

TRANSCRIPTION OF TAPED INTERVIEW WITH HARVEY MERRITT

227 S. Wyoming St., Wednesday, September 12, 1984

*Quinn Kinney*

Harvey has lived at this address since 1940, but was born and raised in Butte. (He has lived here all his life.) He grew up on Iowa near Front St. His father worked as a smelterman and then got a job at the Washoe Sampling works, which was a subsidiary that bought ore to send to Anaconda for smelting. The Washoe Sampling works is located or was located north of the BAP tracks, west of Montana St., south of Iron, behind Rosenberg's.

There used to be a Montana Dairy located at Montana and Irxon St. Milk was poured out of a can into the customer's can that he would bring, and there was a measure right on top of the can, and they'd measure you out a quart.

He attended the Monroe school and the day after he got out of grade school, he went to work for Harve Pierce's automobile agency. It was first located underneath the Montana Power building, and you got at it from the alley underneath, and then he moved over into the Craven garage on South Main. He went to work at the age of 16. Then a job came up at the Sheep Shearer's Merchandis Company, and he took it, and worked there for roughly 50 years. Until about three years ago. He was a toolmaker. They were first located at Iron and Wyoming for a couple of years, and then moved up to Wyoming and Platinum for maybe 10 yrs. He believes they moved into their present location in 1937. Before the Shep Shearer's moved in, it was a garage, belonging to Car Keith (?)

He remembers Charles C. Goddard as a contractor who may have lived on Maryland Ave. The 700 block.

Harvey was born in 1901.

Like the other people I interviewed, Harvey confirmed that as a child, he stuck pretty close to home. His ~~neighborhood~~ neighborhood was immediately around his home. He used to rustle coal from the railroad yards; in the corners of the cars, there would be some coal left, and they'd rustle that and put it in a sack and take it home to burn. They used to rustle wood, too, which was before gas came to Butte. Everyone burned coal in the wintertime.

TRAINS---There used to be a passenger train back and forth to Anaconda that ran every few hours or so. And it came int at the end of Utah St. The Milwaukee Raod, before it got its terminal on Mt. st., used to use the terminal on Wyoming ST.

They used to back the whole train in there.

He recalls that the Milwaukee Road station was built around 1916. He says that they had to do a lot of excavating to get rid of gulches and hills and that ran through there. They had little steam engines and narrow gates that they used to haul the dirt in, and shovels to unload it all. They leveled that area a lot for the station.

There was a big accident on Utah and Iron; a streetcar coming from Columbia Gardens ran into some railroad cars, ore cars, being back up there. This was about 1910 or so. Killed a few people.

MAIN ST. LINE--Started at Park and Main St., the south Main Line, and the double track started right below Platinum St. and it went down one block to Aluminum St. and then west one block to Colorado. Then it went down underneath the railroad tracks--that was the idea of building it like that, to get underneath the tracks so they didn't have to both watching for railroad ~~cars~~ trains. Then they dropped down to Fremont St., and back over to Main St. again. Then the double track ended, and they headed out on Second St., to the Western Iron Works, the end of the street. That car seemed to run about every 15 minutes.

The trains were so busy at night, from about 6 to 8 o.m., that they used to run a small car from Second to Park and Main, while the other car was going out East Second St. It was so busy with people going to the shows or to buy things at Hennessey's or Symons. Stores stayed open past 6 o'clock.

HIS FAMILY--There were five children, and he was the second youngest. The oldest got a job on the railroad, worked as a fireman and then as an engineer, and worked out of Pocatello. His second brother worked in Symons/ clothing store. His parents were from England. His father came by himself, before he met his mother. He landed at Philadelphia, and since he was an Englishman, some rich person hired him as a kind of a busboy, to meet him at the station, and take him to his estate, A farm just outside of Philadelphia. His father got tired of that, so he moved on to St. Louis, where they were building a bridge, and got a job there. After they finished the job, he went on to Frisco and learned how to make bricks. He was sent up to Butte to open up a brickyard, to get the business started. And that's how he came to Montana. The wages were so much better here, that he stayed right here, he didn't go back. So he came to Butte about 1895. His father built the house they lived in on Iowa St., and it's still standing. 1128 Iowa,

and its been modified quite a bit. It was originally two rooms;

