

Oral history interview with ALVA F. LYONS, Sept. 27, 1989, Durango, Colorado,
by Rae Haynes, for the Center of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College



Center of
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The date is September 27, 1989. This is the second in a series of taped interviews with Alva F. Lyons as narrator and Rae Haynes as interviewer. Today's topic is Mr. Lyons' ancestors and his early life up until about 1925. The interview is taking place at his home, 777 7th Avenue, Durango, Colorado.

[Editor's note: bracketed texts are comments made later by Martha Lyons McDaniel, daughter of Alva Lyons, when she edited the transcription in 1991. Comments followed by the letters *rph* indicate that the correction was made by Rae Haynes. Center of Southwest Studies Professional Archival Intern Renee Morgan entered these notes in the transcription on February 6, 2008.]

HAYNES: Mr. Lyons, before we get started, I'm holding here a little booklet about your mother's family, the Gabbe family album.

LYONS: Yes.

HAYNES: I understand that a niece of yours wrote this booklet about 10 years ago.

LYONS: That is right.

HAYNES: And her name, the girl that wrote it?

LYONS: Yes, is Lou Hale Smitheram.

HAYNES: And she lives in Santa Barbara?

LYONS: She lives in Santa Barbara. She was a teacher in the university there [at] the Southern California, and what started her on this history here [was] that she worked

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in the library and saw several histories and that gave her an idea.

HAYNES: Lou Hale Smitheram, S M I T H E R A M?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: A number of dates are given in this book on some of your ancestors, tell me.

LYONS: On my grandmothers side, you know she traced the heritage back to 1626 in Berlin.

HAYNES: In Berlin?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: According to this little booklet, your mother was born in Berlin?

LYONS: Yes.

HAYNES: In 1873, I believe, and she lived until 1937.

LYONS: 1937.

HAYNES: And died in Colorado Springs. Her name, your mother's name?

LYONS: Was, I think it was Margaret Gabbe Lyons.

HAYNES: And that's G A B B E?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And how about your father; what do you know about when and where he was born?

LYONS: Well, we never could find out from the Census Bureau just when he was born, we never found a trace of him any place, we always assumed that he was born in 1862.

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HAYNES: But you don't?

LYONS: Would that be right?

HAYNES: That's what you have written here with a question mark.

LYONS: And that when he first came to Colorado in '74 he worked for the Rio Grande in Leadville, and I have his discharge papers from there.

HAYNES: Last week you said 1884 is the date he came to Durango.

LYONS: Well that was when he come back the second time, isn't that right, yeah '84 to

HAYNES: Last week I think you said that he came to Durango in 1884 and, no I'm sorry was in Leadville in 1884 and in Durango in 1894. Would that be correct?

LYONS: I figure '92 is about the right time instead of '94.

HAYNES: If he was born in 1862, he would have been 30 years old when he arrived in Durango in 1892.

LYONS: 1892, yes.

HAYNES: And what was his full name?

LYONS: Isaiah John Lyons

HAYNES: Did he have a nickname?

LYONS: Jack.

HAYNES: And so most folks around Durango knew him as Jack?

LYONS: That's true, Jack Lyons.

HAYNES: And where and when did he die?

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LYONS: He died in Durango, at home. I would say in February, I think you called the date there as the 12th in...

HAYNES: February 1923, according to your handwritten note here in the book, February 1923 your father died.

LYONS: I took that from the [Masonic] Lodge records.

HAYNES: Now your mother's people settled in Durango.

LYONS: They settled in Durango, we, first come to the States and settled in Bayfield where they took up some timber claims for Schultz over there. [Schutze]They were semi-related some way.

HAYNES: To the Schultz?

LYONS: To the Schultz, yes.

HAYNES: Of Bayfield, about when would this have been that they settled in Bayfield, do you have any idea?

LYONS: Well they come to Durango in, they were over there two, no I think it was four years, so they must have come to Durango in '78. Would that be right? No '78 and '80 then.

HAYNES: Do you know how old your mother was when they moved to Durango, that might help.

LYONS: Well let's see, it's in this book here wherever it is, where is it?

HAYNES: Oh, I have it right here in my lap.

LYONS: Oh.

HAYNES: Well we'll check that later. [Came to Durango about 1883, per Martha Lyons McDaniel].

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LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: We won't bother to look it up now, but they did come to Durango then from Bayfield and settled just outside of town.

LYONS: Well, I suppose so, they must have had a cabin or something on the property.

HAYNES: Now, are you speaking of the property on Junction Creek?

LYONS: No.

HAYNES: Where did they first settle?

LYONS: When they came to Durango, they settled on two lots on Main Street in the 12, let's see 1400 block where the Shell filling station is there.

HAYNES: 1400 block of Main Street, and then they did move out to Junction Creek some time after that?

