

Off 020-23

Interview with Joe Lee

Subject: Bob's Market, "A Neighborhood Grocery Store"

Date: March 16, 2002

Interviewer: Phil J. Telling

## Proposed Interview Outline

### Parents

#### Father:

- Born
- Raised
- Educated

#### Mother

- Born
- Raised
- Educated

### Previous Employment

- When
- Where

### Previous Store Experience

#### The Store

- Name
- Location
- An existing store
- Time Frame
- Products and Services
- When did Joe start working in the store
- Did other family members work there also
- Store Hours
- After Hours Calls

#### The Neighborhood

- Other Businesses
- Home owners or rentals
- Short term or long term residents

#### The Customers

- Typical
- Types of employment
- Walk-ins
- Deliveries
- Outside of the neighborhood
- Cash or Credit
- How was credit handled

### Effect of ACM Strikes

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Effect of Safeway and other Super Markets

Vendors

Who did your dad buy from

Relationships with vendors during hard times

Neighborhood Characters

Closing of the store

Memories

Included is a biography of Bob Lee and his store by his son Joe Lee

**Phil:** This is an interview with Joe Lee. His father owned a grocery store on east Second Street in Butte.

**Phil:** Joe was your dad born in Butte?

**Joe:** Yes he was born in Butte on Feb 8, 1912, 2340 Terrace in Walkerville. He was raised in Walkerville.

**Phil:** Was your mother born in Butte?

**Joe:** Yes she was born June 16, 1918 her maiden name was Wedlake. She was raised down in the Lowell St. area.

**Phil:** How about your dad's education?

**Joe:** Dad went to school at the St. Lawrence, to the best of my knowledge he finished Elementary School. Sometime after that he went to the Butte Business College. He was also in the CCC, Civilian Conservation Corp, for a short period of time. He also worked at the Hansen Packing Company. His sisters & brothers all worked there. My dad only worked there a short period of time. So as far his formal education, it was elementary school & how ever long he was at the Butte Business College. I don't know how long he was there.

**Phil:** You mentioned the Hansen Packing Company, where else did he work?

**Joe:** Prior to owning the store he worked at the Anaconda Company. He started to work at the Anaconda Company in 1937. He worked there until the strike of 1946. He worked at the Leonard Mine. At the time of the strike he was a shift boss and walked out with the other miners. After the strike Dad and the other Shift Bosses that had walked out were Black Balled by the Anaconda Company, meaning that they could no longer go to work for them. After the strike of 1946 Dad went to Ketchikan Alaska with Bill Holloway and worked in a sawmill. One of the stories dad always talked about was waking up one morning in Ketchikan with these red spots on him from the bed bugs. He & Bill walked down to the local pharmacy & bought some powder that they then put in their beds to get rid of the bed bugs. Then my brother Bill the third oldest in our family, he was about 2 years of age became very ill and Dad had to leave Ketchikan Alaska and come back to Butte. He was in Alaska about 2 months.

**Phil:** The Anaconda Company didn't do your dad any favors.

**Joe:** No they certainly didn't.

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**Phil:** But maybe in the long run they did.

**Joe:** Maybe you're right, maybe they did.

**Phil:** Where was the store located?

**Joe:** The store was located at 140 East Second Street. Dad got into the store business after he got back from Alaska. He learned that the market, which was Jim's Market, was for up for sale. He borrowed money from his brother Pegger and his sister. He started in the store business in 1948 and closed because of health reasons in 1978. He was there approximately for 30 years. There was number of different people who operated the store in the early 1900's before dad bought it.

**Phil:** Your dad named it Bob's Market?

**Joe:** Yes, that is correct.

**Phil:** The typical neighborhood grocery store tried to meet everyone's needs. What types of products did your dad carry?

**Joe:** Dad had the regular food the staples, can goods, dairy products, and pastry from Eddies Bakery, Dutch Girl Bakery, and Town Talk Bakery. He also had a very small Butcher Shop. Dad ran that also which consumed a lot of his time. He got his meat from Hansen Packing and when Hansen closed he got it from Sigmens, or Bystock & Shoemackers. Dad would get up at 6:00 or 6:30 in the morning and be down to the meat plant about 7:00 AM & selected his own meat. He would put the bologna, hot dogs and whatever in the back of his 1949 Hudson take it back to the store after a couple of stops at the produce houses, Gamble Robinson & Butte Produce. The sides of beef were delivered to the store later in the day. A couple times a week he ordered the sides of beef. He had the butcher shop. He had all the can goods and dairy products. He had other items such as women's nylons, mops, and brooms. He didn't have much in penny candy; he had bubble gum and lollypops. He didn't have much time to sell the penny candy and he didn't have the patience to sell the penny candy. He had pop, Pepsi from Harkins, Coke and also Mission Pop. Jack Macintosh one of the neighbors, he was the Mission bottler, and he stocked his product. He had a large baby food rack, dog food, cat food and detergents. Work men's gloves. If people needed special item like rakes, shovels, ice skates, he would get those from the Montana Hardware for the people at a discount. He would get electrical appliances such as toasters for people from Graybar Electric.

