

Ed Brown
Butte History
Oral History with Robert Osier

Ed: Ed Brown interviewing Robert (Bob) Osier on March 30 2002.
Um, I guess when did you arrive in Butte?

Bob: I was born here.

Ed: You were born in Butte.
What part?

Bob: Walkerville, North Walkerville June 4, 1923, a few years ago.

Ed: Yeah, any good memories of you childhood?

Bob: Yeah a lot of stuff, use to go outdoors, hunting rabbits during the deprecation, during the wintertime not the summer time.

Ed: You said something about the ice skating rinks?

Bob: Yeah, had the ice skating rinks up north up on top of the hill by the Alice mine, use to go ice skating there, sleigh riding of Williams St. use to have a six man flexible flyer, start up on Williams St., one time we got going came all the way down to the Anselmo mine down there, without stopping.

Ed: What schools did you attend?

Bob: Sherman school, and went two years at Butte High. Got appendicitis when I got back from the war. I went to work for the Montana Dairy up in North Walkerville. I had work with pasteurizing milk, separated it, use to deliver to all the schools in Butte. Use to deliver out to the county hospital out there on Grand Ave. After that went to work in the mines, I went to the CC's first, out of Missoula there and nine mile camp, then we moved from there down to a new camp at camp Grand Vanard down below, down at the Forest Service Station. I come home from there that's when I went to work for the Montana Dairy when I come home from the CC's. And after that I went to work for the mines December 17th or 21st of 1942, went to work for the Mountain Con. Used to work the Stoke and after I graduated from the there went to work as a student miner, with two miners one was her brother, my wife's brother, that's before I ever met her, back in 1942. And uh, were on the motor, and the snoper on the motor, and the 1400th south of the Mountain Con. My Partner was Leo Rooney, his dad was my instructor at the Prudent Stope, his name was Leo too. ___?___ yeah I still remember the first time I got chewed out by Leo. He was backing the train up and we had five cars and we were supposed to have ten cars and we were going to pick up another five and I stood on the inside of the curb of a couple of cars and I didn't whistle for them to come back and that was the worst

thing could have ever have done. He climber over them cars and through me up one side and down the other and told me that you're on the outside of the curb of those couple of cars. I never forgot it to this day. _____? _____. Yeah and from there I went nippin, I was a nipper, that's when you get the tools and that for the miners, and hoses. Used to go up and go out to the station and bring everything in and had a tool locker. We used to have picks and axes, shovels, saws, and hoses and whatever the miners sandbags whatever the miners needed. They tell you what they needed and you take it in to them. Trade them sharp picks for dull picks and if they had a shovel with a broken handle you'd bring the old piece out and give them a new shovel. After that we would go ya, from there I went on to ventilation, build doors for the motor, ya know for the air to correct the to tell us which way the air was going to go. Had to put a set of doors in, airlocks, of course you need and airlock so you put two doors in and if the air was really steep you would have to have three doors to control it. Cause if you only had two, and too pressure if you open one you couldn't get the other one open. From there, from ventilation I went to well I was from there to a slime gang and fire gang, slime gang used to build slime walls for the stokes. Miners take so much ore out then we would build a slime wall up and then we'd hook the pipe and everything up and burlap it and fill it full of slime, that's tailings from the concentrator and ah. After that I finished on the slime gang and I went to the from there I went to the fire gang, of course if your on the slime gang your practically automatically on the fire gang. But the way I got on the fire gang my brother was on he belonged to the fire gang. I don't know how I got my name on there but they must have automatically put my name down. So when a fire came up I got called out to the fire. Ya, we fought fires and the Con, the Leonard, and the Stewart, and the St. Lawrence, High Ore. And after that I went back on the slime gang, and they were losing so much slime out of the walls and that on to the seal, that they were losing too much money cleaning it up after they slimed the stokes it didn't take them take them all day some times two days to clean the slime up that leaked out of the stoke so that's when they went bossin and they made we a boss shift boss and that was my job to see to it that the walls were put in right. So I was on that for awhile then I went on a ____? ____ and ah 40th I was moved from the 3900 to the 4500 Mountain Con. And I was on that for, until they shut the Con down. Then I went to the Kelly, 2000 in the Kelly, I had the pumps and everything there, pump station, plus all the mining. That's where we set up 911's and 912's up in the stokes, we used them to muck the stokes out and that. And that's when I got me retired in 1981.

Ed: Did you enjoy being a miner?

Bob: Oh yeah, yeah I enjoyed it. _____? _____, Never miss a shift afraid your going to miss something. Yeah always something going on. Used to be able to, used to take sawdust, put it their pockets and the guys from the top deck and dribble it down through, oh man drive me nuts all day long. I enjoyed it.

Ed: Any notable people that you remember, as far as like someone who would always be a joker or someone who's not the nicest kind of a guy.