LYONS: Yeah, when they bought all that property, [they] were able to gather together is when, why, they moved out there, they built the house there first.

HAYNES: And you know when that would be approximately?

LYONS: Well, I'm having a hard time figuring up these dates too here.

HAYNES: There's a picture in the book indicating that the house was standing in 1893, so sometime between the time they came to Durango and then the house would date,

LYONS: That would be about right.

HAYNES: Did your grandparents still own that house when you were a kid?

LYONS: Yes.

HAYNES: And did you spend a lot of time out there at Junction Creek on your grand folks place?

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LYONS: Oh yes, we always went out there every Sunday.

HAYNES: Every Sunday?

LYONS: We always had cake with pure cream on top of it and the old folks drank either wine or coffee.

HAYNES: And then did the youngsters have an opportunity to go out and play and explore?

LYONS: Well, we always played around the barns and looked at everything and rode the old horse out there.

HAYNES: I think you had a little mishap with [that] horse.

LYONS: Yeah, I fell off the horse and broke my arm.

HAYNES: And when would that have been--how old would you have been?

LYONS: I was about 13, 12 or 13 at the time.

HAYNES: Now this property we are speaking of lies along the, sort of southeast side of Junction Creek road, is that correct?

LYONS: It would be the, yeah, southeast.

HAYNES: On the right hand side of the road as you are going out from town?

LYONS: Yeah, just north of 29th Street.

HAYNES: And just north of 29th Street.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: How much property do you think your grandparents had there at that place?

LYONS: There was four blocks and a sliver.

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HAYNES: Four city blocks.

LYONS: Well, they weren't actually city blocks. They were probably 100 feet square or something.

HAYNES: And to what use did they put that land?

LYONS: Well they had hay and they raised currants, and they had fruit trees on there. They had currant bushes clear around the whole outside fence. There was two ditches that went through the property. The Dwyer Ditch that went on close to the road and the other one was the Animas City Ditch which was on the east side of the house, between that and the barn.

HAYNES: These currants that they were raising, these weren't wild currants, these were planted.

LYONS: No, they were planted currants, they were tame currants.

HAYNES: I see.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And what other sorts of things did you youngsters do there while perhaps the grownups were having their coffee?

LYONS: Well, I guess we walked all over that Animas Mountain there, you know as far as kids could go until they got tired and then they come back.

HAYNES: How long did your grandparents retain the title to that property?

LYONS: Well they retained the title until they died, grandfather died first and, of course, his wife then inherited it, and she deeded then the property to the other sister because she didn't want the a, Frank, who was the older one of the brothers, he wanted to get some, he thought he was entitled to some inheritance, but he didn't get anything.

HAYNES: So it was your mother's sister that inherited...

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LYONS: Mother, yeah, mother didn't get any inheritance either, she didn't want any, and the printer, Henry, why he was by that time he had several printing shops around. He had one, he printed the paper in Idaho Falls, Idaho and up in the mining town north of there.

HAYNES: This is an uncle of yours?

LYONS: Yes.

HAYNES: I see.

LYONS: Then he moved to California and lived in San Diego.

HAYNES: So your grandparents thought he really didn't need the property?

LYONS: No, he didn't need any.

HAYNES: And your mother's sister did.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: What did she do with the land and how long did she keep it?

LYONS: Well, they didn't do much with it. They had a vegetable garden around there. That cousin of mine, why he worked for Gallavan in the produce department, and they raised cabbage and all kinds of vegetables and they sold those around town to the markets were buying.

HAYNES: Is the property in the hands of a family member at the present time?

LYONS: No, it was sold, I sold the property when I become the trustee of Mrs. [Elizabeth Gabbe] Peeples' [estate].

HAYNES: That was your aunt, Mrs. Peeples. What can you tell us about your wife's people?

LYONS: Well, her father was a farmer. She had two grandfathers that were born in

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Arkansas, and they come west in the late 1860s. One of them stopped at Osier and rented his teams out to work on the railroad grade and he operated the toll gate there and the restaurant.

HAYNES: At Osier?

LYONS: At Osier.

HAYNES: Now his name?

LYONS: His name was Samuel Ent.

HAYNES: Would you spell that?

LYONS: E N T.

LYONS: Samuel.

HAYNES: And what about the other grandfather?

LYONS: The other grandfather came to Durango, and they started in and got a ranch down at La Plata, New Mexico. He was in the cattle and sheep business.

HAYNES: And his name?

LYONS: His name was Heather. [James Heather]

HAYNES: Heather, H E A T H E R? [Rhymes with “ether”. rph]

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And so it was out on the La Plata that your wife's father was farming on this land that had been settled by his dad?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And she was living out there when you met her?