**Phil:** So he did some of this own meat cutting? Did he learn that at Hansons?

**Joe:** I believe he learned that at Hanson Meat Packing. Also during the Holidays, such as Thanksgiving, and Christmas, people would put in orders for

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fresh Turkeys so dad would spend a couple evenings cleaning the turkeys both inside and out. I would be up at the shop with him during the evening when he was cleaning the turkeys when I was in grade school. It was a busy day. He would start his day about 6:00 AM have his breakfast, go to the meat plant, produce houses, go to the store about 8:30 or 9:00, about then the bread and milk deliveries would come. He would be at the store until 6:00 PM go home & have dinner with his family until 7:00, go back to the store and clean the butcher shop; stock shelves and do other tasks until 9:30 PM. Go home and retire. He was open for business Monday through Saturday. For business he would be at the store on Sundays from 10:00 or 10:30 AM, stay until 3:00 PM. Stocking shelves and cleaning the meat cases out. He would write up his order for Tuesday from Helena. He would get all his food products from Associated Food Products from Helena. So every Tuesday a big semi truck would make deliveries from Helena. The difficult thing about that, you would have over 100 cases of food and they would be stacked in the front of the store and you would have to work around them all day until you had time to open the cases and stock the shelves and carry the big cases down into the basement of the store. Every time you ran out of a food product you would have to go down into the basement and bring it up the narrow staircase to the store. It was hard work.

**Phil:** I know you worked in the store how about your brothers and your sister?

**Joe:** My sister was the youngest she was 5. I was the oldest so I guess the responsibility fell on me. I worked in the store from fifth grade through high school. I worked there a number of years. I worked there after school from 3:30 PM to 6:00 PM and I worked all day on Saturday with dad. Mom didn't work in the store, the other brothers didn't do a lot of work in the store with the exception of brother Tom. Dad did have one of his younger sisters working in the store with him for a number of years. She would come in the afternoon & work for a few hours. She lived on Sanders St. so she would take the bus from Sanders St. to Second St., after 6:00 PM dad would give her a ride home. She would also work all day Saturday, she would get there about 10:00 AM and work until about 6:00 PM.

**Phil:** I was going to ask about after hour calls, but with the hours your dad worked, there probably wasn't many.

**Joe:** No there wasn't. The people in the neighborhood knew that Dad would be at the store. If they ran out of milk or bread they would send their kids to the store to see if Bob was there. Nine times out of ten he was. Like I said earlier he was there on Sundays a little after 10:00 AM and stayed until 3:00 PM. The doors were always unlocked when he was there except in the evenings. He would lock the doors in the evening when he was back in the butcher block cleaning, but if someone knocked on the door he would unlock the door. People in the neighborhood relied on Bob being there most of the time.

**Phil:** Did your dad keep his books?

**Joe:** Yes he did. He had a lot people referred to as being on the books. They were the people who had credit with Dad. There were quite a few. I couldn't tell you how many. Some would pay their bills or tab weekly and some would pay monthly. There were people Dad carried month to month and year to year. Some people had very large bills. They didn't seem to be able to get caught up. When Dad closed his doors in 1978 there were thousands and thousands of dollars that Dad never collected.

**Phil:** Where there other business's in the neighborhood?

**Joe:** At the time dad started there were two other smaller stories located on the same intersection as dad's store and that was the intersection of Second and Emma Streets. One only stayed open a couple years it was owned by a woman named Charlotte Johnson the other was run by Agnes Lizen. I believe before she ran it, it was an Eclipses Store. I understand there was a number of Eclipse Stores, about five or six. About the time or shortly after Dad opened his store the other two had closed. The only other businesses in the neighborhood were three bars. A bar was adjacent to the store, it was in the same building. It was run by Jimmy Hill for a number of years, then Joe Klapin took it over and ran that bar for many many years. The bar still exists today. The other two bars were at the east end of the street in the next block. One was Dozen's Corner run by Paul Dozen and his son Frank Dozen and right across from that was the Scoop Bar which was run by Botch Birick. That bar exists today. Those were the only business in the immediate area.

**Phil:** Talking about the area, Western Iron was located a couple blocks east of the store.

**Joe:** Western Iron, those people would stop in for a package of cigarettes. I don't recall any of those people actually doing any trade with dad. There were a lot of truck drivers that would stop by that worked at Garrett Freight. They would stop by and buy a pack of cigarettes and shoot the breeze with dad. A lot of people knew dad from the mines, he was pretty well known. There were people outside the neighborhood that traded with dad. He had some very good customers. He had very big orders on Saturday from people outside the neighborhood that would carry him through the week.

**Phil:** People in that area were they home owners or renters? A lot of short-term residents?

**Joe:** No it wasn't. The people in the area were permanent residents of the area, they had lived there many many years. As far as rentals, there may have been a couple pieces of rental property. There were two four plexes just west of the store, other then that. There were some large families in the area. There were a

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lot of older people who took real good care of their property. A lot were retired miners.

**Phil:** Where there a lot of miners in the neighborhood?

**Joe:** There were quite a few miners in the neighborhood. There were a few people there who worked for Victor Chemical, later named Stauffer Chemical. Some worked for the Montana Power Company. There was one individual who worked for the Great Northern Railroad, and another who was a salesman for Shiners Furniture Store, named John McLeod. Mr. MacIntosch worked for Mission Bottling Company, prior to that he worked for Tommy Williams's gas station on Front St.. There were a lot of older people in the neighborhood. A lot of ethnic people, Serbians, Irish, English, and Italians.