Bob: There were a lot of them, Remember used to have, at lunchtime the guys would go to sleep, and they'd take and stick matches in their boots and that and start them on fire. Light a fire underneath them. I Remember one chinamen called Wong Wing Hum he first come to work for the mines back then _____? _____. We used to say Wong Wing Hum just say Kelly he says I know who you are, his nickname from then on he was Kelly. Used to take his paychecks and put them in a drawer at home at the end of the year they'd have to write him a letter to tell him to cash his checks so they could balance their books. See he ran the Chinese laundry too. Yeah he was quite the Character.

Ed: You got along with Chinese?

Bob: Oh yeah, I got along with everybody. Yeah, then everybody got along, we had all different ethnics; Chinese, Philippians, Yugoslavians, Russians, the whole works. We had one guy who was an Eskimo from Alaska . _____? _____ I can't remember his name though. We had Indian.

Ed: What would be your average workday, in the jobs, like as far as what time you'd go and how long you'd be there?

Bob: Oh 8 hours usually 8 hours, unless.

Ed: Was it Good Paying?

Bob: It wasn't too bad , I mean we relied on it, the only thing with strikes you could only figure would go on for a year. You know you'd be on strike and at the end it was three years. So if you're going to buy something you'd figure in three years. Cause at the end of three years there was a strike and that was the end of the work for a while. Other than that it was good. Your miners made a lot more money than a days pay cause they were contracted. At the end they made real good money, did the miners.

Ed: And you were union right, I imagine?

Bob: They were union, and I was union until I went bossin, after that I went Salary. I was union for 20 something years I guess, 19 years I guess, since the first time I became shift boss.

Ed: Did you, um, we learned a lot about in class about the smoke and stuff from the stacks and how the pollution was bad did you have any effects from that, did you get miners cough?

Bob: Well I started at the fort in 1969, back at Ft. Harrison, cause that was the only one they told me it was caused from cigarette smoke. I just went over just now and signed up for 100% disability.

Ed: So you really didn't have, I mean you weren't you didn't really have any effect from the?

Bob: Well, I suppose I did but ah I imagine that was from the mines ya know. But I smoked too, I quit smoking when I was 62. When I was 62, nine years later they say it was caused from smoke. Up till then I was in pretty good shape.

Ed: What about married life? How did that affect your working?

Bob: Not at all. Got along ok, we made out, had five children.

Ed: When did you get married?

Bob: Ah, 1948 ____? _____. Met her in Oct. of 1942 come out Feb. 1946.

Ed: Did she work at all?

Bob: She used to work at Penny's years ago even before we got married, she hasn't since we got married. Oh she worked down at the shop for a little while a few days a week down on Park Street.

Ed: What would you do on your nights off before the children came?

Bob: Fighting, argue no we had pretty good times.

Ed: Go Dancing, go to the bars at all?

Bob: Yeah, I used to go to the bars. Used to go up and take her dancing , hang out at the Columbia Gardens. Go dancing at one of the big Dance floors. One of the big bands were at the Columbia Gardens and we went out there to dance with her brother and his wife. We used to go to the Gardens a lot when the kids got older.

Ed: What about before the service did you ever go into the Hurdy Gurdy houses?

Bob: No , Nope. We used to play football for the school and we used to run through the what's its name down there, where the gals were all at. As long as the cop didn't catch us. If he caught us then we were in..

Ed: Then you were in trouble.

Bob: Yeah, yeah used to play football down at Hebgen Park right there on Second Street back behind Oselos. So we used to walk up ____? ____ they had a big green gate there and a fence with a gate in the ally there and then the other one came out by that bar there now on Main Street.

Ed: Um, Silver Dollar?

Bob: No, that Irish pup there.

Ed: Oh , the Irish Times.

Bob: Yeah okay that's, see that used to be the old paper, the Butte Daily Post. That alley coming up that's where we used to come through , if you didn't get caught.

Ed: What about the famous people that came to town, like the President and stuff did you always go and see them?

Bob: Yeah most of the time, I seen Roosevelt and ah, Truman course that was after I got back home from the service. _____?_____

Ed: What about the Columbia Gardens? What do you remember most about that?

Bob: Everything!

Ed: Everything?

Bob: It was quite the place; it was a good place to take kids and that you know. And over there you would very seldomly see a fight or anything, everybody got along, aint' like it now a days, your out beefin and fightin, trying to kill one another. No, things have changed, when we were kids you got in a fight, when you got through fightin you shook hands and when about your business, now days you go get a gun and shoot each other.

Ed: It was a neat place huh?

Bob: Oh yeah, I enjoyed it yeah.

Ed: So then ah, what about the Pit do you think it was good for Butte or was it bad?

Bob: Well the Con was good at the time it was running ya know you had a lot of work there. Right now its bad because of the water, I guess there going to take care of that too, which will help the economy and everything.

