

Oral History Interview with ALVA F. LYONS, Nov. 24, 1989, Durango, Colorado,  
by Rae Haynes, for the Center of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College



Center of  
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This is number 5 in a series of tapes with Alva F. Lyons as narrator and Rae Haynes as the interviewer, today's date is November 24, 1989. Today we will talk about some Durango residences that figured in the life of Mr. Lyons.

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

**HAYNES:** We are sitting in front of a brick house on 28th Street just off of Junction Creek road and I believe, Mr. Lyons, you said your grandfather Gabe built this house.

**LYONS:** That's right.

**HAYNES:** And in an earlier tape we talked about the fact that it was standing in 1893, do you know how much earlier than that it may have been built?

**LYONS:** I would, no I couldn't say unless I looked at the old deeds to see when they finally acquired all the property, see this here is just a sliver of a lot here, runs to a point there and then widens out here up to where the house is.

**HAYNES:** It runs to a point down at Junction Creek road?

**LYONS:** Yeah, and then they had those three great big lots running up Junction Creek there.

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**HAYNES:** But...

**LYONS:** Junction Creek road.

**HAYNES:** You are saying the property line now is sort of a pie shaped lot now?

**LYONS:** Well yes, it always was that way.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh

**LYONS:** The only reason there was a little change in it was because of the ditches that come here, one went right here the Dwyer ditch crossed in this way.

**HAYNES:** Crossed 18th Street?

**LYONS:** Yeah, the other one was the Animas ditch, it crossed here above us back here, it went around the base of the hill.

**HAYNES:** I see.

**LYONS:** And into Animas City.

**HAYNES:** Now we are sitting on the road just about at the point where the photographer had to be standing to take a picture of this house in 1893, this picture you are holding, can't see the house as well now because of all the trees, but what changes do you see here over the past years, how is the house different now than when you were a boy?

**LYONS:** Well it looks like there is a little bit of a closed in porch on the back there

**HAYNES:** It wasn't there before?

**LYONS:** It wasn't there before, it might have, outside of that there's not many changes

**HAYNES:** It's got a modern composition roof on it, of course, now...

**LYONS:** Yeah

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**HAYNES:** And it looks as if the chimney has been modified a little bit, doesn't look quite...

**LYONS:** They probably have gas in there now.

**HAYNES:** Doesn't look quite as tall as in the picture, but pretty much it's as you remember it?

**LYONS:** Let's see if that's the chimney there is on the east side of the house, that's a new chimney.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, it doesn't resemble the one in the picture.

**LYONS:** No, the one where the kitchen still was- was on the north side of the building.

**HAYNES:** On the far side where we can't see it?

**LYONS:** No, we can't see it.

**HAYNES:** I think you told us before that your granddad was a brick mason and that's why this...

**LYONS:** Stonemason.

**HAYNES:** Stonemason?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** And a...

**LYONS:** He could lay bricks, of course.

**HAYNES:** And he did the work on this house himself, to the best of your knowledge?

**LYONS:** Yes, I think he did all the work on this house, he probably had his brother-in-law, Wharton, to come over here and help him with the carpenter work, putting in the

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windows and doors while he was laying brick, but he started, he laid brick on the Strater Hotel until that was completed.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, now how about the inside of the house, if one was to go right in this doorway that we're facing, how were things inside when you were a boy?

**LYONS:** That was a living room right there, that was a little square room, off of the living room, why there was a bedroom over here on the...

**HAYNES:** To the right?

**LYONS:** To the right and then they had the stairway, a kitchen right behind that bedroom and a stairway that went up to the upstairs window there, a second floor.

**HAYNES:** And how many rooms upstairs?

**LYONS:** Well they had two, three rooms upstairs, one little narrow room, well they weren't very big bedrooms.

**HAYNES:** And after your grandmother died, I guess an aunt had the house for a while?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Then it came into your possession?

**LYONS:** Yeah, it come into my, it come into my sister's possession, she inherited the house, but I was the trustee for the- my aunt's estate which is part of it, that's the only way I got involved in it.

**HAYNES:** Now we have some information on that on an earlier tape that you did, you say that you still do have the deed papers and everything going back?

**LYONS:** Yeah, uh huh.

**HAYNES:** On this house?

**LYONS:** Her daughter or my sister sold this to young Barker, Jr. Barker.

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**HAYNES:** From the hotel?

**LYONS:** Uh huh, and he held it awhile and then he sold all the property on the Junction Lane there and left what was left here, probably I don't know 50 feet here out from the house where they had the garden.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh

**LYONS:** I think there is a post out there yet.

**HAYNES:** I see back there what looks like a fence, may have been a fence, well then your sister got the house back from Barker or how did it get into your possession?

**LYONS:** No, it never did come into my possession, only as the money after she sold it.

**HAYNES:** Oh, I see as trustee, you said?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** All right, I had understood you to say that you had sold it, but your sister sold it?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Okay, well let's move down the street a little bit and look at maybe the other side of the house here, now we've moved over to what is about the south side of the house and we can see that kitchen chimney now through the tree and what you thought was an added porch seems to be kind of a...

**LYONS:** A bathroom now.

**HAYNES:** Has kind of fiberglass panel enclosing it?

**LYONS:** Uh huh.

**HAYNES:** Other than that, there has been no addition to the house since you were a

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kid?

**LYONS:** I don't think there has unless they've done some; it looks like there's been some new windows put in, looks like aluminum sashes or something.

**HAYNES:** Yeah, they are reflecting the light.

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** They must have replaced the windows, now off behind there is kind of a brick building that looks to be pretty, I'm sorry stone building that looks pretty old.

**LYONS:** That's the barn up above there.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, on a little higher level?