**Phil:** With the older people in the neighborhood, were there deliveries made?

**Joe:** There were some deliveries made with some of the elderly people. I made some big deliveries on Saturday. Saturday was the busiest day in the store. People would come in and get their groceries for the next week. Sometimes one or two elderly people would call in an order. I would make those deliveries on foot because they were in the neighborhood. There were some larger orders that we would have to use the car. I recall in the winter months when it was 30 and 40 below zero we would get bundled up to make those deliveries. Those deliveries were for people who were quite elderly and couldn't get out in the winter months.

**Phil:** You mentioned about running tabs for people. When the business shut done they were still on the books. How did your dad handle that?

**Joe:** People were very honest. It was difficult especially during the strikes. Dad carried a lot of people during the strikes. One person they could rely upon during the strike was their neighborhood grocer. They would get some help with the Union and they would also have to be carried through on the books by their neighborhood grocery store. Dad carried a lot of miners through the strikes. It wasn't easy it was a very low profit margin in the grocery business. Thank God the people were honest and would come and pay on their tab as much as they possibly could. There were a few people who would trade at Safeway or Buttreys. During the strike they didn't have the money and would ask dad if they could start some credit. A few of those people didn't return to continue to trade with dad, after the strike they would go back to Safeway or Buttreys. For the most part it was pretty lean times during the strikes. There wasn't a lot of money made for all the hours dad put into the store. Dad never owned a new car. He had a 1949 Hudson, 1951 Hudson, there was one time he bought a 1958 Cadillac from Burt Mehrens. That was some time in the 60's that he bought the Cadillac and after that he drove a 1963 Chevrolet and that was in the 70's. Times were lean, we made out OK, we didn't go without anything.



**Phil:** You mentioned Burt Mehrens. Both he and your dad were councilmen for a lot of years. Did any political problems get solved in the store?

**Joe:** That's a good question. I don't know how or why Dad got involved in politics, I think it was in 1958 that he decided to run for the council. We were in the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward. The other alderman was Pete Sodja. Dad decided to run for the council. I believe the other councilman had died, I think his name was Joe Simonich, so there was an open seat. So dad decided to run for the council, that was about the same time Bert Mehrens also got on the council. The Mayor at the time was Rick Donnelly. There were a number of people who came into the store on a daily basis. They would come in to discuss politics, worldly issues, sports, weather whatever, it was kind of a hub and bubble place of activity. People might stop in and get cigarettes and visit for hours with dad and other people in the store. It was kind of a center of activity for the neighborhood, only outdone by the bars. Dad enjoyed talking with the people. I never knew where he ever found the time to get involved with politics, but he did. Of course he had no love for the Anaconda Company since he was black balled after the 1946 Strike. I remember a couple of the issues. The railroad wanted to do away with the watchman at the crossings and install electrical gate crossings. I know that was an issue and a point of contention with dad. I know he didn't want to see the elimination of the flagmen's job. He was also concerned with safety with the electrical gates that were going to be installed. Another issue was self-service gas stations. Dad was concerned the number of gas station attendants that were going to be laid off and also the safety. He wasn't sure how well the public would handle pumping their own gas. Those are a couple of issues I remember.

**Phil:** You mentioned some of the strikes. While your dad had that store he saw some of the longest strikes.

**Joe:** There were some long strikes. I don't recall exactly how long some of those strikes were, but I remember some of the strikes that went on for a number of months. Pretty tough times. There were people who would come into the store and ask dad if they could borrow \$10.00 - \$20.00. They might have to buy a pair of shoes for the kids or help them make a house payment or car payment. I think some of that money was spent for a few cold ones at Klapins Corner also. Dad would never turn anyone down if he had money in the till he never turned anyone down. A lot of these people were very honest and when the strike was over they would repay dad.

**Phil:** You mentioned Associated Foods out of Helena. Wasn't there a Harkins in Butte?

**Joe:** I don't recall how much Harkins had as far as food stuff. There was also Ryan's, there was also Gambles Robinsons that had produce, vegetables and canned goods. So dad did a little bit of business with them but mainly he went to

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Associated Foods, they treated him very well and their prices must have been right. They catered to the small grocery stores. When dad would run out an item he would call one of the small groceries, maybe Bill Richardson or Charley Matule and ask if they could spare him a half case of whatever and I would hop in the car and go pick up the half case. And another thing they would do is go in collectively, three or four stores would go in on Hormel Hams. The hams would be delivered to one of the stores, I would hop in the car and go to the store that the hams were delivered to and pick up a couple hams for dad. So they were good friends and took care of each other. They knew how hard they had to work to make a living so they had a lot of admiration and respect for each other. They had a very good relationship.

**Phil:** Was Associated Foods understanding during hard times?

**Joe:** I don't know if they were or not. Dad banked with the First National Bank and I know there were sometimes that he might have been overdrawn on his account. First National knew that dad was good for the money so they would help dad out for a couple of weeks until he could make a payment. As far as Associated them selves I'm not sure, I'm not sure how often you had to pay that bill.