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LYONS: Well, the Ent family, of course, when they come to Durango, he went to, hired out as the deputy sheriff under Joe Dwyer who lived up there across from the Fairgrounds on Junction Creek Road that goes around there. The house is still standing there, and Samuel Ent, of course, went into the mining over at Hesperus, and he mined coal there and provided coal for the Rio Grande Southern tippie which you can see over there on Highway 140, south of Hesperus.

HAYNES: You see the mine over there?

LYONS: Yeah, and in the early days why my wife went to school there at Hesperus

HAYNES: But her father was not an Ent, her father was a Heather?

LYONS: Her father was a Heather.

HAYNES: So both of her grandfathers were actually over in that La Plata-Hesperus area?

LYONS: Yeah, in the same area, yeah.

HAYNES: And her father continued to farm out there?

LYONS: Mrs. Ent was supposed to be the first child born in Parrot City, up there north of Hesperus. [Mattie Ent Heather, according to Martha Lyons McDaniel. Mattie Ent Heather was the first white child born in Parrot City, rph]

HAYNES: Yes, Parrot City.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: I neglected to get your wife's birth date and name.

LYONS: Her name was Mercedes Heather Lyons. [Mr. Lyons pronounces his wife's name "mee-SEE-dess", rph]

HAYNES: Mercedes Heather Lyons.

LYONS: Yes, she was born in August the 31, 1903. [It was 1902, not 1903,

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according to Martha Lyons McDaniel, rph]

LYONS: In Mercy Hospital.

LYONS: In Durango.

HAYNES: And she lived until what date?

LYONS: She lived until, hmm...

HAYNES: About three years ago, you said.

LYONS: Just about 10 years ago, I was a...

HAYNES: Oh, ten years ago.

LYONS: No, it wasn't that long, huh.

HAYNES: I thought you told me earlier she'd been about three years, is that right?

LYONS: Yeah, that's about right in there.

HAYNES: About 1986 then you think? [March 25, 1986, according to Martha Lyons McDaniel, rph]

LYONS: Yeah, yeah, that's more like it.

LYONS: She [Mercedes Heather Lyons] died in the hospital at Farmington. She had a stroke here in the house and we tried to get her to Farmington because she had a blood clot on the brain. [Mercedes Heather Lyons Aug. 31, 1902 – Mar. 25, 1986 daughter of Charles James Heather and Mattie Ent Heather granddaughter of Samuel Ent and Louisa Nan Rhodes Ent; James Heather and Nancy Amelia Carl Heather (dates of birth and death are on tombstones- Greenmount)].

HAYNES: I also neglected to get the date that you were married.

LYONS: We were married in 1923, I think, and in California at the, why can't I think of that place, we took the ferry up there. It was the county seat.

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HAYNES: In the San Francisco Bay area?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: But across the bay from San Francisco, [in] Berkeley?

LYONS: Well no, it's at the north side, see that's south.

HAYNES: San Rafael?

LYONS: San Rafael, that's it.

HAYNES: That's where you were married in 1923? [It was Oct. 1, 1924, according to Martha Lyons McDaniel, rph]

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: You told me last week that you had gone out there to find work after your foot had been injured.

LYONS: That's right.

HAYNES: And what kind of work were you doing out there?

LYONS: I went down, I was trying to get her to marry me, of course, it was a, she didn't want to marry a broken down railroader so she thought I ought to get another job so I went to San Diego and my uncle tried to get me in several jobs, but I got one at the Southern Electric Company selling vacuum cleaners, Hoosiers and Maytag washing machines, and I did that for a couple of years.

HAYNES: And you said, I think, earlier that she was going to school at Berkeley.

LYONS: Yeah, she was getting her degree at Berkeley.

HAYNES: And did she finish there at Berkeley before you were married?

LYONS: Yeah, she finished at Berkeley, [Aug. 1924, according to MLM, rph] but in

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the meantime, of course, we were married and shortly after she got her degree at Berkeley why we come back to Durango here, why we had, Martha Ann was born. [Frances and Mercedes Heather graduated from the University of California, Berkeley Aug. 1924. Between 1919 and 1922-1923 they attended Rockford College, Illinois and taught school. Mercedes at the old Whittier School, Main St, North Durango (no longer standing). The Whittier school years must have been when Alva Lyons started his courtship, 1921 approx.]

HAYNES: Before we talk about Martha Ann, did you have a big wedding there in San Rafael?

LYONS: No, just the two of us and the Methodist preacher and his wife.

HAYNES: I see, and that was 1923 [1924] and then you came back to Durango where your daughter was born and this book gives her birth date at 1925. Is that correct?

LYONS: 1926, isn't it?

HAYNES: Let's see if I read it right, September 8, 1925, the book says. [September 28, 1925, according to MLM, rph].

LYONS: Well that's probably right.

HAYNES: And she was born in Durango. Earlier you had indicated that four generations of your family had graduated from Durango High School.

LYONS: All the way from my mother to myself and two sisters, my daughter all graduated from Durango High School.