**LYONS:** On a little higher level, yes.

**HAYNES:** There's a wooden story up on top of the stone story.

**LYONS:** Now that's where the hay, hay was up above, they could store hay up there.

**HAYNES:** And that's the way it was when you remember it?

**LYONS:** Yeah, that's all.

**HAYNES:** It's a...

**LYONS:** Down below here why they had chickens here on that south end of this, of that barn and then they in the middle they had the a, where they kept the two milk cows and then on the far end there was the storage for all the vegetables and stuff that they raised.

**HAYNES:** The far western end...

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** It would be, what was the roof made out of originally, that seems to be

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corrugated tin now?

**LYONS:** Well it was made out of trusses across there and stringers, of course.

**HAYNES:** But the actual roofing material was it metal?

**LYONS:** No, no metal.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** Everything was wood.

**HAYNES:** So the roofs of both buildings have been replaced?

**LYONS:** They were on cedar shingles, or they cut pine shingles here in the early days, they are a little bit heavier than cedar shingles.

**HAYNES:** Can we see the ditch from here?

**LYONS:** Well it was right along this fence, I don't know whether you can see it, we could drive around and probably go up the Junction Creek there a little, we could probably see where the apple trees.

**HAYNES:** Okay.

**LYONS:** Or we might see where the ditch came.

**HAYNES:** Now we will do that, but you mentioned an upper ditch that ran around the base of the hill.

**LYONS:** Well that's it, that's it, that's one right above the upper one that went on the other, just the north side of the house; the other ditch was right against this fence.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, now which side of the barn did that upper ditch run on?

**LYONS:** On this side.

**HAYNES:** This side?

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**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Okay, I guess that must be a road or something up above the barn, I thought maybe that was a...

**LYONS:** Well yes it was a road that went up there so they could pull by the barn and turn around and come back, although they could go up a little bit on the hill there.

**HAYNES:** Okay, well let's move on down the road and see if we can get a better look at the ditch, when they paved this Junction Creek road would that have taken out part of this lower ditch or do you think that the ditch that you see here now was the original one?

**LYONS:** It, I don't think it could have taken it down but the ditch was probably further out that way.

**HAYNES:** So it might?

**LYONS:** It was all planted with currant bushes between the ditch and the fence.

**HAYNES:** So you say, when you say the ditch was further out, you mean further out on what is now Junction Creek road?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** No, it wasn't clear out in the road, but the, because they had the, those currant bushes you see were between the fence and the ditch.

**HAYNES:** Currant bushes?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** All the way from the house over here, all the way up this line and have till we get up there quite a ways and then they had the hay field a little on the upper part



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there around the point of this little hill.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, well this, the point of the hill kind of pinches out this field then it widens over there beyond.

**LYONS:** Yes.

**HAYNES:** To the north, I guess that would be.

**LYONS:** That was their hay field.

**HAYNES:** Beyond the hill, well let's pull over there and take a look too, well we've moved on Junction Creek road now going away from town till we are right under the big green water tower on Junction Creek road and this is where the hay fields were?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** And the ditch ran right along the base here below where the water tower is today?

**LYONS:** Well now you see, well, this ditch, the Animas City ditch didn't go on that side as I remember it, it might have been, come down in through there, that's the Animas City ditch and that would run right around the hill.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** In between the on the east side of the house, the other ditch, of course, come in, the Dwyer ditch, it come in across here and then down on this side.

**HAYNES:** Right close to the road where we are sitting?

**LYONS:** Yes, right close.

**HAYNES:** But what I was asking, would the Animas City ditch have been right over along the base of this hill?

**LYONS:** Yes.

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**HAYNES:** Okay, I can't really tell now that there is any trace of it.

**LYONS:** No, I don't think there would be any trace of at all.

**HAYNES:** And this was all in hay then down how far?

**LYONS:** The paving.

**HAYNES:** The hay, how far down did the hay field extend?

**LYONS:** Oh, to the next fence there, next to the next house up here.

**HAYNES:** Okay, we'll go take...

**LYONS:** That's Stanley Allen's house.

**HAYNES:** We'll go down here and take a look.

**LYONS:** A little bit too far.

**HAYNES:** Oh, I went too far?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** I didn't see any; I didn't see any fence till this one right here, but this is a new one.

**LYONS:** This should be the fence right here, I don't know, they've probably graded this road so that we don't have the right prospective here.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, but you think this may have been the old property line?

**LYONS:** Yeah,

**HAYNES:** And so basically there is no development on the old property, it's still just an open field?

**LYONS:** That's right.

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**HAYNES:** And then right here is this fence and then the houses begin and we are right across the street from a fire plug.

**LYONS:** Yeah, they weren't in existence, they just put those in here when they developed all these places up here.

**HAYNES:** Oh, I was just thinking, anybody listen to the tape might look for the fire plug and know where the property ended, okay, and this is the field where you broke your leg on a horse when you were a kid?

**LYONS:** Yeah, right here.

**HAYNES:** Right out here between where the property line ended and where the hill pinches toward Junction Creek road?

**LYONS:** Yeah, yeah.

**HAYNES:** It wasn't a real big hay field, did they have enough hay growing there to support...

**LYONS:** Yeah they could get...

**HAYNES:** The cows and a horse.

**LYONS:** Three cuttings of hay.

**HAYNES:** Three cuttings of hay?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Now you are talking about the Dwyer ditch and we are now sitting in front of a house, 2535 West Second Avenue, now what did you call this?

**LYONS:** The Dwyer home, it was their home here, they owned a lot of ground, part of the fair grounds and where the 55 Plus is and probably part of where the school is, that was all probably their property in the early days.

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**HAYNES:** So this was the only house...

**LYONS:** Only house here.

**HAYNES:** In the neighborhood, and this is a large light brick building, real attractive house and I guess what you are saying is that the Dwyer ditch served the Dwyer farm then?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Okay, and the Dwyer ditch ran across your granddad's property, cross 28th Street and then came on down here?