**Phil:** As time went on it seemed like the majority of small grocery stores were gone in a fairly short period of time. When you think back did you see the business kind of dropping off and what caused it?

**Joe:** You could see. When dad got in the store business in 1948 there were approximately 158 stores in Butte and that included Safeway, which there were a number of at that time. When he closed the doors in 1978 according to the records that I researched there were approximately 33 stores which included Safeway and Buttreys. Ya, you could see it, like I mentioned the couple of stores that were located on the same intersection as dad's closed. There were a few stores that we as kids liked to go to because of their penny candy. There was one across from Len's Foods on Utah Street, in the 11 hundred block, it was called Sam's Grocery. We would go in there quite often going back and forth from school, at St. Joseph's and buy penny candy. There was a store north of St. Joe's Church we'd stop in on Sunday mornings, ran by a lady named Mabel, we'd stop in there and get penny candy. Clague's grocery across from St. Joe's School, Mitchell's Store was over in that same area. Over the years you could see the smaller stores closing. And like I said there wasn't much profit margin in the grocery store business. The emergence of Safeway and the bigger stores, they hurt the smaller stores, they had more variety for people. They could afford to put sales on certain products, the smaller stores couldn't do that.

**Phil:** When we were talking earlier before we started the interview you mentioned Piggly Wiggly Stores.

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**Joe:** That was news to me when I started doing my research. In 1925 there was two Piggly Wiggly stores in Butte, it may have been prior to 1925. There was one on East Park St. and one on West Park St. and also I heard there were three Skaggs United Stores, which eventually became Skaggs Safeway and then after that, around 1930 they were called Safeway Stores. 1937 there were eleven Safeway Stores in Butte.

**Phil:** With some of the other 150 some odd stores in Butte at that time, some of them survived until fairly recently. I can think of Lake Market and places like that. They must have been strictly neighborhood walk in stores.

**Joe:** I think they were. In a lot of those stores people lived right in the stores. They had living quarters located in the store. Dad's store and a lot of the other ones I was aware of were just the store. The store was there by itself they may have lived next door to the store or in close proximity. I can't think of any small stores today in operation in Butte. They all phased out over the years. The competition with the bigger stores.

**Phil:** Any memories in particular of the store that stand out in your mind?

**Joe:** There are certain memories, you remember the winter months, they were pretty tough as far as staying warm in Dad's store. Dad had a gas heater with a fan suspended from the ceiling. It was in the rear of the store. It worked overtime in the winters. That's when we had some tougher winters, 30 - 40 below zero. The store was open everyday, 7 days a week for 30 years. I certainly remember going out delivering groceries on foot and how cold it was. The big delivers by Associated on Tuesdays. A Semi would pull up in front of the store and double park. It made it difficult for the two-way traffic to get around the semi. A lot of people you remember when you look back and reflect, the older people. Just the fact that a lot of hours were spent in the store. Dad put a lot of time in there, he didn't take any time off.

**Phil:** Sounds like a tough way to make a buck. Sounds like your dad must have been in it for more than the just the money.

**Joe:** Yes he enjoyed it. As hard as it was and the hours he put in he enjoyed it. I think he got his enjoyment out of the people more than anything else. I can mention a lot of people, the Fire Chief, Jack McCarthy, stopped down maybe once a week to talk with dad. I think they went to school together or were raised together, Maurice Hennessy, the attorney would stop down to talk to dad. The mail carriers in the area would stop in and talk to dad. He enjoyed the people, a lot of retirees from the railroad, miners. I guess there was a lot more to the store than the mere fact of selling goods.

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**Phil:** Every neighborhood had its characters, did you have any characters in particular?

**Joe:** Ya we did. Since I talked to you recently and doing this project, reflecting a little bit, I wrote down a few things. The last couple of nights I was writing down a few characters mainly for my family so they would be aware of some people in the neighborhood.

There was one Frenchman who lived half a block from the store. Always whiskered, didn't shave very often. He liked to go down to Klapins Corner or down to the Scoop Bar and host a few everyday. I remember as kids picking him off the sidewalk two or three times a week. Taking him up to his front porch, his wooden porch on his house. Laying him on his porch, he had a number of cats, Tom cats and we were afraid of his cats. We'd put him on the porch and we'd take off like hell. We'd get out of there before the cats would come around. I know when he passed away his nephew had to go into the house and tried to poison the cats. They were as big as any dog, they were as big as a Cocker Spaniel. They were quit mean, the nephew finally had to shoot the cats with a 22 in order to get rid of them. So he was quite a character.

There was another individual, he was a World War 1 vet. Fuzzy, I remember seeing him featured on a television show The Big Picture. It would be on, on Sunday afternoons. Documenting Battles of World War I and II. I would see Fuzzy playing the piano during one of the episodes. He used to play the piano at Klapin's Corner for drinks, he would play the piano all day long for drinks. He was quite a character and wore thick coke bottle glasses, he had very poor vision and he would always be searching the gutters around the neighborhood for cigarette butts to smoke. As kids we would stick Lady Finger fire crackers in the butts, of course his wife Daisy didn't care for any of the kids in the neighborhood because of the practical jokes we would play on her husband. We'd sit on the street curbs and watch Fuzzy pick up the cigarettes butts and watch them explode in his hand or mouth and they never did cause any serious injury to Fuzzy.