HAYNES: That's three generations, was there another one that we missed here.

LYONS: Well the only other one would be Frank--I don't think he actually graduated. But I have a certificate in my history over there where he got sub-credits towards graduation.

HAYNES: Now Frank is who?

LYONS: He was the oldest brother of...[Margaret Gebbe Lyons]

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HAYNES: Your mother?

LYONS: Mother.

HAYNES: Your mother's oldest brother, okay so there were at least three generations that graduated from high school here in Durango. You graduated in what year?

LYONS: I graduated in 1916.

HAYNES: And that's the date on the high school building down there at the end of Second Avenue. Did you go to school in that building?

LYONS: No, we went to school in the Central where Mason School is.

HAYNES: Central Elementary building?

LYONS: Yeah, all 12 grades were there, we went to school there.

HAYNES: And what happened to that building?

LYONS: It was destroyed in a fire.

HAYNES: And that would have been sometime after 1916.

LYONS: After, yeah.

HAYNES: How much schooling did your parents have, do you know?

LYONS: Well my mother graduated from Durango High School in '94.

HAYNES: But she didn't go on to school?

LYONS: She never went beyond that.

HAYNES: That was the end of her schooling?

LYONS: Yeah.

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HAYNES: And how about your father's education?

LYONS: I have no idea. I know that he was a good writer, signed his name, you know, just like I do, all those flourishes, so we must have had a good schooling anyways, but as far as graduating from high school, I don't know.

HAYNES: He never talked about that.

LYONS: Those things I didn't find out.

HAYNES: Back in the days that your parents were first married, at the time you and your sisters were born...

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: Where were you living; where was the family living?

LYONS: We were living at 833 Fourth Avenue. [Lyons' house on 4th Ave. was built by George Wertin who was married to Wilhelmine Schutze, sister of Louise Schutze Gabbe. The Wertins lived in a house on the same block. This Wertin house was for sale 1984-1985 and the owner let us look through it. Alva had many memories of the construction features of the house and the time spent there as a boy.]

HAYNES: Now that was the address you gave me as a house that your mother had built.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: In 1902.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: How long did you live in that particular house, do you recall?

LYONS: I lived there till I went away to college, I guess, and after I got one year at the University of Colorado, why then World War I, was on deck so first thing I knew I was drafted and went to France.

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HAYNES: Now earlier you had given me some other addresses as places your family had lived. The first was 433 Eleventh Street.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And tell us about that house and just when the family lived there.

LYONS: Well, I think that's where probably the first house that--I was born in that house--so that was the first house that my father and mother lived in, and then they moved down on Second Avenue in the house still standing to the telephone building.

HAYNES: And the address I have here is 1045...

LYONS: Yes, that's about, that's...

HAYNES: Second Avenue.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: About when would they have moved to that building?

LYONS: I couldn't tell you when they moved there, sometime when I was...

HAYNES: When you were a kid?

LYONS: I was a kid cause I broke my leg there, got caught on the picket fence. I was walking the picket fence. I was about five or six years old and broke my leg here.

HAYNES: So that would have been roughly 1902, something like that.

LYONS: Yeah, uh huh.

HAYNES: Did your father build either of these houses himself?

LYONS: No, no, he never had any property at all as far as he was concerned.

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HAYNES: When you say he never had any property, you are saying that you were renting rather than owning?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: I see.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And then this house on Fourth Avenue that your mother had built, they owned that?

LYONS: Well, yeah, it was in her name and...

HAYNES: How did that come about?

LYONS: It was built; she had her uncle, who lived in the same block, build the house. Worten was his name. He was related to the Gabbes some way, I don't know just what.

HAYNES: And how long did she live in that house, your mother?

LYONS: Well, mother lived in there until she moved to Colorado Springs and that was when my sister Gladys went to work for the railroad, down at the roundhouse. [Gladys Lyons Roberts, musician- played piano in movie theatre, worked for railroad in Durango after high school graduation 1919. Later trained Eastman School of Music, married E.R. Roberts 1928.]

HAYNES: And that would be sometime between your father's death and...

LYONS: Yeah, yeah.

HAYNES: And the time your mother died?

LYONS: Father was still alive, I know that.

HAYNES: Your father...

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LYONS: It was right after she graduated from school, I know that.

HAYNES: Right after who graduated from high school.

LYONS: From high school, yeah.

HAYNES: Right after who graduated?

LYONS: Well, I'd already graduated, but it was right after she graduated that she went to work down there.

HAYNES: You are speaking of your sister.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: Okay, I'm sorry, I got confused there for a minute, but it would have been sometime between 1923 and 1937, is that correct?

LYONS: Well, yeah, it was sooner than that, because she, let's see a...

HAYNES: I think you told me earlier that she moved there after your father died.