**LYONS:** Uh huh.

**HAYNES:** And I think you indicated that it sort of circled around the school property up there, on a little higher ground that we are now...

**LYONS:** Well, I think it's on the same level as the school is.

**HAYNES:** On the same level as the school?

**LYONS:** Yeah, you wouldn't want, that was the Animas ditch was a little higher than at present level but the Dwyer ditch was lower down.

**HAYNES:** Did the Animas ditch feed the Dwyer ditch?

**LYONS:** No, it went- it turned and went up to Animas City.

**HAYNES:** So what was the source of water for the Dwyer ditch?

**LYONS:** Still Junction Creek.

**HAYNES:** I see, and the Animas City ditch came...

**LYONS:** Junction Creek.

**HAYNES:** So they both came out of Junction Creek?

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**LYONS:** Uh huh.

**HAYNES:** But different diversion points?

**LYONS:** Different diversion points, yes.

**HAYNES:** I see. Well now we are sitting in front of 433 11th Street, and what happened in this house?

**LYONS:** That's where I was born.

**HAYNES:** And if I remember right, that's 1897.

**LYONS:** That's right, February.

**HAYNES:** This house was being rented by your parents?

**LYONS:** Evidently, I don't remember, it's too far back.

**HAYNES:** Too far back, I think you told me earlier that as far as you knew they had not owned this though that they had...

**LYONS:** No, they didn't own it.

**HAYNES:** That they had, that they rented it.

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** And then how long did you live here?

**LYONS:** I don't think we lived here more than two years, anyway.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** Because when we moved to Second Avenue, next to the telephone building there, why I was a kid and we left there before I went to school at the Central School up here on Fourth Avenue.

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**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** Fourth and Third.

**HAYNES:** Well this house that you were born in, do you have any idea how old it is?

**LYONS:** No I don't; it's one of the older buildings around here.

**HAYNES:** Well it has to be one of the very first homes.

**LYONS:** Yeah, one of the very first around here.

**HAYNES:** And is this pretty much as you remember it during your childhood?

**LYONS:** Everything except the trees.

**HAYNES:** The building itself was...

**LYONS:** The building itself is just like, of course, I don't remember, I was too small.

**HAYNES:** But when you were a youngster around town, you were certainly aware of the house?

**LYONS:** Yeah, I was aware of the house here because I went to school up here.

**HAYNES:** So just pretty much as it was?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Back when you were a kid, a...

**LYONS:** They might have put the lattice work under the porch there; I don't think that was ever here in those early days.

**HAYNES:** And this little addition off to the west, that was there back in the early days, this little white piece sticking out here?

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**LYONS:** Well I guess so, that could be, that's [inaudible]...

**HAYNES:** It sort of looks like it was added on, but you don't know when?

**LYONS:** No, I don't know when.

**HAYNES:** Okay, shall we go on down to a...

**LYONS:** It looks like they tried to make a garage out of it, doesn't it?

**HAYNES:** Well I don't, I can't tell, I really can't tell.

**LYONS:** I can't either

**HAYNES:** It looks too narrow for a garage

**LYONS:** Yeah

**HAYNES:** So it must just be a little added room.

**LYONS:** Yeah, that's probably what it is.

**HAYNES:** Okay shall we go on down...

**LYONS:** Okay.

**HAYNES:** To the house on Second Avenue

**LYONS:** Uh huh.

**HAYNES:** Now this place 1045 East Second Avenue, you think you moved to this address when you were about two years old?

**LYONS:** That's what I think, yeah

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, and lived there for how long?

**LYONS:** Lived there, possibly let's see, maybe three to four years.

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**HAYNES:** And did your folks own this house?

**LYONS:** No, they didn't own this house.

**HAYNES:** I think this is the house where you told me that you broke your leg?

**LYONS:** Yeah, walking the picket fence, got my pants leg down over one of the pickets and that threw me off the fence, that unbalanced me and that's when I fell off and the picket stuck through my leg and broke it

**HAYNES:** Now was it an arm or a leg that you broke out there on the horse at your granddads place?

**LYONS:** An arm.

**HAYNES:** An arm, so you had at least two broken bones when you were a kid?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** I think you indicated that this house looked quite a bit different when you were a kid?

**LYONS:** Yeah, it seems to me that they had a different porch on it, a little, instead of just an entry way like that, because the, let's see what was here, they had a, they had a longer porch here, it went out clear to the edge of the house this way, instead of this way, instead of like it is now.

**HAYNES:** It extended to the north side of the house then...

**LYONS:** Yeah

**HAYNES:** And you think the porch stuck out from the...

**LYONS:** Yeah, the porch yeah front

**HAYNES:** Of the present?



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**LYONS:** And the porch was a little further this way.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, of course, I'll bet it wasn't painted these colors back in those days?

**LYONS:** No.

**HAYNES:** What color was it when you remember the place?

**LYONS:** I don't know, I don't remember, one thing, my memory was pretty poor and it hasn't much since then.

**HAYNES:** I think we can pretty much be assured that it wasn't this fancy pink and blue in those days.

**LYONS:** Yeah

**HAYNES:** Now, how many rooms does this house have?

**LYONS:** Well it was the dining room, living room and a dining room, kitchen, and I think there were two little bedrooms if I remember right, maybe.

**HAYNES:** On the lower level.

**LYONS:** On the lower level, there was nothing upstairs.

**HAYNES:** There seems to be a window upstairs now, do think that was maybe just an attic before?

**LYONS:** That was an attic before, uh huh, the house was getting too small because the second sister was born and there was another one expecting so that's why they wanted to move up on to Fourth Avenue there.