There were a lot of characters in the neighborhood. I guess you remember a lot from being around the bars in the neighborhood. Some would take us fishing on the weekends. Some pretty good guys would take us up to Delmo or down to Divide, drop us off and then we would hitch hike home.

After old Joe died there was another individual named Art who lived in Whitehall. He would come into town everyday and frequent Klapins Corner and the Scoop Bar. Joe died on a Sunday afternoon and Art asked us kids to give him a ride to Whites Funeral home. Art was to drunk to drive the truck, of course us kids jumped at the opportunity to drive although none of us had a drivers license at that time. I remember going into Whites and Art staggering up to old Joe laying there peacefully and finally Art turned to us and said "he moved", and that scared

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the hell of us and we ran out the front door of the funeral home. That was the last time we saw old Joe and that was the last time we volunteered to take Art for a ride anywhere.

There were a lot of characters in the neighborhood and of course we had the hobos, tramps, bums that would come in the summer time. They would come into the store, Dad would slice off a piece of bologna for them. Give them a small loaf of bread, and two potatoes they would go up to the Diggins. That was the old mine waste area by the Great Northern Railroad and have a small fire going and bake the potatoes. Of course us kids had to throw rocks at the bums. Of course they'd get up to chase us and we'd run like hell. So there was a little of that during the summer. The bums would be around the neighborhood quite a bit wanting yard work. I don't think dad ever took any money from them if they had 15 or 20 cents they would put it on the counter and dad would give it back to them. That was pretty frequent during the 50's and 60's.

**Phil:** Sounds like your dad was one of the Butte notables himself. One of the old Butte hands.

**Joe:** He lived through the Depression and knew what hard times were like so if he could help someone who fell on hard times he certainly didn't refuse them.

**Phil:** When your dad finally got out of the business did he sell the store or just close it?

**Joe:** The store was closed. He owned the building. It's comprised of Klapins Corner and two apartments upstairs. So dad over the years bought the building and had to pay it off. Because of health he left the store, he closed the store, it never has reopened and he sold the building to Joe Klapin. Joe passed away about a year and a half ago.

**Phil:** Well Joe thank You for your time.

## ***GROCERY STORES IN BUTTE***

1925.....	235 GROCERY STORES TO INCLUDE 3 SKAGGS UNITED STORES & 2 PIGGLY- WIGGLY STORES [ 1 w. Park + 1 E. Park ]
1929.....	231 GROCERY STORES PLUS 4 SKAGGS SAFEWAY STORES = 235
1930.....	232 GROCERY STORES PLUS 4 SAFEWAY STORES = 236
1931.....	216 GROCERY STORES PLUS 4 SAFEWAY STORES = 220
1937.....	181 GROCERY STORES PLUS 11 SAFEWAY STORES = 192
1939.....	181 GROCERY STORES PLUS 9 SAFEWAY STORES = 190
1940.....	165 GROCERY STORES PLUS 6 SAFEWAY STORES AND 5 ECLIPSE STORES = 176
1942.....	145 GROCERY STORES PLUS 5 SAFEWAY STORES = 150
1945.....	124 GROCERY STORES PLUS 5 SAFEWAY STORES = 129
1948.....	150 GROCERY STORES (INCLUDE SAFEWAY)
1978.....	33 GROCERY STORES (INCLUDE SAFEWAY)

***BOB'S MARKET***  
***1140 E. SECOND ST.***

1923.....COWLING & OMMEN  
1926-1927.....JOSEPH ANDOLSEK  
1927-1936.....SIDNEY HANCOCK GROCERY\*  
1937-1941.....CHARLES PROPP GROCERY  
1942-1948.....JIM'S MARKET\*\*  
1948-1978.....BOB'S MARKET

\*SIDNEY HANCOCK OPERATED THE MANZA GROCERY AT 1600  
N. MAIN ST. IN 1926.

\*\*JIM'S MARKET WAS OPERATED BY JIM BUGNI WHO LIVED AT  
16 COPPER ST. IN MEADERVILLE.

IN 1948 WHEN DAD STARTED IN THE GROCERY BUSINESS THERE  
WERE APPROX. 150 GROCERY STORES IN BUTTE.

IN 1978 WHEN DAD ENDED HIS GROCERY CAREER THERE WERE  
APPROXIMATELY 33 GROCERY STORES IN BUTTE.

SUBJECT: ROBERT E. "BOB" LEE  
OWNER/OPERATOR OF BOB'S MARKET  
1140 E. SECOND ST., BUTTE, MT.

My father, Bob Lee, was born in Butte on February 8, 1912. He was the sixth of nine children brought into this world by Hugh and Rose Lee. Dad's father Hugh Lee was born in Ireland on May 2, 1862. His first wife Mary Meehan did in 1885; he then married Rose Burns. He died from the "consumption" (T.B. Pulmonary) on May 5, 1920 while working in the Butte mines. Dad was eight years of age when his father passed away. Dad's mother Rose (Burns) Lee was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts on January 3, 1878; she died on October 12, 1960.