LYONS: Well, yeah, but I never gave any dates, I don't think. Cause I wasn't sure of it myself

HAYNES: And I think we established that your father died in 1923.

LYONS: Well, it probably could be remembered as the date because my sister Mary, of course, went to Denver and married Hale and Gladys went to Colorado Springs and married Roberts.

HAYNES: Then there is a fourth address that you gave me, the house that we are sitting in just now.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: Going back for just a minute, in the pause we were looking in the book and determined that your sister Gladys married Mr. Roberts in 1928.

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LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And so that would mean that your mother moved to Colorado Springs sometime right after that.

LYONS: Yeah, I think that's right.

HAYNES: Okay.

LYONS: Yeah, that probably [is] right. [Margaret Gabbe Lyons would not have moved to Colorado Springs before 1928.]

HAYNES: Now about the house that you are living in today. You said that you built that in 1926.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And when you say you built it, you mean with your own hands you constructed it?

LYONS: Well, I did a lot of the work on it, they contracted part of it, the stone work and the a, that is the foundation and the frame structure of the house and the roof and all that was put on, but then I had to do a lot of the wiring and, well I didn't do the wiring either, I did the, hung all the lights up and I did all the painting and everything else on it, on the house.

HAYNES: I see and so...

LYONS: Finished up the cement work in the basement.

HAYNES: And so you and your wife lived here from 1926 until she passed away?

LYONS: Yes.

HAYNES: And you are still here.

LYONS: I'm still here, it's had several facelifts around, we enlarged the living room

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by taking out a partition and all of that was done by myself and Mr. Jones a neighbor who wanted to help me.

HAYNES: Well we have these four addresses in Durango where you've lived from the one you were born in until the one your are living in today, that's 92 years later, but for a short time you indicated that you worked out of Alamosa, what kind of living quarters did you have over there.

LYONS: Oh, I lived in a hotel room.

HAYNES: You never bought a house or lived in a house?

LYONS: No, no, we lived, my wife always lived in Durango because Martha was going to school and it was, I wasn't that kind of person anyway.

HAYNES: And then when you were in California, did you rent something there?

LYONS: Yes, I had a little apartment rented on the University Boulevard about a couple of blocks from where my uncle lived on Illinois street.

HAYNES: Now was this southern California?

LYONS: San Diego.

HAYNES: San Diego, and you were over there a year or two until you got your wife to say yes and then you brought her back?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: Going back to your family a little bit, did they own any land other than the land out along Junction Creek, any place here locally?

LYONS: Yeah, they owned the two lots on Fourteenth Street down there on Main Avenue.

HAYNES: They held on to those?

LYONS: Oh yes, until they finally sold them.

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HAYNES: Which would have been about when?

LYONS: Well, what was the picture taken out there with all the family there in 19...

HAYNES: 1893 they were out on the Junction Creek property.

LYONS: Well they must have sold the property in Durango then probably about a year before that.

HAYNES: I see, so they didn't hold on to that Main Street property any longer than that.

LYONS: Grandfather, of course, being a stone mason, why he laid bricks on the Strater Hotel while they were living on Main Avenue, and that's why the house that he built on Junction Creek is a brick house.

HAYNES: Because he was a stone mason?

LYONS: Because he could do the work.

HAYNES: This is your grandfather Gabbe?

LYONS: Gabbe, yes.

HAYNES: Did he have anything to do with the construction of other important buildings around town that you know of?

LYONS: Not that I know of.

HAYNES: And at the Strater, did he just do the stone foundation or was he...?

LYONS: No, I think it was all brick work.

HAYNES: What he did was brick work, I see, can you describe what he looked like, do you remember him at all?

LYONS: Yeah, I remember him. He always had a great beard, one of those big

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flowing beards that ran down to his chest, and he had long, rather long hair, but not too long.

HAYNES: And what kind of a man was he?

LYONS: Well, he was not very tall, but he was stocky and strong. He was, I don't know you would, outside of that

HAYNES: Was he good natured?

LYONS: Yes, yeah.

HAYNES: And you enjoyed him as a child?

LYONS: Yes, we enjoyed him and grandmother too. They were, well I think they though a lot of my mother and that's why they thought a lot of us kids, that is my two sisters and myself.

HAYNES: How do you think the community held your Grandfather Gabbe?

LYONS: Well, I think all the people around, the German people respected him. They had lots of friends, the Neglens or the blacksmith on Main Avenue, they were on Fourteenth Street. Of course, their shop was on Main Avenue and he sold sauerkraut at the [?] down at the Southern Hotel down on Main Street and other places in town, some of the stores.

HAYNES: Now your grandfather sold this sauerkraut?

LYONS: Yeah, he sold the sauerkraut; he made sauerkraut, that was part of the stuff that he--he made wine and sold sauerkraut and vegetables.

HAYNES: And what did you think of sauerkraut when you were a kid?