**HAYNES:** So the third baby was do at the time you left this house?

**LYONS:** Uh huh.

**HAYNES:** I see, can you remember any other mishaps or doings around here except the broken leg?

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**LYONS:** No, we used to be able to coast down the hill from here on across Main Street.

**HAYNES:** Coast in a wagon or...

**LYONS:** In a, in a sled.

**HAYNES:** Oh, in a sled in the winter time, uh huh, didn't have to worry about any traffic on Main Street then?

**LYONS:** All except the streetcar.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, so you would go over here on Eleventh Street and right down the hill?

**LYONS:** Yeah, right down the hill, yeah.

**HAYNES:** Did you do that by yourself or did you have a parent along to supervise?

**LYONS:** Well the a, next door to us was the Nelson boy, they had four boys and they were all coasters too.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, would that be where this brick building is now or was that a vacant lot?

**LYONS:** It was a vacant lot in here, then, I think the next building was the Nelson house, he run that second hand store down on, almost next to the Snyder building on the Main Street corner on this east side of the street.

**HAYNES:** What was where the telephone building is now?

**LYONS:** Another building just about like this, that's where the Hollopeters lived and he was a blacksmith, worked for Harry Jackson.

**HAYNES:** So there was just one more house here and then the alley?

**LYONS:** One more there on the corner and that's where the judge lived.

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**HAYNES:** So there were two houses here where the phone building is now?

**LYONS:** Yeah, yeah, well the phone building is at the corner yet, there's another place there beyond that.

**HAYNES:** Maybe that isn't an alley I'm seeing, it's just a driveway.

**LYONS:** Well it doesn't go clear through, I don't think.

**HAYNES:** So there were two houses between, this house where you lived and Tenth Street.

**LYONS:** Yeah, there was quite a big vacant lot in between there.

**HAYNES:** About where the phone company driveway is now?

**LYONS:** Where the phone company's driveway is.

**HAYNES:** Well anybody listening to this tape knows that it's 3:00 in the afternoon; the courthouse bell just went off.

**LYONS:** Oh, was that it?

**HAYNES:** Yeah, that was it.

**LYONS:** Pretty light, I guess they keep people awake down here.

**HAYNES:** Now we are at 833 East Fourth Avenue, the house that you moved to when you were five or so years old.

**LYONS:** Yep, that's it right here, we didn't have this big porch to start with, it was a little porch and it extended back under the roof there a little, on this side and that's a hallway there.

**HAYNES:** Just inside the front door is a hallway?

**LYONS:** Yeah, uh huh, then later on why they extended that hallway and put this

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porch on clear across the house.

**HAYNES:** Clear across the front?

**LYONS:** The front, yes

**HAYNES:** Now I understand this house was new when your family moved in.

**LYONS:** Yeah brand new and mother's uncle lived in the second house from here, north.

**HAYNES:** Two houses north of this one?

**LYONS:** Yeah the third house north you might say.

**HAYNES:** Okay, and he was the one that built this house?

**LYONS:** He was the one that built it, I think.

**HAYNES:** And then how long did you live here?

**LYONS:** Oh, I lived here until 1921 or 22.

**HAYNES:** Well till you went to college and then some after the war?

**LYONS:** Yeah

**HAYNES:** So you were kind of in it...

**LYONS:** See I was gone a long time there, over seas all that period of time and traveling around, braking over to Alamosa and one thing and another, you know.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, so you lived here off and on really until you got married, any time you were in Durango, this was your home base?

**LYONS:** Yes, yes.

**HAYNES:** What other rooms are there on the ground floor?

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**LYONS:** Well there was the living room here to the north, right behind that is a bedroom, and then right beyond that is another bedroom and the bathroom.

**HAYNES:** All on the north side?

**LYONS:** Yeah, and on this side here behind the hall is the dining room and the kitchen next to it.

**HAYNES:** On the south side of the house...

**LYONS:** And the pantry right on the rear end of the house.

**HAYNES:** Anything upstairs?

**LYONS:** Nothing upstairs, no.

**HAYNES:** Well what mischief did you get into here?

**LYONS:** Well these buildings, of course, they had a big barn here next door and that's where Harold Lloyd and we would all climb, we could all climb the barns on this side of the street and, but those on the, across the alley in this block, why we couldn't get up there because they were too high, you would have to have a ladder, you know, to get up to the edge of the roof.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** That's why we'd climb on the church cause it had stone that you could walk up at.

**HAYNES:** I see, I see. So you did climb the ones here on Fourth Avenue, but didn't climb the barns over on Third Avenue?

**LYONS:** No, these you could get up on the sheds behind our house here, get right on top of the barn there see, climb up on the edge of the barn roof.

**HAYNES:** Did you ever get hurt doing that?

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**LYONS:** No, I never fell off of there.

**HAYNES:** How about some of your other roof climbing, any of that lead to any injury?

**LYONS:** No, I climbed all over everything there is around; this is the Steins. Steins used to live here and the Swansons next door.

**HAYNES:** You are indicating the houses that are located south of the place you lived?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** And have those places changed much in appearance?

**LYONS:** Not much, there's been a little change and I think they closed up part of this here and changed a little bit on the inside, I don't know what.

**HAYNES:** The one just next door to the south?

**LYONS:** They did it on the back and out the front, yeah.

**HAYNES:** How long was this house then in your mother's possession or in the family's possession?

**LYONS:** I sold it in 1937, I rented it before that because she wasn't living here, she was living in Colorado Springs.

**HAYNES:** So she lived in this house as long as she stayed in Durango?

**LYONS:** Yes.

**HAYNES:** And went to Colorado Springs?

**LYONS:** Uh huh.

**HAYNES:** With you sister?

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**LYONS:** Yeah, yeah.

