

Transcript of Oral History Interview with Dale Satterthwaite

Interviewed by Kathy Bradford in Ogden, Utah, October 26, 2012.

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Kathy Bradford: Today is October 26, 2012, and I'm speaking with Dale Satterthwaite, Senior Vice President of BIG-D Construction, at his office in Ogden. First I'd like you to tell me where you were born and grew up and how you came to be a builder and into construction.

Dale Satterthwaite: Well, I grew up near Ogden in a small town called Harrisville. That's where I lived my younger life and my early married life.

KB: Were you on a farm?

DS: No, it was just a rural environment. It wasn't as bedroom community as it is now, but it was just a rural area much like western Brigham City at that point. I started working in construction as soon as I returned home from church service, missionary work. I've been in the construction business ever since. I'm in my 40th year.

KB: How long did it take to become manager in a place like this?

DS: Well, it doesn't happen this way very often probably, or it doesn't at all. But when I started with BIG-D Construction, I was probably the seventh employee.

KB: So it wasn't named after you?

DS: No, it's not named after me. I'm not the D even though my name starts with D. BIG-D is the founder's nickname, because he was a big man. He was 6'4" and his name was Dee Livingood. That's what he called his company, which he started a few years before I went to work for him. We've gone from 7 employees to more than 700 employees now.

KB: And you moved from Harrisville to Huntsville, to the Valley?

DS: Yes, I've lived in the Ogden Valley for 25 years now.

KB: Did you move there just because you like it there?

DS: Yes, Harrisville got to be more urbanized. We lived on the highway. Had we not lived on the highway, we might not have moved, but we lived on the highway that runs through the middle of Harrisville, and we wanted to get away from that. So that's what kind of pushed us into moving.

KB: When you first started as an employee at BIG-D, I guess you did a lot of the things that you're still doing, but not in a managerial position, right?

DS: Right. I was a craftsman, and I'm a journeyman carpenter by trade. Education – I have a

couple of years of college. My training was a four-year carpentry apprenticeship.

KB: Were you doing mostly commercial buildings or homes?

DS: It's always been commercial and industrial buildings, everything really from office buildings to manufacturing buildings, food plants, dairies, and distribution. We do a little of everything really, or a lot of everything. BIG-D is a pretty big company.

KB: You probably drive around and see buildings that you've built in the whole area, don't you?

DS: Part of the satisfaction of being in the construction business is that you can take pride in some of the buildings that you have built over the years. At this point in my career I have been able to build temples. Being part of building temples is special because they're going to endure for many years.

KB: How did you get into building temples? Did you just put in a bid?

DS: We've always been interested in doing temple construction. It was probably about 7 or 8 years ago that we finally got an opportunity to do some remodeling work during a shut-down period in the Salt Lake Temple. That was our start. We went in one summer during their shut down and did some very sensitive work on the fourth floor and did a good job for them. As a result of that, I think, we got an opportunity to bid on the Twin Falls Temple and won that project.

KB: Did you build that one from the ground up?

DS: Yes, that was the first ground-up temple that we did. Since then, we have recently completed the Brigham Temple. We are in the process of the renovation of the Ogden Temple and its complete grounds, including the tabernacle, site improvements and parking there. We continue to do work during maintenance shut downs in the Salt Lake Temple. We have crews in there doing work that needs to be done while there are no patrons there.

KB: So now you're getting a reputation with the Church. They see the quality of your work, and I'm guessing that kind of mushrooms. Let's get to the Brigham City Temple because that's basically what I want to know about. I can't visualize what you would start out doing when they call you and let you know you have the contract for the temple and want you to do the project. Where do you start?

DS: Each temple might be a little different in its process in that sometimes they're fully designed and developed, and you just start construction immediately. In Brigham we were hired early and able to provide budgeting and constructability input during the design process with the architectural and engineering firms.

KB: So you work with an architectural firm and the Church.

DS: Right.

KB: And Brigham City Corporation?

DS: Brigham City wanted to make sure things were built to code, and the architects and engineers are involved in making sure that happens. They have some interface meetings with them to talk about issues that they might have. Our interface with Brigham City was just during the construction process -- to have the inspectors come in and inspect our work and make sure it was all appropriately done.

