lake Flat.

HF: By dog sled?

AN: Oh, yes, his two daughters did. Yes I even have pictures of those two girls with their dog teams and loaded with mail too.

HF: Now have you delivered mail with skis?

AN: Only short distances.

HF: From your car to the homes?

AN: Yes. Now I have never carried the mail on my skis like wrapped around my body or like that. I have not done that. I have to stay with my mail outfit until I could get it to the next post office.