**HAYNES:** Okay, anything else you can remember about this place?

**LYONS:** I built the garage on this lot here too.

**HAYNES:** You said you built a garage on the back of this lot, was that later on like the 30s or...

**LYONS:** No, it was in the 20s, I built that right after I got graduated from school.

**HAYNES:** From high school you mean?

**LYONS:** From high school, yeah.

**HAYNES:** And you built it on your own, or...

**LYONS:** I built it on my own.

**HAYNES:** Is that building still back there?

**LYONS:** It's still back there.

**HAYNES:** I can't see from here, we should take a swing through the alley and take a look, shouldn't we?

**LYONS:** It's still there, it's right against the barn on the south side, you couldn't build it that way now, but...

**HAYNES:** Well let's go back there and take a look.

**LYONS:** Okay.

**HAYNES:** Okay we are back here in the alley, parked behind this garage that you built and you were talking about the other outbuildings.

**LYONS:** Well we had a, one building that ran all the way around, divided into three

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sections, the first one here was the coal shed, the next one was a little shop that I had, the next one was the wood shed, and then we stacked the wood along the barn that way, you see the barn was right up against the lot line.

**HAYNES:** Okay, and so the wood shed was sort of on the northern edge of that?

**LYONS:** That's why we could get up on that barn here, this great big barn in front of us.

**HAYNES:** Okay, that's, that building was still, that was original too?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Okay, we are indicating the garage, barn that's just north of the lot in question, so the outbuildings went right up to this big one and you climbed on the lower outbuilding on your lot and got onto the barn roof next door?

**LYONS:** Yeah, yeah.

**HAYNES:** Now what about this little garage or barn that you built, a you say you did that all by yourself?

**LYONS:** Yes.

**HAYNES:** How does a young man just out of high school know how to build a barn?

**LYONS:** Can't prove it by me, I just...

**HAYNES:** You just did it.

**LYONS:** I did it, I had it in my mind just how it should be done, I had a pit in the garage that you never would find in a garage now so that you could get down and grease the automobiles if they were in there or change oil.

**HAYNES:** Well now, so this was built as a garage not as a barn?

**LYONS:** Yes, it was built as a garage.



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**HAYNES:** And in the 20s when you built this, did you have a car or had hopes of getting one?

**LYONS:** We never had a car, I rented the garage to a doctor who lived over on, next to the Camps on Third Avenue and he parked his car in there.

**HAYNES:** Now this building we are talking about now has sort of a shingle outside painted brown, is that the way you did it back when...

**LYONS:** No, never had that kind of, it was regular shingles over the years, it's been stained since then.

**HAYNES:** Do you think those are the shingles you put on?

**LYONS:** Yeah, those are the shingles I put on.

**HAYNES:** They've just been painted.

**LYONS:** Yeah

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** And you've noticed there is one little window there.

**HAYNES:** Yes.

**LYONS:** And then a door.

**HAYNES:** Yes.

**LYONS:** And a door, you have to step up a step to open the door because I never made a ground level entrance into that building.

**HAYNES:** Was that intentional?

**LYONS:** I guess it was poor management.

**HAYNES:** Are you saying you would do it differently if you were doing it today?

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**LYONS:** Yes, I'd put it at ground level now.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, but there was a door there originally?

**LYONS:** Yeah

**HAYNES:** It's just that you had to step over the foundation to get into the...

**LYONS:** To get into the garage, yes, uh huh.

**HAYNES:** That does have a concrete foundation?

**LYONS:** Yes.

**HAYNES:** Did you pour that yourself?

**LYONS:** Yes, I poured that, mixed it in a mixing box.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, is this the one piece of architecture that is your doing or, did you ever build anything else?

**LYONS:** Well, the house that I live in, I did most of the planning on it, like I got the idea, outside idea from a magazine ad, and from that why then I planned the inside of the building.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, well we are going to go there next, but before we do that is there anything else you would like to add about this lot?

**LYONS:** No, but you notice there you can't climb up on the buildings here that were right here now I guess they've got doors in there that they never did have, see this was solid siding.

**HAYNES:** You are indicating the building that's just across the alley from...

**LYONS:** Alley, that was the Tom [?] lived there

**HAYNES:** Your mother's place?

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**LYONS:** And

**HAYNES:** Yeah, I can see that that building had kind of a high ceiling so that it looks like the roof starts, oh 12 feet off the ground.

**LYONS:** 12 feet off the ground, yeah.

**HAYNES:** That would be pretty hard to get on to.

**LYONS:** Yes, yes you couldn't get up there and there was another behind the old, the next building was the Henderson house, there's a little bit of a lot right here with some smaller buildings in front, if you remember, then the Henderson house which is that big brick building, it's now a church and it was a mortuary.

**HAYNES:** And did you do some climbing over here?

**LYONS:** No, we didn't do any climbing because it was just like this here you couldn't get up on them.

**HAYNES:** Oh they were all tall, uh huh.

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** What I'm seeing now is a lot shorter but that's sort of a later shed or something.

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Okay shall we go on back to the place where you live now?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Well now we are right back where we started, at the house you are living now, 777 Seventh Avenue, East Seventh Avenue and I'm looking at the house and I'm also looking at this older picture of the house and you've done some remodeling?

**LYONS:** Yes, I've covered over this porch that on the, off of the dining room here.

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**HAYNES:** Now that's on the southeast corner.

**LYONS:** Southeast corner and I made it into, why I where I keep all my junk like an office.

**HAYNES:** And then you've altered the entrance as well?

**LYONS:** And then later on when the wife wanted a little more room for her to entertain in why I took out the wall on the porch on the northeast corner and put it under the lock and key a new door in the front, filled all the arches with some glass brick here on both sides of the door and then on the north side I moved all the windows from the dining room, the south part of the dining room and the one that was in the living room and filled in the arches on the north side here.