Then his father went to work at the Colorado Smelter; they had a concentrator and a smelter thhre. He worked there are 3 or 4 years, and then got a job up at the Sampling Works, wehere the company bought their custom ore, sampled it, then sent it off to Anaconda. So the small mines would send their ore trough the sampling works. They would empty the whole car and drop it into a hopper, and then into a crusher, and then hoist the whole works up to the top floor, about six stories. As it dropped floor by floor, they'd crush it, and pull out some, and send the rest to the main bin. By the time they got to the bottom, the ore they were going to sample and test was about 500 lbs, out of 50 ton car. And they'd have a pretty good idea of what it was worth. And they had a laboratory there, and tey'd run it through and test it. See how much gold and silver and copper there was. It was located on the BAP track, but they tore the whole thing down.

An intersting thing about Butte is that all the power was steam before it got electrified. The hoists and drills down underneath. So a lot of coal came into Butte. This contributed to the bad air. But a lot of pollution was due to roasting ore out in the open. They would put wood down, and then ore on top of it and set it on fire. The ore contained a lot of sulphur, and that would readil burn, and that just drifted through the valley. This was done in the flats, like around the Blvd. there. But most of the smoke Harvey r embers is from the coal and steam, from the plant in the center of the city. On a real cold day, they used to say they burned about a carload of coal at that heating plant. That's the stack you see at the Montana Power Building; that was the heating plant for most of the stores in the business district. They even had the heat going as far west as the high school on Idaho St.

STORES -- He remembers the store at Front and Utah. The area was known as South Butte, and it had its own Post Office, on Front St. There was a drug store and two or three saloons, and the Bennett Hotel, And the <sup>Charles</sup>Brothers had a saloon and one had a dry goods store. They became relatively well to do--e.J. Charles was one of them.

When he started with the Sehep Shearer's he lived on Iowa and walked to work. But when he moved up to Wyoming, he bought the place, wich was a common practice for people to do. To make a little money. His chief interest in the place was that he would walk to work, not having to depend on any way to get there. The railroad tracks are right next to his house, and he mentions that they used to switch cars thereuntil about 2 in the morning! So they were back and forth making noise, but you got used to it, he says.

THE ICE HOUSE ACROSS THE ST.-- It was operating when Harvey moved in. They got the ice from Lake Avoca. Which was located on the flat, south of where the mall is now. East of Holmes Ave, extension. They cut ice in the winter, and they stored it in warehouses down there. Lake Avoca was kind of a recreational place where they had canoes and swimming, that is if you were a "sturdy sort of a fellow, a Finlander or something." "Seems that all the good swimmers were Finnish people."

His neighborhood on Front St., was a mixture of nationalities, "sort of American, you might say." "Missourian, generally."

As a kid, he was always interested in electricity, and with his friend, they used to go looking for wire and anything pertaining to electricity. And one of the things they had to have was batteries. And automobiles always had batteries in them, dry cell batteries, so he remembers going into garages looking for semi-worn out ones. And he remembers going into that building, Sheep Shearers, looking for batteries. And that was about 1913.

Harvey wanted to be an electrician by trade, but didn't know anyone to get him into it. He needed connections and pull--that was the best thing that could happen to a fellow coming out of school, to get an apprenticeship, to learn a trade. But he didn't have the connections for that apprenticeship. So he became a machinist instead.

SHEEP SHEARER'S-- along with Sunbeam in Chicago, they are the only manufacturers of sheep shearing equipment in the country. The Union office is the only one in the country. Sheep Shearer's was organized by the Butte Miners, around 1912.

The Californai Bakery--operating by 1912 or so up on Dakota St. As a kid he used to ride around with Symons' delivery truck. And when they'd come back to the store and load up, they'd go across the street to the bakery and buy a donut. That was the selling store for the Bakery down on Dakota.

He mentions a book by Oscar Johnson, who lived in the 700 block of Nevada. He did a lot of research on the ore wagons, and who hauled what with horse teams.

During his time no one seemed to complain about the coal smoke. They ought to have been up in arms about the Phoenix Heating Plant, because there was a lot of know how in the country about how to burn coal. They just bailed that coal in

there by hand, no mechanical stokers.

He observes that most of the people that went uptown were single mingers. And they didn't have anything else to do.

He had one son, who moved to Albuquerque.

