

Transcript of Interview with Ula Marie Nielsen Cobb

Interviewed by Larry Douglass and Joann Penrod March 29, 2007, Brigham City, Utah

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Larry Douglass: We're at Ula Cobb's house at 539 N. 100 E. in Brigham City. Today is March 29, 2007, and we're going to ask her a few questions about Brigham City's history and about her life here.

Ula, it's a pleasure to be here at your home today. Tell us about your parents immigrating to Utah and your early childhood.

Ula Cobb: Well, we came when I was four years old. My dad and my oldest brother came over and were working here in Brigham for a year. Then they sent enough money for us to come – my other four brothers and Mother and I. We came in to New York. It took us 18 days on the water. Then we got into New York and into Ellis Island. The Statue of Liberty was the first thing we saw, which still stayed in our minds all these years. At Ellis Island they wouldn't let us off the boat until we all had shots. I've still got the mark on my shoulder from the smallpox shot. Then we got on a train and rode the train from New York to Brigham City. My dad had a place for us, and we lived uptown right there where Ken Jensen's store was on the corner of 1st South and Main. There was a Madsen that had come before we did, and he had a photography shop there, and we lived in part of their house for quite a few years.

LD: What year was that?

UC: When I first came to Utah, it was 1913 or 14. I was only 4, and I'm 98 now. From there we went out to Horsley's. They had a shop uptown. Do you remember Horsley's?

LD: Yes.

UC: Well, my dad and brothers went to work for them out on a ranch in Promontory, and we went out there for five years, and that was the best five years of our lives. I was 10, and my younger brother was 9. When the threshers would come out, we'd have to hook up a team of horses and drive five miles up the canyon to get water and bring it back when the windmills were out down at the place. We'd haul water to the threshers, and my mother fed them while they were there. We were out there for five years, and we learned to ride horses. My brother and I took care of a man from Logan who had a ranch out there. He'd go home and get us to come and ride out there and feed his stock for him when he was gone. John Adams had a big farm out there, and my dad and brothers would help him in the hay and grain, too. My brothers and I would get on horseback and go for a ride out to the lake and go swimming in the lake and get salt all over us and come. Then we'd go up on our other place that was five miles up in the mountains and play around the cedar trees and play hide-and-seek on horseback. One time we were up there gathering the service berries on the big bush. We came around, and here came a little bear around the other way. Boy! We got out of there in a hurry! That was Promontory.

After we were out there five years, we moved into Brigham on the Valentine fruit farm down on 8th West. We lived in an adobe house that's still there, down the lane. We lived there when I was going to high school. From there we moved up on 3rd South and 5th West just above the high school, but where the high school is now was our orchards. There were pear trees all the way around and then peaches.

We had all kinds of fruit on that farm, and we picked fruit from daylight to dark. We were there five years.

LD: So you went to Box Elder High where the Junior High is now?

UC: Yes, I went to Box Elder High School up here, and it was great. We moved up on 5th East just above the high school and lived there until my parents moved to Salt Lake. Bud and I got married and bought this place here in Brigham. We lived uptown on 1st South and 1st East for a while, and then this property came available. John Baird was a realtor. He sold us this piece of ground, and all it had on it was a little three-room house right over here to the north. We bought this place (¾ of an acre) then for \$300.

LD: Prices have changed, haven't they?

UC: Yes, they have.

Joann Penrod: What year were you married?

UC: 1927, and we bought this place in '28. There was nothing here but the little three-room house, but the house had water in. Of course, it didn't have a bathroom or anything, just the water. We lived there until we saved enough money so Bud could build this house in the middle of the lot.

LD: It's a nice house. He did a good job.

UC: He did do a good job. It's a warm house. It stays warm. In the winter it's really nice. Well, he built this himself. He had help with the basement, but he did all the rest of it himself. First he worked at Second Street. Then when Thiokol came in, he went to work for Thiokol for 17 years. He was a millwright out there and he'd come home from work at Thiokol and work on this house.

LD: As you were growing up in Brigham City, do you have any outstanding memories of some happenings in town?

UC: They had Peach Days, which was Peach Days.

LD: Not like it is today?

UC: No.

LD: Tell us about Peach Days.