KB: When you started out, I saw you excavating for the parking lot and the lower levels of the building. Is that the first thing you did?

DS: Yes, every building starts with a foundation, and so you excavate for the foundation, and everything builds upon that -- whether it be a steel structure or a concrete structure or masonry. All those components were used in the Brigham Temple, and then just come together into a finished product.

KB: From a layman's point of view, it looked like there was a metal framework, and then pieces were attached separately to that.

DS: Yes, it was a structural steel frame with some concrete core walls at the ends where the elevator shafts are, which gives it the rigidity in the structure. Then, of course, once the steel structure was up and in its framed condition, what you saw going on were the precast exterior panels, which are precast concrete.

KB: What do you use to make them white like that?

DS: It's actually the concrete, and it was produced in a plant in California in a controlled environment with natural materials. For some of the glitter you see in there, there is actual stone in the Brigham precast, which gives it that stony, glittery look if you look at it closely.

KB: So does your company contract with them to do it, or is that the Church?

DS: Yes, as the general contractor, we contract with all the different trades that come together and put their work in to make a complete project. We self-perform some work. The concrete work -- we do all of our own concrete; but other than that, most all of the work is subcontracted to specialty trades. Our job is to coordinate all of them and make sure they know when it is their time to come to put their particular work in place.

KB: Were they usually pretty timely to come and work with you when you needed them?

DS: That's just part of the business. It's a communication thing. We have a schedule that we are building by, and we'll have the complete project filled out from beginning to end. We will have that schedule and give them the schedule when we sign them up. Their work might not start for 8, 10, 12, 15 months down the road from when we start, but they know when their window is and when it's going to fit. Then as we get closer, we're able to update them and communicate and

make sure, "Hey, we're still on schedule. We're going to be ready for you this week." This might be several weeks early or a week or two later than planned.

That's just part of the coordination that a general contractor goes through.

KB: You know, I go to the dental office right across the street from the temple. I was there a couple of times during the construction when somebody would say, "Okay, everybody get out of your chairs and come over here by the window. They're putting the panel on the side." So there was an audience standing there looking out the window to watch that happen.

DS: In Brigham City, because it's such a close community, I think there were a lot more eyes on the project than normal, and it was a very special project for Brigham.

KB: I have been talking to a lot of people about it, and it seems that everybody feels they have ownership in it.

DS: They do. It's their temple. We were building their temple, meaning Brigham residents and the surrounding area's temple. There was a lot of interest in that.

KB: Is that good for you and your workers or not?

DS: Well, we have to be careful because we have a construction site where there are a lot of safety concerns. That's why the fence goes up. That's why barriers go up, and we try to keep the public outside of those barriers. Generally that works well.

KB: I didn't hear any complaints about that. Are all of those workers your employees?

DS: All of the management were our employees, and then we had tradesmen on the project, too, whether they'd be carpenters doing the concrete work or carpenters working on the interior. But, yes, they were all our workers.

I think a special thing the Brigham area Saints did for the workers, they set up with the missionaries that were there on site, Elder and Sister Peck, early on. I think throughout the stakes that the temple serves in that district, they rotated the opportunity to bring lunch to the workers every Thursday. I think that gave the Saints a very special opportunity to feel part of the temple project. I think for them to bring sandwiches or whatever they brought, I think the workers were very appreciative of that. At first there were some workers who were a little bit apprehensive about joining in. "What's going on?" "Why is this?" "Why are they doing that?" But after they learned that it was just some good Saints wanting to participate and thank them for their work on the temple, they embraced it. I think it was a good thing for the workers because not every worker is an LDS worker, and I think it was quite an experience for some of them to think that people would serve them like that and respect what they do like that. So I think there was some benefit that was had on both sides, both on the service side for the Saints and on the receiving side.

KB: You know they have the young missionaries come to your house for dinner, and one night

these two elders came to our place. When they got there, they were so excited because they had been able to go inside the temple and do some cleaning on the upper level. They were just ecstatic!