LYONS: I still like it.

HAYNES: You probably liked it when you were a kid too.

LYONS: Yeah.

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HAYNES: Was your grandmother involved in this sauerkraut making or did he do it all by himself.

LYONS: I think he did it all by himself.

HAYNES: And what kinds of things was she involved in that you can remember?

LYONS: Well, I don't think he was involved in any community stuff outside of the church. They belonged to the Lutheran Church, it's up here on Fourth Avenue.

HAYNES: What kinds of activities was your grandmother involved in around the house or the community?

LYONS: Oh the usual stuff of taking care of the chickens and picking up the eggs and feeding the chickens and I don't know whether she milked the cows or not. I know Herbert Peeples [Alva's cousin], the cousin, he always milked the cows later on, but they knew a lot of people they knew all the miners that were up on the Junction Creek area.

HAYNES: Your grandparents did?

LYONS: Yeah, grandparents and we used to go pick the chokecherries that were up there on the south side of the Junction Creek against the mountain on that side.

HAYNES: Now these were growing wild?

LYONS: Yeah, they were growing wild; make chokecherry jelly.

HAYNES: Your grandmother did?

LYONS: Yup.

HAYNES: What did she look like, can you describe her?

LYONS: Well she was a rather heavysset woman and had her gray hair, she always had her little bun on the top of her head. She looked sober but she wasn't, she was full of fun underneath, it always didn't show.

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HAYNES: You think other than what she did around the home, pretty much it was just home and the church and a...

LYONS: Yeah, she was never active in anything else.

HAYNES: What about your mother, describe her?

LYONS: Well, after my father joined the Masonic Lodge why she joined the Eastern Star and was a member for, till she moved to Colorado Springs, I think, and that's about the a, I don't know any other literary society or any other club that she was a member of. She was a homebody, she made good pancakes, good biscuits, we had a lot of good meals around that place.

HAYNES: A lot of German cooking from your mother as well. What did she look like?

LYONS: Well, that's pretty hard to describe, she looked like...

HAYNES: Well was she short and stocky like her parents?

LYONS: No, not near as stocky, she was slender and a she didn't weigh too much, I'm sure.

HAYNES: And she had your grandparents' good nature?

LYONS: Yeah, she was that way.

HAYNES: Well you come by it naturally, don't you?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: A long line of good natured folks. Anything else you can tell us about your grandparents or parents that comes to mind.

LYONS: I really don't know anything, I know that my father was greatly respected for his work on the railroad, not only by the Smelter people, but the other customers of the railroad.

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HAYNES: We didn't describe him, what did he look like?

LYONS: Well he lost his eye some place, one of his great tricks was to look at the sun and make a little bet that he could look at the sun longer than the other fellow, particular some railroad men, I can always remember one, Roberts, who was an engineer on the Rio Grande Southern. he was handy with a snowballs, make a little snowball, you know, and throw it maybe 50 or so feet, 100 feet always land on somebody's neck or knocked their hat off.

HAYNES: This was your father?

LYONS: That was my father, he was always full of fun, a lot more than...He smoked cigars and he was well liked in the lodge, he was, took one of the chairs in there, but he enjoyed the York Rite better, and that was the chapter consulate or chapter council and commandery of which he was a member and also was an officer on three bodies, and his brother in Montana was also a Knight Templar and was the yard master after my father got him a job. His wife was a Eastern Star and they were very popular people in Montana in Masonic circles. The a, my a, Frank, my mother's brother finally became a yard master in Durango after so many years, but they had two engines there, one in the daylight and one in the afternoon or in the evening and the day engine was the foot, the footboard foreman was my father, and uncle Frank, he was the footboard man on the other engine, but there were also some other old timer railroaders on there. There was a fellow by the name of Burnsides was the first footboard man, and he afterwards went braking.

HAYNES: What do you mean by footboard man?

LYONS: Well that was, you know, you get on the front end of the engine or the rear end of the engine on a footboard that runs across the front of the engine.

HAYNES: Kind of a little step?

LYONS: Like a step.

HAYNES: Was your father tall, unlike your mother's family, or...

LYONS: No, he was about as tall as I was, not quite, I was a few inches taller than he

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was.

HAYNES: So you would say medium height?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: What coloring?

LYONS: Well, he was tanned, of course, from being out in the sun all day long in the winter.

HAYNES: And dark...

LYONS: He liked to grow flowers around the yard office in Durango and things like that.

HAYNES: Uh huh, dark or light haired?

LYONS: He had about a medium colored hair, I would say, neither real light and neither real dark.

HAYNES: We've already established that he was full of fun.

LYONS: I have no idea where ever he lost his eye, but he had a glass eye that looked just like the other one.

HAYNES: When you were growing up here in Durango, let's say when you were in grade school, Looking back on it, how would you describe the town at that time say compared to today?