UC: They had more floats than anything. They had a few horses, and most of them were floats. They didn't have all these automobiles and trucks like there are nowadays. Peach Days was Peach Days, and we used to take pictures. I don't know where they ever went to. I had all kinds of pictures of the Peach Day parades from years back, and they disappeared. We haven't been able to find them.

LD: Well, if you ever find them, we'd like to make copies of them.

UC: Yes, I'd like to know where they went.

LD: So were they home-made floats?

UC: Everybody would get together and make them, and they were pretty – not Peach Days like they are now. I marched in the Peach Day parade because of the Veterans of Foreign Wars one year. And I rode one of Norm Lichtenstein's horses in the parade one year. He had horses and had me ride one of them in the parade.

LD: Were the horses pulling the floats?

UC: No, they had cars pulling the floats, but they had a lot of horses in it. It wasn't all automobiles like it is now.

LD: Did each ward do a float?

UC: Yes. Each ward did one, and they had some from over in Cache Valley, some from Ogden. They came from over in Tremonton and Garland and all around here, and they were pretty.

LD: Would there be more than 25 floats?

UC: Oh, I imagine about that many floats.

LD: How about some of the town characters that you knew? Any town characters here that stand out in your mind?

UC: Well, we knew Ruel Eskelsen. He was our electrician for Brigham City, and his father lived right here on the corner where the bowling alley is. When we bought this place, he had a barn and horses and cows over here. There was a peach orchard, and then his house was right on the corner there where the bowling alley is. His son Ruel was the electrician.

Oh, there were so many that I can't remember. You know the old dance hall – the Blue Bird, the Roller Rink.

LD: Yes.

UC: We used to go roller skating up there.

LD: What was on the first floor then? Was it a bowling alley at the time?

UC: Yes, that's what they had there, and the dance hall was upstairs and the roller rink.

LD: Was the roller rink open during the weekdays or just on the weekends?

UC: It used to be open all the time. We'd go up roller skating at night.

LD: They're going to restore that building.

UC: Yes, and that's good. I think they need to do something with it.

LD: I'm glad they didn't tear it down. What about the downtown? What are some of the businesses you remember?

UC: Oh, my gosh! The old Roxy Theater was up there where Smith's is, and on the corner was Compton's Photography Shop. Across the street was Mack's Pharmacy. J.C. Penney's was in town. The hotel was right there, and Nuttals had their restaurant.

LD: What was the name of their restaurant?

JP: The Tropical.

UC: Yes, the Tropical. That was uptown. The Idle Isle, of course, was there. It's been there for so long, and then there was Alex Cafe on that side. Hyde's Dress and Hat shop was there. I used to work for her. I worked for Blanche Hyde for about five years.

JP: Where was that?

UC: It was on the west side of the street, and the Mode O Day was next to Ken Jensen's, and then Blanche Hyde had a dress and hat shop right along there. Then right over here on 4th North and Main was the A & W, and I ran that for five years for Farr's in Ogden.

JP: A & W Root beer?

UC: Yes. We had the A & W root beer stand right there where that service station or whatever it is is there now. I had nine girls working there for me. They kept me busy. My two girls worked there, and Joan Tingey worked and several others in the ward all had jobs there for five years. Then they gave it up and took it back to Ogden.

JP: I wish it was still there.

UC: Yes, I fried a lot of hamburgers, I'll tell you. They had good root beer. You can still get it down at Call's. They have A & W.

LD: That's the main attraction at Call's – the good root beer.

UC: Yes, they have A & W root beer.

LD: You probably remember some of the mayors of Brigham City.

UC: Yes, Carl Wold was the Mayor when I was about 14 or 15 years old. He was the Mayor, and I used to pick strawberries for him across the street from the new high school. I sit here and wrack my brain trying to remember who the other mayors were.

LD: Well, we wrote a book on the mayors, and I can't even remember.

UC: I do remember Carl Wold.

LD: Carl Wold was Mayor during the war, wasn't he?

UC: Yes. Carl had a place where the new high school is built, just on the other side of that. He owned that piece of ground there. That's where he had his strawberries. That's been quite a few years ago.

Do you remember Ray Grant's Drug Store uptown? He had a drug store right there on the west side about where the flower shop is.

JP: Did Hamilton's have one, too?

UC: Hamilton's Drug was down the street a ways, and Ray Grant had one. He had a fountain, so you could go in there and have ice cream or a drink. Then Alex Cafe was up just a little farther. On the other side there was Penney's, and like I said, the hotel and restaurant. I can remember them.