**HAYNES:** Which is now the north wall of the house?

**LYONS:** Yeah, the north wall of the house.

**HAYNES:** But this east corner was a porch with one big arch as an entry and three smaller ones on the north.

**LYONS:** Uh huh

**HAYNES:** Now this is the house you said you got the idea from a magazine advertisement?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Do you remember what magazine?

**LYONS:** Nope.

**HAYNES:** Just saw something you liked?

**LYONS:** We'd been, these ready cut houses, you know, they cut them, you order the plan of the house and they cut it and sent it to you in bundles and you erect it, but we were interested in that because several of our friends had built houses like that, Jess Day

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down at Bondad and another one here in town, but when I saw this house in a picture in the ad, why I preferred the outside of this then I arranged the rooms on the inside or I think maybe I did it the other way, the rooms were showing and then I put the roof on, different roof.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** That's what I did here.

**HAYNES:** So you didn't order pieces shipped in?

**LYONS:** No.

**HAYNES:** It was just custom build.

**LYONS:** It was all custom built right here.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, and the year of construction?

**LYONS:** Well yes I had a school teacher that was a friend that I'd known for many years, ran the manual training and he wanted to build this house and so I contracted everything from him except the light fixtures and the wiring and that went to Hocker, then I did most of the other work there, all the painting and staining and everything, I made the stain out of two different colors, yellow ecru and red and linseed oil, it's still that way.

**HAYNES:** The stain on the stucco you are speaking of?

**LYONS:** No on the woodwork.

**HAYNES:** Yeah.

**LYONS:** There's been no stain on the plaster because that's cement.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** On the inside, why it's plaster and, of course, that's been painted many times on the inside.

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**HAYNES:** What year was this built?

**LYONS:** In 1926.

**HAYNES:** And you've lived here ever since?

**LYONS:** Yeah, 53 years.

**HAYNES:** 63 years.

**LYONS:** 63 years, yeah.

**HAYNES:** That's a while, any other remodeling except here on the front of the house?

**LYONS:** No, that is all the remodeling that I've ever done, I did do a little excavating down underneath the house here, took out the old root cellar here and put it into the shelves and you can see the little tin things that cover the ventilation ducts here in the front.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** Under the windows.

**HAYNES:** So you've got a basement with shelves down there now?

**LYONS:** Yes.

**HAYNES:** And you garage is down there too?

**LYONS:** The garage is down there too; well it's still as modern as most houses are right now.

**HAYNES:** Real comfortable house, any thing else you want to tell me about the house?

**LYONS:** No, there is nothing else that I want to say.

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**HAYNES:** Do you still have the plans you drew for it?

**LYONS:** No plans.

**HAYNES:** No plans, you just started building?

**LYONS:** Well I drew the floor plan and then, of course, it wasn't the contractor, he did the rest of it.

**HAYNES:** I see, but are those drawings still in existence?

**LYONS:** Yeah, I have them.

**HAYNES:** That's what I was wondering.

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Now I had forgotten to ask you about sanitary facilities in these various houses where you lived, you mentioned bathrooms in most of them, but let's go back to the oldest house, the one that your grand folks had on Junction Creek, now did they have indoor plumbing back when you can first remember that place?

**LYONS:** No.

**HAYNES:** Okay.

**LYONS:** They didn't have plumbing in there till they built a water main up Junction Creek Road.

**HAYNES:** And when would that have been?

**LYONS:** That would have been somewhere in the neighborhood of the, between 1915 and 20, I imagine.

**HAYNES:** So there was no running water in the house at all?

**LYONS:** No. No running, they had a well.

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**HAYNES:** And you had, that was outdoors?

**LYONS:** It was an outdoor well with a pulley and the water was down about 50 feet.

**HAYNES:** And did you use a bucket then?

**LYONS:** Yeah, we used a bucket, had a bucket where they pull it up, why you had a weight on one end and the bucket on the other end, draw it up, then empty the bucket up, then you'd have to pull it back so that the weight would be up.

**HAYNES:** Then you would actually carry the bucket into the house?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** It was only a few steps to the back door.

**HAYNES:** And that was for cooking, for washing?

**LYONS:** Cooking and washing and everything.

**HAYNES:** Everything?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Then I suppose there was an outhouse?

**LYONS:** There was an outhouse about 50 feet north of the house up towards the Junction Creek area.

**HAYNES:** Up toward the creek, okay, was that out toward the barn?

**LYONS:** Well it was, yeah, it was in front of the barn.

**HAYNES:** Between the barn and Junction Creek?

**LYONS:** Yeah, between the barn and the road.



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**HAYNES:** Okay, then when this water main was put in, did they remodel the house to accommodate this or what?

**LYONS:** No, they, all they did was they put the water in because they didn't have a cesspool and then when they finally, I don't know what they did, when they finally started building east there up on the hill why then they had to put in, connect up with the sewer so that it would all go down.

**HAYNES:** So first there was an outhouse then there was a cesspool and then they connected with the sewer line?

**LYONS:** Yeah, yeah.

**HAYNES:** When they had this cesspool, they did have sanitary facilities then in the house?

**LYONS:** They never did, well, they never did till after they had the a, well they didn't have, actually have a bathroom till after the water, city water come into there.

**HAYNES:** And do you remember when the main was put in?

**LYONS:** No, I don't, I really don't.

**HAYNES:** Okay, how about cooking, what was the source of heat for cooking?

**LYONS:** Well they had a coal stove; they had the coal stoves downstairs in the living room and then one of the front bedrooms or the front bedroom.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, and that was for heating?

**LYONS:** That was for heating.

**HAYNES:** And coal in the kitchen as well?

**LYONS:** Coal in the kitchen, all of it.

**HAYNES:** When you used to go out there to your grand folks place, you said you

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would go out there on Sundays?