Dad and his siblings attended St. Lawrence elementary school. He often spoke of the catholic nuns providing shoes for he and his brothers and sisters during the depression years. He also commented about his mother (Grandma Lee) staying up at night to keep the rats from biting the children as they slept. A couple of things that I remember about Grandma Lee was her size. She was quite short, probably less than five feet tall. And, she would entertain the grandchildren by doing the Irish jig.

Sometime during his early life, Dad joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, more commonly referred to as the CCC's. He and other men from the Butte area and Montana were sent to various job camps to build bridges, pathways, etc. as part of a federally funded program. He worked at Hansen Packing Co. for a short time and also attended the Butte Business College.

Sometime around 1937 ~~dad went to work as a miner~~ for the Anaconda Company, working at the Leonard Mine until about 1946 when the miners went on strike. Dad was a Shift Boss at the time of the strike and he and a number of other bosses walked off the job with the miners. Following the strike, dad and the other bosses were "blackballed" by the ACM. Sometime prior to the 1946 strike, dad and a number of other Butte miners volunteered to go to Red Lodge, Montana for the purpose of digging out a large number of miners who were killed in a coal mine explosion there. During this recovery operation, dad found a number of short letters that were written by the dying miners to their families. The notes were written on pieces of wood with chalk.



As a result of not being called back to work by the Anaconda Company following the strike, Dad and another gentleman from Butte named Bill Holloway went to Ketchikan, Alaska where they worked in a sawmill. Dad often told the story of he and Bill being bitten alive by the bedbugs that took up residency in their boarding house. He mentioned going to the local drug store to get some type of powder to put on the sheets and blankets in their beds.

Dad worked at the sawmill while his family remained in Butte. After a number of months Dad returned to Butte following the illness of his third child (Bill), age 2-3 years. Dad's friend, Bill Holloway, was hit by a train and killed in Ketchikan.

Sometime after returning to Butte from Alaska, in about 1948, dad learned of the sale of a neighborhood grocery store located at 1140 E. Second St. named "Jim's Market". Not being able to work for the Anaconda Company following the 1946 strike, dad decided to go into the grocery business as a way to provide for his family which at that time numbered four children, ranging in ages from a couple of months to 5 years of age. Dad borrowed money from one of his brothers and sisters in order to purchase the business. At that time there were over 150 grocery stores in Butte. Dad operated the store, which included a small meat market more commonly referred to as a "butcher shop", until 1978 when his health began to fail.

## ***TYPICAL DAY IN THE LIFE OF BOB LEE***

6:30 A.M.

Each morning at about 6:30 A.M. dad awakes, washes/shaves and makes breakfast consisting of raisin bread toast and coffee.

7:30 – 7:45 A.M.

Following breakfast, dad would drive to Hansen Packing Co. located south of Butte on Hansen Road where he would select the meat for his butcher shop. Some of the meat (hot dogs, boxes of sausages, lunchmeat, etc.) he would take with him. The sides of beef and hams that he would select were delivered to the store later in the day. Following the closure of Hansen Packing Co. (around 1960), dad would drive to Schumacher's and Biastock's Meats located west of Butte where he would select his different types of meats with care making sure that he got nothing but top grade meat for his customers.

Dad would next drive to the produce houses (Butte Produce & Gamble Robinson) where he selected a variety of vegetables and fruits. These items were placed on the backseat or back floorboard of his 1949 Hudson with the meat items and transported to the store.

8:30 – 8:45 A.M.

Dad would arrive at the store and unload his cargo of meat, vegetables and fruit from his vehicle.

He would then perform the following tasks in preparing for the day's business:

.Stock his produce bin with the freshly bought vegetables and fruits. Sprinkle the produce using a watering can that was kept under the produce counter together with bundles of paper bags. Some of the water would eventually drain into a galvanized bucket located under the enclosed produce bin. The bucket had to be emptied on a daily basis.

.Fill his cash register ("till") with currency and change. The currency was brought from home. Dad kept all of his currency and checks in a small pouch that he would tuck into his buttoned shirt and take home following each business day. The coins were usually kept in the store overnight in a hiding spot. There were many silver dollars that were stashed away beneath the refrigerated meat case.

.Balance his books respective to the cash flow transactions from the previous day ( money taken in and receipts for money paid out). It was by no means an real accurate record as Dad extended credit to many of his customers and there was large sums of money on the "books"; but, it did provide some form of accounting.

.Stock his refrigerated meat case with meat products taken from the walk-in cooler located in the butcher shop area of the store and the meats products that he purchased from the wholesale meat outlet(s) that morning.

The meat market was small in size allowing only enough space for one person to perform the butchering duties. There was a solid wooden meat block located in the middle of the area where Dad would cut steaks, beef roasts, slices of ham and clean fresh turkeys at Thanksgiving and Christmas times.

.Re-assemble his meat slicer and ground beef machine that were disassembled for cleaning on the evening before.

While preparing for the new business day, customers and vendors alike would enter the store.

Morning deliveries to the store were made by Eddy's Bakery, Town Talk Bakery, Dutch Girl Bakery, Miners Dairy, Meadow Gold Creamery, etc.