LYONS: Well, we had quite a few depressions during the years when I was growing up around here, and so I always worked around the house at home on Fourth Avenue, I put in some of the sidewalks in the back yard by mixing it by hand, and I built a garage back there. I had a workshop in one of the sheds that were around the back there, and then I carried papers, I did something all the time to make a little money.

HAYNES: Uh huh, this would be when you were in grammar school and high school

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LYONS: Both.

HAYNES: At that age when...

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: You probably had friends, playmates in the neighborhood.

LYONS: Yes, I had lots of friends all over.

HAYNES: Can you remember the names of any of those?

LYONS: Oh yes, down on this south end of town there was the Nazlen brothers, and Iver Hansen, in our neighborhood there was [?] McCloskey, Emory Tiffany, Stewart Henderson, Jay Glazier, John Townsend lived next door to us, across the street was the Andrews brothers, Carl Andrews and he had two brothers.

HAYNES: These were all boys your own age?

LYONS: They were all boys, they had one girl, Marie Andrews, and I was friends with quite a number of girls in high school.

HAYNES: What kinds of games or activities were you young people involved in when you weren't doing chores or going to school?

LYONS: Well, I played because that was one of the things that I could do, and we had two towns that we could perform in, that was Mancos and Silverton because the trains run to those two towns, so we could ride there by train.

HAYNES: Now was this a school team?

LYONS: School team.

HAYNES: That you played on?

LYONS: I never played anything but on the school teams.

HAYNES: That was when you were high school age.

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LYONS: Yeah, high school.

HAYNES: What about games and play when you were a little bit younger...

LYONS: Oh we used to play.

HAYNES: With these neighborhood boys?

LYONS: Kick-the-can around the house and do climbing stunts, one thing and another like that. We had a tennis court behind the Episcopal Church, and we used to play tennis there, and, of course in the evening we would kick the can around the block, they had a nine fifteen clock curfew so we didn't stay out too late at night.

HAYNES: How was that curfew announced?

LYONS: By a bell in the roundhouse, or down at the city hall.

HAYNES: At the city hall?

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And where was the city hall?

LYONS: City hall was on Tenth Street on the alley, right behind the present city hall.

HAYNES: Other than the curfew, were there any rules that you had to follow, did your folks give you any rules when you went out to play in the neighborhood?

LYONS: They give me a licking, that's all the rules I ever ran across.

HAYNES: If you did something wrong, you'd find out it was against the rule?

LYONS: Yeah, I'd find out.

HAYNES: Now, when you were growing up, did your sisters and the rest of your family continue to go to the Lutheran church?

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LYONS: No, my sister Gladys, after she came back from learning all the organ music, why she played the organ at the Presbyterian church and she was a pianist, she had her own grand piano.

HAYNES: You had indicated that your grandparents were Lutherans.

LYONS: Yeah, they were Lutherans.

HAYNES: But then after your mother married, did she continue in the Lutheran church?

LYONS: No, no she didn't.

HAYNES: Did you go to church or Sunday school when you were a kid?

LYONS: I went to Sunday school when I was a kid, yeah, because like Emory Tiffany we went to the Baptist church, I had some others that went to the Presbyterian church, so I would go there.

HAYNES: So you just sort of...

LYONS: I was always invited out for the Christmas celebration at either church.

HAYNES: So you went wherever your friends invited you?

LYONS: Wherever the pickings were the best.

HAYNES: Where did most of the folks in town attend church, was there anyone that was predominant?

LYONS: No, my wife's family belonged to the Methodist church in north Durango and then after, later on, why they joined the Southern Methodist church and joined up and operated under that church there on Third Avenue.

HAYNES: We were talking about playing with these young boys, I remember reading a newspaper article recently about you and Harold Lloyd climbing on a church roof. Tell us about that.

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LYONS: Well, that Harold Lloyd when he come here was probably he went to the ninth grade and he was, during the three years they were here why he was selling card tricks, you know he was a slight-of-hand artist, and if he could sell those tricks why then he made money out it, and he was always a leader of the kids so that we either followed him or we didn't. Well a lot of the kids like Emory Tiffany and Downs, they didn't want to climb over those barns and over the church and just a few of us younger kids than Harold Lloyd were the ones that followed him and did everything that he did.

HAYNES: How many church roofs did he take you up on to?

LYONS: Oh we just went on the Episcopal church because it was in our neighborhood.

HAYNES: I see, and did anybody get hurt.

LYONS: Nope, not that I know of.

HAYNES: Did anybody get in trouble?

LYONS: No.

HAYNES: Your folks never knew about it?

LYONS: Well, no, on Halloween we never got into any trouble at all.

HAYNES: You must have gotten into some kind of mischief as a boy.