**LYONS:** Yes.

**HAYNES:** What was the means of transportation?

**LYONS:** We used the street car.

**HAYNES:** And that took you as far as...

**LYONS:** It took us as far as the north end of the fairgrounds and that's where they stopped, or we had them stop there and we would unload and walk across there up to where the house was.

**HAYNES:** So the rest of it was on foot?

**LYONS:** There was no other houses in that area.

**HAYNES:** And that's what about half a mile?

**LYONS:** Oh, possibly shorter, a little over a quarter.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, okay moving along to the house you were born in, what about sanitary facilities there, what do you know about that?

**LYONS:** Well, I think that was about the same kind of a deal, I never did know whether there was any outside toilet facilities, but there might have been.

**HAYNES:** That's because you moved from there when you still so young?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Well how about the place on Second Avenue where you lived when you were a toddler?

**LYONS:** I don't, I think they had a cesspool behind that house.

**HAYNES:** This is the one next to the telephone building?

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**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Do you remember anything about the heating stove, cooking stove there?

**LYONS:** They had coal stoves, yeah.

**HAYNES:** Now in the house that your mother built that you lived in until you were a young man?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** That was built in 1902?

**LYONS :** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Correct, what about the bathroom and kitchen in that house?

**LYONS:** Well we had, we had a coal stove in the kitchen, a coal stove in the dining room that heated the bedrooms and the living, and the dining room as well as the living room, and we had bathrooms built in that house and we had a cesspool out behind.

**HAYNES:** But you had running water from the time that the house was built?

**LYONS:** Yeah, yeah, we also had an outdoor privy out there too, with a, finally a flush toilet in it.

**HAYNES:** An outdoor privy with a flush toilet?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** So you had an outdoor bathroom?

**LYONS:** Yeah, when you pulled the seat down, why it flushed.

**HAYNES:** This was in addition to what was in the house?

**LYONS:** Well yeah, that's what; they thought they would have to have that before

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they on account of the cesspool.

**HAYNES:** I'm not following you, you had an indoor bathroom?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** And an outdoor bathroom with a flush toilet?

**LYONS:** See they had this privy was built I suppose for the people who were working on the house.

**HAYNES:** I see.

**LYONS:** And then later on the building was never tore down, it was still there.

**HAYNES:** Okay.

**LYONS:** And the a, it was connected with the cesspool and it had a flush seat whenever you sat on the seat why it flushed.

**HAYNES:** Was the house plumbing connected to the cesspool?

**LYONS:** Yeah, the house was all connected to the cesspool too.

**HAYNES:** And then later there was a city main?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** A city sewer?

**LYONS:** Yeah, when they got the sewer in why then the cesspool was filled up and the everything the plumbing was all connected with the sewer in the alley.

**HAYNES:** Do you remember when that was, were you still living at home then?

**LYONS:** No, let's see, I don't remember whether I was still living there or not, however, I do remember helping to fill in the cesspool with dirt.

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**HAYNES:** Uh huh, now this is the place at 833 Fourth Avenue East?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Anything else about those facilities there at the house?

**LYONS:** Well, afterwards they a, when I started renting the house, we finally sold it, why they put the bathroom between the two bedrooms, always before it was off of the kitchen and the rear bedroom.

**HAYNES:** So there was some remodeling done in there?

**LYONS:** Yeah, remodeling inside.

**HAYNES:** And this would have been in the 30s after your mother left Durango?

**LYONS:** About '37, I think I sold it.

**HAYNES:** Cooking on coal in that house?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Earlier you had talked about the garage you built there on that lot.

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** But that you never had a car?

**LYONS:** That's right.

**HAYNES:** When did you get your first car?

**LYONS:** I didn't get a car until 1929.

**HAYNES:** And by that time you were living in the house you are living in now?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

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**HAYNES:** And did your mother ever have a car?

**LYONS:** No.

**HAYNES:** So if she wanted to some place you took her, as long as she lived in Durango?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Well it stands to reason that the house you are living in now built in 1926 had everything conveniently located in it at the time it was built, correct?

**LYONS:** Yes.

**HAYNES:** By that time the city had water mains.

**LYONS:** Yeah, we had water mains...

**HAYNES:** Sewage lines?

**LYONS:** Back before I bought this lot, the sewer was, ended right at the back of the house and the water main also ended in the front, across the street here.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** So if you bought a, built a house beyond Eighth Street here, then you had to run your own sewer down the alley and the same way for the water in the front.

**HAYNES:** So you were lucky, or were you smart, that's why you picked this lot?

**LYONS:** Smart.

**HAYNES:** Actually you said this was two lots that you built on here?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Were the corner lots any larger than the...

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**LYONS:** No, all the lots were the same.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** 26 lots to a block, 13 in a half block.

**HAYNES:** And do you know the dimensions of this lot here?

**LYONS:** 25 x 150.

**HAYNES:** A single lot would be 25 x 150, so you have 50 x 150?

**LYONS:** Yeah, I have 50 x 150 and these, one thing like Alamosa which was a railroad town, a company town, Pueblo and Denver, wherever the railroad built, and they used it, they had town sites for sale, why the same lots, the same kind of a pattern was every place.

**HAYNES:** Same size as well or do you know?

**LYONS:** Yeah, the size of the lots were all 25 feet, a lot of times in Denver, if you go over towards where the railroad yards used to be, the roundhouse, why you could still see just little 25 foot brick buildings.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, well there's...

**LYONS:** Built right together.

**HAYNES:** There's a few small buildings over here on, it would be Sixth Avenue right behind you.

**LYONS:** Yeah, yeah, right down the street, it's down on...

**HAYNES:** And that's not very big.

**LYONS:** It's down on Fourth Street.

**HAYNES:** Here on Sixth Avenue I noticed some last week.

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**LYONS:** It's Fifth Avenue and Fourth Street, one over here on these apartments over here on Ninth Street between Fourth and Fifth Avenue, they are..