DS: That was probably near the end when the Church had taken possession of the temple because we couldn't let anybody in there doing that until we turned it over. Once we have a turnover of the temple to the Church Temple Department, then they begin their process of putting in the furnishings and the furniture and the fixtures that go in the temple after we're done. That's when they start cleaning, too, and I think they involved some of the local members. During the open house there was a cleaning crew in there every night.

Even though it hadn't been dedicated, there was a special spirit that came into the Brigham Temple. I have to compliment the people here – everyone who was involved in the project – because in my mind everything that was required was done to near perfection. There was the church side and their architects in planning the programming for the temple and the architects and engineers that helped put the plans together to build it and the workers who actually built it.

KB: Well, you were the ones who built it. You have to take a lot of the credit.

DS: The credit for a successful project is shared by all who contributed to it. On the Brigham City Temple everything came together and aligned on this project, and that was a special thing, too.

KB: Doesn't that always happen?

DS: It doesn't always happen. This temple was probably built in a record time, and we say to the Church Temple Special Projects group, "Please don't reset the bar and think that every temple project can be built in this amount of time because special things happened that made it all come together very well."

KB: Did you have any glitches with your construction plans?

DS: There are always glitches in a construction project. There are things that the Church might decide to do differently because they've had an experience in another temple somewhere else in the world that they might say, "Oh, this needs to be incorporated in all projects."

KB: Is that helpful for you or not?

DS: Well, no. It hurts the schedule because something's brought up to incorporate into the project and it's not been planned for. It has to fit somewhere in that schedule, so something's got to slide forward or backward to allow it to happen, and that's just part of the dynamics of having a project come together. We incorporated several of those things that came up during the project and still were able to deliver the temple to the Temple Department when they wanted it.

KB: After you deliver the temple, are you finished? Do you stay for the open house? I know that the workers were one of the first special groups to tour the temple.

DS: There was a special evening set aside for anyone who had been involved in the construction of the temple. There were a lot more people there than they thought were going to be there. They were all invited to make that their family night and bring their families up. There were a lot there, and they were able to walk through and see the temple in its finished state.

KB: Were they touched to see how beautifully it turned out?

DS: How could you not be? I haven't heard any specific stories, but I think with every temple there have to be some workers that are touched, and somewhere down the road, whether it's sooner or later, it might bring them to change their lives so they become temple worthy. I'm sure Elder and Sister Peck gathered some of those stories for the history that they put together for the temple project.

KB: I was invited to the Media tour at the beginning of the open house, and while I was there, Elder Peck showed me the sculpture he'd done to honor the workers.

DS: I was amazed at what he was able to do. He's not an artist by trade. It's a beautiful sculpture. I actually purchased one of them. It means a lot to me being in the construction business, and really his portrayal of the Master's Builder – that's really what a craftsman working on a temple does. There's a special spirit that comes with working on a temple. In every meeting held about the project, it always started with prayer, which is totally unique to temple work. We don't do that on all our other projects, but it does bring a special spirit to those projects. I think the big difference between a temple project versus a normal project is the help and aid of the spirit in getting things done.

KB: It's a beautiful place. I've heard about all these special woods and tiles and seen them after the building was completed. Were you in charge of getting them?

DS: We were involved with them, but were working with the subcontractors who do that portion of the work. Yes, there was stone from Egypt that got shipped to China that got fabricated and finished. There were some stones from Turkey, too. Mostly the interior. The exterior is all the precast concrete which came out of a plant in California, and it's pretty. The color is white.

KB: Were you there the day the Angel Moroni was installed?

DS: I was there. We waited all day long, but he finally went up in the mid-afternoon, but we just had too much wind that day. You can't lift loads on a crane when there are winds over 15 or 20 miles an hour. There were a lot of people there that day – some antsy and some probably impatiently waiting.

KB: Do you know Jim Buchanan who's the Director of Emergency Services here in Brigham City?

DS: I know who he is. I don't know him.

KB: Well, I interviewed him, and he said there were so many people there waiting, and finally one by one they just left and went away, but when they heard he was going up, he said, "Whoosh! They were all back."

DS: I guess phone calls were made. In today's social networking media it doesn't take much or long.

KB: Is there anything else you want to say about the Brigham Temple?