Columbia Gardens--people weren't using it when they had it towards the end. When people used cars so much, they took off and forgot about Columbia Gardens. He didn't go up there much when he was growing up, but as an adult, he played tennis there a lot. They had tennis courts up there, the Butte Electric Railroad built them, and they were clay and well taken care of, watered and rolled, and it was "sure fine to play on."

He never really ventured up to Meaderville or Walkerville at all.

Twice a week a solicitor used to come from Evans and Condon store on East Park Street so they could do their shopping. And his mother would tell them all they needed, and that evening, he would deliver it. Sometimes in the winter it would be dark when he'd come, and once in a while they'd have a sleigh if it was snowy, and he remembers the jingling bells on the sleigh horses. This was before they had an automobile, when he was a child and lived on Iowa St. Since he's moved to Wyoming St., he's been shopping at Pay 'n' Tak-It. And then down below at Tripp and Dragstedt. One of the things we'd need once in a while was a can of coal oil, better known now as kerosene. For lamps. Incidentally, once in a while I'd take a few drops of coal oil on a spoon with sugar for a cold. I don't know why it had to have so much sugar; i could have got it down without sugar.

The most interesting thing on Main St. according to Harvey Merritt was the Ice Company, and the livery stables. On the corner of E. Platinum and Main (where Town Pump now stands). They used to cut ice down at Lake Avoca, put it in storerooms there, without sawdust, and haul it up to a secondary station, so to speak, just below the tracks, and store it there, and then work out of Main St. with their teams and wagons, go down there and get the ice.

Livery Stables--there was one on Galena St., and one on Mercury St., and down farther, just above Platinum was another one. And across the street, just above what is now Unique Cleaners, there was one there. And of course there were more feed stores around then, too, to handle the feed.

The building right across the street (which still has "creamery" written on its walls), had quite a business in butter and eggs, and they used to ship butter out of there every couple of weeks, to California. It says Blanchards Butter on the wall. Hennickson Produce

Company. They used to bring in cream on the railroads from dairy herds from all over this neighborhood here, like Divide and Melrose, and Deer Lodge. Apparently the eggs too. And they used to candle the eggs, too. If you know what that means. (I didn't). They look through them to see there are no blood spots, or foreign matter in them, so they could guarantee them.

He believes that there were Koreans, Chinamen, Chinese growing gardens to sell vegetables for Butte. There was one group at ~~ax~~ the Nine Mile and then in Silver Bow, near Stauffer's, there was a group. But most of the produce came in on the rails.

One of Harvey's brother's jobs was to keep stuff coming in on ~~ax~~ the trains; like if they got too many bananas they couldn't use, he had to send it on to Helena or Billings. His brother took care of the shipping and ordering and things; like a brokerage concern. Armor and Swift had warehouses here, too. They'd stock cans of lard and eggs and sausages and things like that.

There were quite a few passenger trains in Butte at one time. The North Coast, ~~and~~ <sup>the</sup> NP, ran two trains a day; UP from Salt Lake used to call it the orient short line, they ran two trains, and then they cut it down to one. And the BAP, about every two hours they went back and forth; and the GN come down ~~from~~ Great Falls, one train a day. Then the Milwaukee added two trains a day. "You know, it was this ~~xxxxx~~ big deposit of copprr that <sup>caused</sup> ~~gax~~ them to build the railroad in here in the first place, then the UP come up, used to call it the Utah Northern, then the line from Great Falls. Then the main line of the NP went through Helena, til they say fit to come through here because Butte was big enough and the town had enough business, that they built the NP through here. It comes from Logan to Garrison, and meets the other line. Butte was an important town in its day."

And Butte's future: "It don't look very good, the way I see it. But we're set up here pretty good now, enough room to store all my stuff. And I've kind of forgot about rentin' the place any more, I don't want them to be botherin' me. I've just got one tenant left. Course, if some old lady come along that's almost deaf and ~~xxxxx~~ didn't use the radio, I might rent to someone like that."

"I'm still the maintenance man. Been working on the roof here lately. So I'm still able to do that, and have always been handy with plumbing and the electrical business. And I've been pretty handy with laying brick, too. I'm kind of a jakk of all trades."

In the end, he asks if we think it's all been recorded. My response: If it isn't I'm in big trouble. No kidding.