Other deliveries during the course of day (dependent upon the day of week) were made by Harkins Bottling, Harrington Bottling, Coca-Cola, Mission Bottling, Truzzolino Tamales, Gus' Tamales, Rush's Pies, etc.

Various salesmen came to the store on designated days of the week (Society Candies, Newbro Drug, Nabisco Cookies, etc.)

12:00 – 1:00 P.M.

Dad would bring a thermos of coffee to work with him at the store each day. He made his own lunch at the store which consisted of fresh lunchmeat (usually ham). He would eat his lunch between waiting on customers.

The day was always busy-waiting on customers, cutting meat, running downstairs to the basement to get food items for stocking the shelves, filling orders that were called-in, meeting with salesman- there never seemed to be any slack time. Saturday by far was the busiest day of the week; this was the day when many customers bought their weekly supply of food.

Prior to closing each evening, the floor was swept using sweeping compound to keep the dust down and some of the fresh vegetables and fruits were put into the walk-in cooler.

6:00 P.M.

At the close of the business day (6:00 P.M.) dad went home for dinner with his family.

7:00 P.M.

Following dinner, dad would return to the store for the purpose of cleaning the "butcher shop" which consisted of using a hard wire brush and metal scraper on the wooden meat block; taking the meat slicer apart, washing the blade and other parts in hot soapy water; taking the meat grinder apart and doing the same; sweeping the floor and putting down fresh sawdust. Other tasks involved the stocking of shelves which meant going to the basement and carrying can goods, cases of soap detergent, etc. up the narrow wooden stairs to the main floor. Dad usually left the store around 9:30 P.M. and returned home for the evening, retiring at about 10:30 P.M. An average work day for dad was about 14 hours.

***END OF DAY***

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The store was opened for customer business Monday thru Saturday. On Sundays and holidays, dad could be found at the store stocking shelves, cleaning the butcher shop or doing a number of other store-related duties. Every Sunday he would empty his meat display case and clean it with hot soapy water. The doors to the store were unlocked when dad was at the store on Sundays and the Holidays. There were always people who ran out of milk or bread and sent their kids to the store to see if dad was there. When dad left the store on Sundays, usually around 3:00 P.M., he went home where he tackled a pile of store-related bookwork and wrote out an order to the Associated Grocers in Helena for his weekly Tuesday delivery of goods. Following his making-out of his order, in which he ordered items by using a series of numbers to identify each product, he would then drive to the old post office on north Main Street and mail it to Helena. The post office was later moved to a location of Harrison Ave.

When the Associated Grocers semi-tractor trailer arrived at the store on Tuesdays from Helena, it was a hectic time as dad waited on customers and helped the driver unload the trailer all at the same time. It always seemed as though the semi arrived around noon time when dad was busy with kids who were home from school on lunch break. The large semi-tractor trailer doubled parked in front of the store while the grocery goods were being delivered; this made for some exciting times during the Winter months when the two-way street was snowpacked and icy. The weekly delivery usually consisted of over 100 cases of canned goods, frozen food items, cases of cigarettes, etc. During the course of the day, the delivered goods sat in the front area of the store causing a barrier that one had to walk around. As time permitted, the cases of goods were opened and the shelves stocked before the goods were moved to the basement. Tuesdays were not days to look forward to.

Besides the regular food staples, the store also stocked such items as brooms and mops, tobacco, shoe polish and laces, clothing dyes, women nylon stockings, clothes pins, dog food, men's work gloves, etc. With the exception of one-cent bubble gum and two-cent lolly pops, no penny candy was sold at the store. Many small stores at the time did sell one-cent candy. Selling one-cent candy consumed much of the store owners time and dad did not have the time and I think the patience to sell it. A variety of popular five-cent candy bars were sold as well as bags of candy that sold for thirty-nine cents and forty-nine cents a bag.

Weekly dad got shovels, rakes, ice skates, hunting ammunition, etc. from the Montana Hardware and electrical appliances such as toasters from Graybar Electric for customers at a discount price.

At Thanksgiving and Christmas times, a number of customers would place an order for "fresh" turkeys. Dad would spend a couple of evenings prior to these holidays cleaning the turkeys. This was very time consuming as it meant that each turkey had to be cleaned by hand inside and out.

Dad's customers were not merely limited to the neighborhood. Many people came from various parts of town to do their shopping at the store. Some of the elderly customers would call the store (Tele. #3495) to place an order which was delivered by dad after 6:00 P.M. or by one of his sons during the course of the day. Most of the deliveries were in the neighborhood and were made on foot. There were a few other deliveries that were made in dad's 49' Hudson.

One of dad's sisters worked in the store with him for a number of years. She worked a few hours during the week and all day on Saturday. Dad would give her a ride home on the "flats" following the closing of the store as she did not drive. She would arrive at the store via bus. I also worked in the store for a number of years while I was in elementary school and high school. There was always work to be done. It was a seven day a week operation which demanded a lot of hard work. During the thirty years that dad operated the store, he never took a vacation or for that matter a day off.