LYONS: Oh yes, we were in all kind of things, like on St. Patrick's Day why a good old Irish Catholic, young Finney and I were, we wore a yellow ribbon that day, and, of course, we got taken down at school and Mr. Smiley took us in the office to keep us from getting into any more trouble.

HAYNES: And took your yellow ribbons away?

LYONS: Yeah, he took the ribbon off of us.

HAYNES: You once told me that you had to stay in school an extra year because you'd caused so much trouble in school.

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LYONS: Well yeah, it wasn't me that caused all the troubles, it was some of the girls that got me in trouble, one of them was the Chapman girl and she threw an eraser at the teacher and hit him in the back of the head, and so he expelled me from the class, he thought I did.

HAYNES: Was that the incident that caused you to spend the next...

LYONS: That was the incident that caused me to go back, and then in the eighth grade with Mrs. Polford, why I flubbed up on the history test, and so I had to go back and take summer school for a couple months, and after I got through she says well why didn't you pass the first time, you know more right now than I did then, and I taught.

HAYNES: And had you studied real hard to get ready for that?

LYONS: I didn't study very much, I read the, went through the book a couple of times, but I didn't study very much because I was working a lot at that time, yeah. I used to play, we played baseball too, I was the pitcher.

HAYNES: Just in the neighborhood, you mean.

LYONS: Well, for the school.

HAYNES: For the school.

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: Who would you say was the boss in your family when you were growing up?

LYONS: Boss?

HAYNES: Boss.

LYONS: I think it was my mother; she had a good old razor strap and it...

HAYNES: And you felt it a time or two have you?

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LYONS: And I felt er a time or two, you bet.

HAYNES: What did she expect of you that you weren't delivering?

LYONS: I really don't remember, I think I sassed her about something.

HAYNES: And did your sisters feel that strap too, or was that...

LYONS: No, they never caused any trouble whatever that I know of.

HAYNES: When you were growing up, I would imagine that there were some families that were poorer than others, maybe some that were wealthy, how did you feel that you and your family fit into this social standing sort of thing?

LYONS: It never entered my head at any time. I don't think it bothered any of us.

HAYNES: You just all played together no matter what.

LYONS: There was a sister of my father that come to Durango and stayed here for a number of years until she passed away, but we never a, well I don't know of anything that my family did outside of my father, was very active in a lot of things particularly around the railroad and in the lodge work.

HAYNES: But as a youngster you really weren't conscious of how much or how little your friends might of had.

LYONS: No, no, I earned enough money to buy a Pierce Arrow bicycle with the spring forks, and I delivered papers with that thing.

HAYNES: How did you earn the money, by delivering papers also?

LYONS: On papers, I delivered the HERALD and THE DENVER POST, both.

HAYNES: And what age would you have been then?

LYONS: Oh, I was between 10 and 13 during that period of time.

HAYNES: Were there parties or some kind of social gatherings that...

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LYONS: Well, we always had the graduation dance you know at the high school. We danced out in a separate building that was built for the basketball, where we played basketball.

HAYNES: And some of these friends of yours that would invite you to their churches, were there ever parties associated with that.

LYONS: No, no gals, I went to several parties with girl friends that were kind of stuck on me, I guess.

HAYNES: How old would you have been then, high school?

LYONS: High school.

HAYNES: Did you ever have any older relatives live with you right in the house?

LYONS: Never.

HAYNES: Your grandparents were out at Junction Creek?

LYONS: Yeah, they always in a separate place.

HAYNES: And your folks were in town?

LYONS: We never had any company come like we have now, you know people from other places.

HAYNES: House guests.

LYONS: House guests, yes.

HAYNES: House guests, was that because your relatives were right here close, do you think?

LYONS: Right here close, yeah.

HAYNES: I see, anything else you want to tell us about the high school, grammar

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school years, the kinds of things you did.

LYONS: Well, I did manage to, after I got out of the algebra class, why I did manage to pass it under Mr. Smiley over here who was the principal, or who was the superintendent of the Durango schools, and I afterwards took advanced algebra and one thing and another under him to get enough credits so I could go to college.

HAYNES: This was after you got out of high school.

LYONS: It was while I was in high school.

HAYNES: I see.

LYONS: After I was out of high school, why then I was in college.

HAYNES: What year was it that you went away to college?

LYONS: 1916, I had also been working on the railroad for four or five months, that's where I earned enough money to go to college.

HAYNES: And you were then at Boulder 1916, 1917

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: And I think you said earlier that you were drafted then...

LYONS: Yeah.

HAYNES: After one year of...

LYONS: 1918 I was drafted, but we tried to join the Navy.

[end of interview]

[Note: This audiotaped interview was transcribed by Catherine Conrad, Administrative Assistant for the Center of Southwest Studies, and was formatted and edited by Center Archivist Todd Ellison on April 4, 1996, and further on February 7, 2008, including conversion to PDF file format for online access on the Center of Southwest Studies website.]

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