Ed: Did you think it was not good of them to get rid of the Columbia Gardens and some neighborhoods?

Bob: Oh yeah, yeah, they should have never got rid of the Columbia Gardens; I don't think they should have ever got rid of the Columbia Gardens. They never used anything that was there anyway; except for to stack there waste is all. But I think it was costing too much money and they just got rid of it.

Ed: What ever you do to save money, I guess.

Bob: Yeah.

Ed: You mentioned the trolleys when we were looking at those pictures, were those kind of fun to ride on or?

Bob: Oh the trolleys, oh yeah, yeah the open one was good, used to hang out of them, and the guys watching them through the trestles and that. Conductors used to get mad, we used to go skatin, _____? _____, the School of Mines we used to go skating there. The Anselmo had one up there and the School of Mines, used to go over there and walk down the track to the School of Mines skating. Then we'd walk back home, if it was cold somebody would have a nickel and get on and all the rest would jump on the back, ride up and when you wanted to get off you'd pull the trolley and the conductor would stop and then us at the back would get off the trolley, and they would go up the other end of the run and we'd jump back on. Yeah, then up on Granite St. we used to grease the tracks the trolley would come down and could get back up. So they would have to come out and sand the tracks, and they have to call them and the truck would have to come up with sand. Yeah, did some pranks when we were kids.

Ed: What do you think about Butte now?

Bob: Butte now, I think it's a retiree town. To tell the truth, there is some stuff here but, got a lot of smart people here yet, if somebody would come and take it over get her goin.

Ed: You also mentioned when were looking at the pictures, about your great grandfather?

Bob: Oh, yeah Johnny Johns yeah, yeah he was an actor he came up through when Marcus Daly first came up. Right after, well the next day I guess. He tried to get in and see Marcus Daly but they would not let him near him. They went out and slept under a Buggy I guess. I guess the next day when Marcus Daly finally sent a runner around to find out where he was at. Yeah he was an actor, after he got older and couldn't see and that he used to go out north of _____? _____ and I used to go out with him. Run the poles, I'd have to read the numbers off the rocks, cause he couldn't see them. That's when I was about ten, about that I age I think. Me and my young brother over there.

Ed: A lot of stories huh?

Bob: Oh yeah.

Ed: Glad you grew up in Butte?

Bob: Oh yeah, I don't regret it, had good times, I enjoyed myself. Going to work. Got a retirees club up there, still enjoying it.

Ed: You also showed pictures of the mules going down, were you mining when there used to be mules?

Bob: No, I wasn't my partner was Ray Dolittle. He was a muleskinner, course hes dead now, he was a muleskinner he used to tell me something about the mules. He would say to me, they had so many cars to pull that's what they would pull and if they had seven of them little cars they would pull it. Don't try to sneak one on because they would stop. How they would tell is they would count the number of chains that hit, they'd start out bunk, bunk, bunk, bunk. If you had one extra that's it. She wasn't going. When it comes lunchtime you don't have to worry. Come lunchtime they'd head for the barn, they knew when lunchtime was.

Ed: Um, you said you were a fireman.

Bob: Oh the fire gang.

Ed: Yeah you were part of the fire gang.

Bob: Yeah uh huh , we kept straight trains and wore the helmets. The MSA helmets, we used to keep your oxygen and re-circulate your air. And went through the oxygen and you got a gear, the valve would fit, it had like an extra lung here, and it would go up and down through here, and then you would hit a button for more oxygen and with a gage, and depending on if you worked them hard, they would last 1 hour, 2 hours, 4 hours, if you worked them hard a couple hours.

Ed: Now the Granite Mountain disaster?

Bob: That's before my time.

Ed: That was.

Bob: Yeah my brother knew about then and then the Rev. Mitchell from Walkerville, he was in that fire. He told me some things about it. He worked with Dave Dennis's dad I guess, Dave Dennis's dad worked for the station, he tried to talk him in to going the other way, so many went the other way, so many went to the station, the ones that went to the station didn't make it, the ones that went to the other mine followed the air currents. The air currents, fresh air coming in and they got out safely and so did all the rest of the miners.

Ed: Was there any disasters, were a lot of peoples lives taken, when you were there, as far as from the mines and stuff?

Bob: A few, I never lost any men, I know a few that have. Tate Couple, Frank Gaveinans crew, there was a cave-in. I have had my men hurt and that but never lost a man.

Ed: What's the ^hing you miss most about mining?

Bob: Actually, when I retired I never missed it no more. Took off my watch and that was it. Well I miss the men and them and know that I went to the club. _____?_____. She says Diane Club, you say yep. Last one to turn off his lights and turn the key in.

Ed: I might have asked you earlier but what was the pay?

Bob: Oh in the mines, when I first started it was a 3.75.

Ed: 3.75 a day?