DS: That it has been a very special project for us to be involved in here at BIG-D. It takes a full orchestra to pull off a project like this. I hand it to all the people that were involved from our managers on down to the craftsmen that made it all happen because it turned out to be a very beautiful temple. It's one of a kind and will be special in my mind and heart for a long time as I'm sure it will be to all of those who will come to the temple daily.

KB: Oh, people just love it, and my friends who are not LDS were impressed by its spirit and beauty. I'm sure you know about the lawsuits from the protesters. Some of my friends who are not of our faith told me they hoped none of us attributed these action to them because most of them were very supportive of the temple.

DS: I think it's just some of those special-interest groups that get a little bit overzealous.

KB: I would like to ask you about your work on the Ogden Temple. That was my temple for a lot of years.

DS: It is still mine. It's going to be a very beautiful temple, too. It will be unique in its own way. It's a very large temple. I've heard that Ogden was one of the busiest temples before it was shut down to do this renovation. It will still have the same capacity, but it will have a whole different look.

KB: I'm sure you have different issues to deal with in building a larger temple in a more urban environment, like more trouble getting in and out.

DS: You know, you just plan for it. Once it flows it seems to work fine. We only have one gate that's open, and you go in and out through the one gate, and we kind of control the access because we can't have people wandering in.

KB: Do they try?

DS: Not really any more. Once in a while someone will come, but we have it signed well enough that they know that any visitors should contact the missionaries that are there on site each day.

KB: Do they always have those temple construction missionaries?

DS: Yes, we have on all that we've done. They're there to interface with the public. You've got

Primary groups that are interested; you've got Relief Society groups. They're there to interface with any of those groups that come and want to see any progress that's happening.

KB: Do you want to keep doing temples?

DS: Well, we'd love to continue to be involved in temple construction. Of course, I don't think anyone would feel that they could be involved only in temples. In fact, the Church wouldn't want it to be your only type of work or to have your whole business dependent on building temples.

KB: Were you there for any of the events like the celebration and dedication, those kinds of things?

DS: There were very few that were invited to the dedication other than those who live in the temple district or in Utah. I guess all Utahns got to participate in the dedication, but as far as the youth celebration the evening before, I wasn't invited to that. It was pretty hard to get tickets to that because it was not a big enough venue to hold many people.

KB: They had 4,000 youth performing on that small football field.

DS: That's right, but it's a community thing, and I think it's important to have those kinds of celebrations with the opening of the temple.

KB: It's meaningful to them, and I thought our celebration in Brigham City was very spiritual and skillfully done. I loved it.

DS: And it's something the youth will remember.

KB: You mentioned working on the Twin Falls Temple.

DS: Yes, Twin Falls, Ogden and, of course, Brigham City.

KB: So you're committed to temples along with your other buildings for some time.

DS: As long as we can be successful in winning temples. Again, we have to be competitive and win them. There are other good contractors that are building temples, too. We're one of many and just appreciative of the ones we're able to do.

KB: I would like to ask you about making buildings earthquake-proof, because all over town in Brigham we've had a lot of construction to make that happen. I'm sure you have to consider that for temples and other buildings.

DS: Now any new construction has to be built to a certain codes, which new codes require them to be seismically strong enough to withstand earthquake movement. The engineers that the Church hired are responsible to make sure all the components that go into a temple are engineered and put together in a fashion that during a seismic event, they will withstand that

action. I think a temple, whether they do anything extra I don't know, is definitely engineered to withstand an earthquake.

KB: You don't expect them to fall down anytime soon.

DS: No. During the design and construction of temples, the intent that engineers and architects keep in the back of their minds is that this is a building that will endure for a very long time.

KB: I know you have a meeting, and I don't want to keep you past that time. But I would like to ask what it does for you personally to be building a temple compared to other buildings.

DS: Well, of course, a temple holds a special place in my mind, in my career. You can see that since I've been in this business for 40 years, I'm getting close to the end of my career. Maybe not the end, but I feel very fortunate in having been able to win some temple projects and participate in temple building during my career. They absolutely have been high points in my career.

KB: Have they changed you a little?

DS: I think it's understanding what goes into the temple-building. Of course, I knew what it took to build a building, but building a temple is the same, but different in a very special way.

KB: I appreciate what you've done for us in Brigham City and your talking with me here today.