LD: Burt's Cafe has been around a long time.

UC: Burt's Cafe was there, and it has been there a long time, yes. I knew them very well.

LD: And didn't they have a drive-through or something where you could pick-up food and take it out?

UC: Yes, for a while they did. N.L. Hansen was the missionary who converted my parents, and he lived with us in Denmark. He had N.L. Hansen's variety store in Brigham, and that was on the west side for years and years. None of the stores are there now, except the Idle Isle. It's still there.

JP: Hansen Jewelry. Has it changed much?

UC: No, it's still in there.

JP: Did you have any involvement with Bushnell Hospital?

UC: I worked at Bushnell in the kitchen, and I used to iron for one of the bigwigs down there, one of the colonels. He'd bring his ironing to me and I'd do his ironing for him. I can't remember his name, but I used to do his shirts and everything for him.

LD: When you worked there, did you get to know any of the patients?

UC: No.

LD: You probably prepared a lot of food. That was a huge operation.

UC: Yes, it was. I worked in the kitchen because I'd worked over here at Lincoln School for a couple of years in the kitchen.

JP: You're a versatile lady. You have been everywhere.

UC: Well, I've worked different places.

JP: What was the attitude in the town when the Intermountain School came?

UC: Oh, I think they really miss it now. I think they enjoyed having them. It brought in a lot of tax money for them.

JP: What I miss most are the Native Americans marching in the Peach Days parade. They put on a wonderful display.

UC: Yes, they did. I really liked it down there at the Indian School. I hated to see them go out, and I hated to see them tear that big swimming pool down, too. Oh, things have changed, and I don't know whether it's for the better or not. I know the world is changed, and that's not for better.

LD: No. Do you remember all the carpenters and people building the Bushnell Hospital?

UC: Yes.

LD: How many were there building? There must have been hundreds and hundreds.

UC: Yes. That was really a project when they built all those buildings.

LD: Did any of your family serve in World War II?

UC: Oh yes. My two sons were both in the Air Force. My oldest boy Delwin, who lives in Washington, was in the Medical Corps in the Air Force. Then my son Richard, who lives in Ogden, was in the Korean War. Del was in WWII, but Dick was in the Korean War.

LD: I know people really pulled together during WWII. What was the general attitude of the community at that time?

UC: Well, I think they were all pulling together. They knew it was war, and we had to. There were a lot of things you couldn't buy. Gasoline was scarce. You could only buy so much gas. You couldn't buy shortening in the store during the war.

JP: You had to use food stamps to get sugar. We all did.

UC: Yes, during the war you can expect that.

JP: And trying to buy a tire – you couldn't.

UC: Joann knows some of the things, too. She's been here quite a while.

LD: Did the businesses downtown kind of carry on as usual as best they could during the war?

UC: Yes, they survived. They were well-stocked, but people didn't have a lot of money during the war. We raised five kids during the Depression.

LD: Tell us about how you survived the Depression.

UC: Well, we survived. We used to have a peach orchard, and we put everything into garden. And I

canned, canned canned! We survived from our own place.

LD: Did you have any animals?

UC: We did. We had one cow, one horse, chickens.

LD: So you provided your own meat, fruits and vegetables.

UC: Yes, and I canned all of it. I remember one day when Dr. Bunderson came down to give me a shot, and I had a table full of applesauce. He said, "Did you do all that?"

I said, "Yeah." I used to can a lot. I don't do it anymore. I can't can any more.

LD: Well, I think canning is becoming a lost art. People used to travel from all over to the Fruitway to get peaches for canning, so it's not quite as profitable for the fruit growers as it used to be, but it's mostly the real estate and the homes moving in.

UC: Before Bud got a job, he had a little truck, and he'd buy fruit and take it over the canyon to Smithfield and those places and sell it. That's was he did for quite a while until he got on at Second Street. We used to peddle fruit, and those people would just look forward to getting it. We'd go out here to the Japanese in Corinne and get tomatoes. We'd pick them ourselves. I picked a lot of tomatoes out there. They were the good old days. We didn't have a lot, but things weren't like they are today. We didn't worry about all this other stuff that's going on.

JP: What do you remember about the stables down where John Adams Park is now? When we moved here forty plus years ago, they had horses down there. Did they always have a stable with livestock down in there?