Besides providing for the neighborhood's basic food needs, the store was also a meeting place for some of the neighborhood men. It was a place to discuss some of the local and worldly issues. Much of the time the focus of discussion involved the ACM, especially during periods of work stoppages-strikes. The impending threat of communism ("rather be dead than red") was an issue of interest. Sports were also discussed in great lengths as it seemed that everyone was a New York Yankee fan. Boxing was also a popular topic as many young men in Butte did some boxing during their formative years and Butte produced a couple of first class boxers who gained national prominence. Butte was also the host for a number of fights featuring nationally ranked boxers. All in all, the "store" was one of the main centers of the neighborhood not discounting the three bars that were located in a two block area.

During the winter months, the store was difficult to heat because of the doors (front and rear) opening on a frequent basis. It was necessary for dad to don his long underwear and heavier clothing inside of his white apron in order to keep warm. Temperatures dropping to -30 to -40 below were not uncommon during the winter time. The store was heated by a single gas operated heater w/blower that was suspended from the ceiling near the rear of the store. It worked overtime during the colder months.

The summer months brought a number of transients ("hobos", "tramps", "bums") into the neighborhood after getting off of the boxcars on the Great Northern Railroad which was located approximately two blocks north of the store. Dad would slice lunch meat for them, give them a small loaf of bread and a few potatoes. There was seldom any money exchanged for the food items. They would leave the store with their bedroll on their back and camp out in the "diggins" (old mine waste area) near the railroad yard. The neighborhood kids could not resist testing the strength of their throwing arms as they threw rocks at the "bums" as they sat around their small fires baking their potatoes.

Truck drivers traveling on Second street stopped at the store on a daily basis buying a pack of cigarettes and "shooting the breeze" with dad before they continued on their rounds of making deliveries.

There were a couple of the neighborhood men who would enter the store by the front door and exit it by the back door only to go into the "bar" (saloon) next door via its back door. This was their way of "outfoxing" their wives as they threw down a couple of quick drinks at Klapan's Korner. Once they left the bar they retraced their footsteps and re-entered dad's store buying a pack of cigarettes or a quart of milk before returning home believing that their wives were none the wiser to their extracurricular activities (?).

Dad had a number of customers who were "on the books" (had established credit with him). Most paid their bill ("tab") at the end of each week. Others were "carried-over" from week to week, month to month, year to year. When a customer paid his weekly or monthly tab, dad would throw some frozen ice cream in with their grocery order. During the times that the miners were "on strike", which was quite often and which sometimes lasted for months, dad would carry them through the strikes. It was not uncommon for some of the miners to borrow money from dad to buy shoes for their kids or to help make a house or car payment. I think that some of the borrowed money also bought a few cold ones at Klapan's Korner.

For the most part those who did borrow money were honest men who made every effort to pay back their loan. However, there were a few who never returned to the store after the strikes ended. At the time that dad closed his doors in 1978, due to illness, thousands of dollars remained on the books never to be collected.

During the 1950's and 1960's there were in excess of 100 grocery stores in Butte. The different store owners for the most part knew one another and got along quite well. They would help one another when one would run short on a particular item. A simple phone call was all that was required to make arrangements for food items that were needed. Dad and two or three other small grocers regularly placed a collective order for hams. Once the hams were delivered at one of the stores, the other grocers would pick-up their portion of the order. They had a genuine respect and admiration for each other. Each of them knew how hard the other worked to make a good living during those days.

Somehow during his busy work schedule, dad found time to enter politics around 1958 and served as an Alderman for the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward for a number of years. The City Council, comprised of the Mayor and 16 alderman (two alderman from each ward) met a couple of times a month on Wednesday evenings. For many years the political make-up of the City Council consisted of 15 democrats and 1 republican. Dad was a strong advocate for the working man and had no love for the ACM after being "blackballed" by them following the 1946 strike. He also fought the railroad companies when they opted to remove their flagmen at the various railroad crossings and install electrical crossing gates. Another bone of contention for dad was the introduction of self-service gas stations. He had concern respective to the elimination of service stations attendants and safety issues associated with the pumping of gas by the public at large.

Following the monthly meetings of the City Council, the alderman and mayor would walk to the Ranch House restaurant and bar located east of the City Hall on Broadway St. There they would socialize and discuss various government issues over a couple of drinks. Dad did not smoke or drink. He enjoyed his time on the council and the voters showed their appreciation by always giving him the largest number of votes each time that he ran for re-election. In those days, the aldermen were paid less than fifty dollars a month for their public service. However, the City did pay for their telephone.



During the thirty years that Dad operated the store, there was only one incident of known theft or actually attempted theft that occurred. The incident involved a young man who was passing through Butte from out of state. I believe that he came to Butte via the Great Northern Railroad. The young man broke one of the large plate glass windows with a rock and attempted to steal food items. He was apprehended by the City Police near the railroad yards and arrested shortly after his failed theft attempt. When dad learned of the young man's desperate plight, he decided not to file any criminal charges. This was part of dad's compassionate nature. He knew what hard times were having lived through the great depression. However, once released from jail, the police strongly advised the young man to get out of town by the quickest means possible.

The neighborhood stores were an important part of Butte's growth and history. They were, in a large part, responsible for keeping Butte going during the tough times, especially when the miners were on strike. Even though some miners deserted the copper camp during the strikes, most of them stayed in Butte. Receiving some assistance from the union and knowing that they could rely upon their neighborhood grocer to help them through the strike, they remained to work another day for the Anaconda Company.