Bob: A, yeah I always made forty some dollars a month. That's when I come back from the service.

Ed: Wow, that's a.

Bob: You could never make her today could ya?

Ed: No. That was enough, you were fine with finances?

Bob: Well you didn't, couldn't do much but we got by on it. Toward the end of the week it was tough, looked forward to your paycheck. Then after kept getting raises and raises, then after that it wasn't to bad.

Ed: Was there any neighborhood anywhere in Butte that was like I would not go there as far as not being a good neighborhood?

Bob: Well, no, the only thing is you didn't go through Centerville alone. When I was a kid, you always went through with straighter, if you did go through you damn better be on the run. Centerville and Walkerville used to beef all the time. Used to have sawed fights, you know used to pick up sawed and throw it. Ya if you went through Centerville you got in a beef, two or three of them. You'd get in a beef with them and you'd head for wherever you was going.

Ed: What do you think the hardest, you said you got along with everybody but was there anyone who was harder to get along with, as far as like the Irish?

Bob: Well ya the Irish in Centerville and us Walkerville we never got along with them. We would beef with them all the time. But then after we grew up together.

Ed: Was it just because you were from Walkerville and not Irish?

Bob: No just different, same neighbor, different neighborhood ya know, had gangs now a days, it was the same with neighborhoods. The Gulch's and Hub Additions, they were all the same, if you went through you'd better be on the run if your alone, if you went through three or four of us, you were fine. Never had that many fights actually, myself,

other boys had a lot of fights, we used to have sawed fights. I got along with most of everybody.

Ed: Speaking of fights there was history of boxing here in Butte, did you ever go see any big fights?

Bob: No, no but I remember when they had the boxing down there. Remember Al Falcon from Walkerville, he was a good boxer. He won gold, he was state golden glove champion. Then he went to Boxing over someplace and they overmatched him, he got his nose broke. He never really boxed much after that. I remember up in Walkerville, Kellsiwitz had a boxing ring right in the bottom of there, that's were the Walkerville Community Center is now on main and Daly there. Right across the street from the old mercantile. That used to be Chelso's and it had a regular gym in the down, they used to box right there. Used to go to them quite a bit, but the were just people from up in Walkerville; Jimmy Shea, The Mayor.

Ed: What about other sports football and baseball and did you attend a lot of games?

Bob: I never missed a Butte High game or Central game until after I got older. I remember I used to go down to Butte High stadium and watch the Bobcat- Grizzly Games. I never missed them either. Used to go out to Clarks Park when I was a kid, used to get into the bullpen out there if you backed up into the bullpen you would not have to pay for that. And used to go up Montana where the Grizzlies play and they used to play quite a few games there. Essen Popovich was in it, and Milton the whitey brother. I used to watch him run man gets up going down the sidelines he lay on the forty-five and they'd come tackle him. I remember that. I remember down town, we used to have the Independent leagues, football leagues, the Hub Addition. My brother used to play with Ben Gordon, he played for the Hub Addition, and the played a couple. I remember the one time the one team from San Francisco came to play us. Man were they given us a run. ___?___ got caught in the backfield and they wanted to know who had the ball, they had the ball stuck behind them. They were tackling everybody and they were all down. I can't remember which team it was though. Yeah a lot of football game, I used to go to all the Butte High games cause my daughter was on the twirling team and that. I used to make all the games, make sure they stayed a straighten arrow.

Ed: If you had to sum up Butte in one word, what do you think you would say about Butte?

Bob: Now days or the old days?

Ed: In one sentence, just Butte in **G**eneral?

Bob: A great town, everyone seems to get along good, have been for years here, like all this ethnic stuff ya know they got now a days when we was grown up here it never had much of that at all. Everybody called a Wop a Wop, transferred the frogs. We had all different ethnics here, I mean there were a lot of them. The Slavs, the Yugoslavians, the

Hungarians, Swedes, Finlanders, Italians, Frenchman, Africans. We all seemed to get along. Course we had a beef with the guy, we went outside the fence and duked it out. Shook hands went down and had a beer or something.

Ed: Bars where present in Butte back then, as much as they are now?

Bob: Oh yeah, worse, we had bars then they got now. Yeah there was a lot of bars in Butte, there still is. But more than then there is now. Miners had to have their drinks. When you work on the job all day and all that dust you had to wash it down with something. Come up and have a boilermaker, and a shot and a beer. A lot of the Irishmen used to come in used to take Red pepper in their shots. I never did but the ole timers used too.

Ed: Well you had a good life in Butte then?

Bob: Yeah I never, I enjoyed it, a lot of people didn't but then I ain't like a lot of people anyway. Had a good life, didn't have much but stilled enjoyed life. They say money ain't everything. A lot of people think it is but it's not.

Ed: Thank you,

Bob: Um Hem, nice talking to you.