UC: They did for years.

JP: That's on the creek down from the woolen mill and the planing mill. Did you have any interaction with any of those places?

UC: No. They were just always there, and the Baron Woolen Mills and all of them. I hated to see them go out, too.

LD: How many children did you have?

UC: Five. We lost our youngest daughter Norma Jean when she was 20. She had two children, but I've still got the four. I have 20 grandchildren, 50 great grandchildren and 20 great great ones.

LD: That's an accomplishment.

JP: That's a scoreboard and a half.

UC: I've got a bunch of them.

LD: Skipping back to WWII, I'm sure you worried a lot about your son who was fighting.

UC: Yes, I did.

LD: And what about the neighbors around? Did any of them lose any boys in the war?

UC: We didn't have any neighbors here for years. It was just orchards and sagebrush, and there were no homes here at all. We used to walk up to the waterfall on Easter, and there were no homes. I've seen them build all of these homes over the years. I can't believe the homes in Perry and Willard.

LD: It's going to be wall-to-wall homes from Perry to Ogden.

UC: And they're not little homes. They're big ones.

LD: I don't see how people afford them.

UC: When they get my age, they won't want all those steps.

LD: Moving ahead to the 1950s, what was your family doing during that time? You were probably still raising a few of your kids.

UC: Oh yes.

LD: Did your kids have odd jobs, part-time jobs?

UC: Yes, just odd jobs they could get, and then when they went into the service, they were there during wars. JoAnn worked over here at the Ringside Cafe on 4th North and Main. She worked there for a while for Nuttals as a waitress.

JP: They had a mean dog in the back, and every time you'd walk by, it would just want to rip you apart.

UC: Yes, I remember that, and they had a service station across the street. I tried to remember the name of that, close to where the A & W was. Bud worked at Second Street when I was working at the root beer stand. It's funny – I could come home at 11 or 12 o'clock at night and pack money and never think a thing about it. I wouldn't do that now.

JP: When did they give you pavement out here in front and the bridge across the creek?

UC: There was sumac growing down in the road here and wild iris. Of course, there wasn't a bridge across there either. I can't remember how many years it was until we got that. They used to have the mailboxes up on the corner. The snow was so deep you could hardly get up there to get your mail back then.

LD: The weather has changed a lot, hasn't it?

UC: Oh, yes. We got snow! Do you remember old Moroni Bott?

JP: I do. Yes.

UC: He had a horse, and he would open up the sidewalks. Delwin was born in '29. We still lived in the little house, and Bud had to dig all the way through. Nobody lived over here. It was all empty. Lichtensteins weren't even there then, and he had to dig a path all the way over so the doctor could come in because he was born in that little house. He had to dig with a shovel so he could get in.

LD: So that was Moroni's job to clear the sidewalks?

UC: Yes, he'd bring his horse and clean the sidewalks. When they lived up there on the hill, there was Moroni Bott and Wanda Lichfield. They lived up on the hill, and those were the only two homes. All of these homes have been built since. It's been years and years. Do you remember that?

JP: No, because I'm living in one that you watched being built. Our home was built in a cherry orchard, and it was planted in 1934. Mr. Reeder, the milkman – one day I got him aside and asked him, “When was this cherry orchard planted?”

And he said it was 1934, and that was the year I was born. That's how I remember that, but he said they planted apple and cherry trees because the apples would bear fruit before the cherries. I don't know if that's the case.

UC: No, the cherries come on first.

JP: Then after the cherries started to really produce, they cut all the apple trees down.

LD: Cherries were more profitable then. Brigham City had a lot of orchards.

UC: This place over here on 5th North was just opened. Nobody lived there.

JP: What did you pay to get into the Roxy Theater?

UC: Well, it wasn't very much, maybe 50 cents.

JP: And when you went bowling and roller skating?

UC: I can't remember, but it wasn't very much.

JP: The prices have gone up and up, and it's hard to remember when they were down that low.

UC: That's right. When I watch *The Price Is Right*, and they have that Then and Now, I sit there and I'll say, “Then! Then!”

LD: When did all your kids graduate from high school and start moving out of the house? In the '60s?

UC: Yes, my daughter Colleen Mjaatvedt graduated and went down to the Grand Canyon and worked for a couple of years. She got married and moved to Ogden, and then she went to work for IRS. They sent her to California. She went to Fresno, and from there they sent her to Washington D.C. She worked for them for 30 years and lives in Ogden now.