**HAYNES:** Go ahead.

**LYONS:** About the same, they were 25 foot lots, only they were the wrong way, the all fronted out on Ninth Street.

**HAYNES:** A lot of these folks around here that built must have bought two lots.

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** And a, cause many of these houses are just far too big to fit in a 25 foot lot, so you think folks did what you did?

**LYONS:** Yeah, well I think most of em, no most of em built em on the very north side of their lot, where I put my property, the building in the center so that there would be some space on both sides of the house, if you will notice over across the street, all of those brick buildings over there are the north side of the house so that the drip goes down practically on the lot line on the north side.

**HAYNES:** Yeah, you are pointing catawampus across the intersection here. Earlier we talked about Brookside Park.

**LYONS:** Uh huh.

**HAYNES:** And you said that's where folks would go on a Sunday for a picnic. How did that look then, what were the facilities there if any?

**LYONS:** Well we had, I don't know whether there was any toilets out there, I never had to use any, but you had, they had picnic tables, then they had a great big screen, they showed moving pictures there.

**HAYNES:** Now, I know what Brookside Park looks like today with that A-Frame thing and the parking lot and so forth, where would this screen have been situated with regard to that?

**LYONS:** It was clear up on the north part of the park, there was a corner right on the,



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on the, that would be 23rd Street, so it must have been two lots from 23rd Street that the screen was up.

**HAYNES:** I think there is a motel in that area now.

**LYONS:** Well there is a motel there now.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** But somebody, and I don't know who it was, I think the streetcar line still owned it that was Durango Realty.

**HAYNES:** The lots you mean?

**LYONS:** Yeah, I think they owned the whole works there from the, where Junction Creek crosses Main Street clear up to the corner on 23rd Street.

**HAYNES:** Now on the south side of the park today, there is an older house that looks like it has kind of a lily pond or a pond that's been filled in.

**LYONS:** That was a store, they used to, I can always remember my cousin and I going down there to buy bananas, have a banana...

**HAYNES:** But that wasn't part of the park that was on the south side of the park?

**LYONS:** Well that was on part of the, it was on the park ground, but it wasn't part of the park.

**HAYNES:** What about the little thing on the south side of that building that appears to me to have been a lake or something, a pond? There's no water in it today, but there is a depression there

**LYONS:** I don't think there was ever any lake in there, there had been a lot of filling and one thing and another, dirt hauled around there so you would never know just exactly what's going there, but...

**HAYNES:** Now was the park all on the east of the creek?

**Oral History Interview with ALVA F. LYONS, Nov. 24, 1989, Durango, Colorado,  
by Rae Haynes, for the Center of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College**

**LYONS:** All on the west side of the street.

**HAYNES:** Creek?

**LYONS:** Oh the creek.

**HAYNES:** It was between Main Avenue and the creek?

**LYONS:** Now let's see, let's get this question right

**HAYNES:** The park was on the east side of the creek?

**LYONS:** On the east side of the creek.

**HAYNES:** Between the creek and Main Avenue?

**LYONS:** Yes.

**HAYNES:** And it didn't cross the street?

**LYONS:** No.

**HAYNES:** Didn't cross the creek?

**LYONS:** No.

**HAYNES:** Just that one little parcel?

**LYONS:** Just that one little parcel, yeah.

**HAYNES:** And it was about the same size it is today then?

**LYONS:** It was about the same size.

**HAYNES:** Not very big?

**LYONS:** Not very big

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**HAYNES:** About how many picnic tables, do you remember there?

**LYONS:** I don't think there was over three or four.

**HAYNES:** So basically it was just a grass place and you could go wade in the creek?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** And have a picnic, shade trees.

**LYONS:** No shade, well those old cottonwoods are still there.

**HAYNES:** Along the creek?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** That's right.

**HAYNES:** So other than wading in the creek and eating, what did you do there?

**LYONS:** Well I don't know anything that we did outside of watch the picture show at one time.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** It was a very limited, there was no swings, or no other things of that kind that you could.

**HAYNES:** No ball diamond or anything; it wasn't big enough for that?

**LYONS:** No.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh, now you went out there on the streetcar. When did they take up the streetcar line?

**LYONS:** Well they took that up when they started to pave Main Street.

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**HAYNES:** And you indicated that you thought that might be during the Depression.

**LYONS:** Yes.

**HAYNES:** And the source of paving material?

**LYONS:** Well they got the first base they put down was just sand rock up at Animas City off of the side hill on the west side of the street.

**HAYNES:** Just right close to Main Street?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Not up on Animas Mountain itself?

**LYONS:** No, not clear up on the mountain, no, it was really not sand, it was a mixture of clay not gone into rock, it was so you had to, you couldn't crumble it up, but it would make a solid base.

**HAYNES:** Uh huh.

**LYONS:** Underneath the asphalt when they laid it.

**HAYNES:** And they put asphalt over the top of that?

**LYONS:** Yeah.

**HAYNES:** Okay and this was all from the depot out past the fairgrounds or what?

**LYONS:** Yes, I think it went, I didn't think it went to the fairgrounds, I think it just went to the top of, it went as far as the railroad track where it crossed Main Avenue, 14th Street.

**HAYNES:** Okay, then on further north it stayed dirt for...

**LYONS:** It was dirt, yes.

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**HAYNES:** For a while, have any idea when they paved north main?

**LYONS:** Well it must have been during some of the projects of the government when they were here, either the CC camp or WPA.

**HAYNES:** Which would have been in the '30s?

**[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 by Ellison and Renee Morgan on February 7, 2008, including conversion to PDF file format for online access on the Center of Southwest Studies website.]*

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