When Richard came out of the service, he went to work for the State. Richard was a chef, but he went

to work for the State, and worked for them for 25 years as a chef for the Blind and Deaf School in Ogden.

JP: Well, your daughter JoAnn Christensen and her husband Ellis lived here just down the road for a little while.

UC: They lived right over here on 2nd East, and Ellis worked for State Farm. Then they transferred him to Logan, and they've been over there 36 years. He retired from State Farm over there, and JoAnn worked for Utah State University in the financial department for a while. Now she tends her grandkids and great grandkids.

LD: What do you remember about the ward in this area?

UC: Well, when we first moved here, we belonged to the 8th Ward. When they built our ward, the 12th Ward, the train carrying the lumber tipped over out here at the Lucin Cutoff. Howard Kelly was the overseer. Well, Richard lived across the street over on the north side, and when he'd come home from work, he and Bud would go up there and work on the church. My daughter-in-law LaRee Wells Cobb and I would go up there, and I'd nail sheeting on the church when they were building. Every time he'd come home from work, they'd go up and work on the church, so they've got a nail or two in up there and so have I. The members built it. It's not like it is now. The ward members built it.

JP: We were really blessed. We moved here just as they dedicated that building. I didn't even get to clean any walls or do anything to be a helper there.

UC: Oh, I helped clean up there.

JP: Now it holds three wards and a stake.

UC: While I was in the 8th Ward, we'd have dinners. We'd all go up there and have dinners, and Jean Sycamore would help us. We'd get everything from Sycamore's and have big dinners to help pay for the building. All in all, I've got an investment up there in the church.

JP: She's been true blue, faithful.

UC: All these years. Bud was Superintendent of the Sunday School and in the Mutual. I was coordinator for Junior Sunday School for five years and the Work Director on the Relief Society Stake Board for five years.

LD: Skipping back to the downtown, before the freeways came in in the 1970s, Brigham City was on the main route, so you probably had a lot of tourists and other people stopping, eating at the restaurants, and staying in the motels.

UC: Oh yes. They did. Main Street was pretty busy them days, but not like it is now. I didn't believe I'd live to see all that traffic. There's so much traffic in Brigham. You go down 11th South and sit there and see that traffic going this way and that, and I don't know. I've told the kids, "I didn't think I'd live long enough to see all this traffic."

There's so many new people moved in even in our ward, isn't there?

JP: Yes. We have some wonderful folks with young families.

UC: That's good. The kids across the street, Watkins, are a nice couple. He's from Mendon, and she's from Smithfield. He's a Seminary teacher. She came over and brought me some cupcakes the other night. They keep track of me. They're sure nice.

JP: Well, you keep track of Selma Weir.

UC: I call her every day, and I call Dione Lichtenstein.

JP: Do you remember John Weir at the Airport?

LD: Yes.

UC: He ran that for years and years. Anyway they're a close-knit group. I call Sally every day. She's 95, and I call Dione every day and see how she's doing. She'll be 92 next month. I've got her beat a few years.

LD: It must be a healthy neighborhood.

UC: They ask me, and I just tell them it's the Danish in me.

JP: I've got it, too.

UC: My aunt up in Rexburg lived to be 105, my dad's sister. They're the only ones that came over here. My dad came, and then my aunt came later and married a man from Rexburg.

JP: You can't beat that Danish ancestry.

LD: No, you can't. Ula, can you think of any other businesses we didn't talk about?

UC: Well, there was Sheffield's there in the middle of town, and they had Smith's Grocery Store on 5th South. We lived near there for a while. We lived on 5th South and 2nd East. We used to go to Smith's to shop from Dee Glen's dad, and Dee was just a little kid and was stocking shelves. He grew up to have a lot of stores. He died just too young.

JP: We got to talk to him in the hospital. My mother-in-law was down there at LDS Hospital at the same time. He had a fellow there that was recording everything he said. He was talking about old times.

LD: Yes, they published a book.

JP: I didn't know that.

UC: Yes, Dee Glen's sister and I used to go to school together at the high school.

LD: Well, it's been great talking with you.

JP: You've brightened my day.

UC: I don't know if I've said anything to help you.

LD: You have. You've given us some good information, and we appreciate it.