

Voices from the Past

The History of Wilford, Idaho Townsite

Interviewee: James Edgar Birch

June 28, 1971

Tape #67

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by: Jessica Manning October 2006

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Brigham Young University- Idaho

Harold Forbush: The interview which follows first recorded on a reel-to-reel tape is now transcribed and placed on a C60 cassette, being done by Harold Forebush, the society technician on this 26th day of April 1984.

HF: It's my pleasure, this late afternoon Monday the 28th day of June 1971, to have come to my office here at 68th East 1st South in Rexburg Idaho, a good friend, a fellow associate in the Historical Society here at Rexburg, Mr. J. Edgar Birch from St. Anthony. Now Mr. Birch, in commencing our interview, we obviously start right at the beginning by asking you to state your full name, and the date and place where you were born.

James Edgar Birch: My full name is James Edgar Birch. I was born on December the 15th 1899, at Wilford Idaho.

HF: And at that time of your birth was there a post office at this community?

JEB: Yes there was. In fact at that particular time I think there were about thirteen different businesses in Wilford.

HF: I see. So when you say at Wilford, Idaho I mean, that was a post office address?

JEB: That is correct.

HF: That's very interesting. Now Mr. Birch, what has been your principle life occupation?

JEB: Well, I've been engaged in farming all my life. I don't know whether you would call it a sideline, a hobby, or what it would be, but particularly since about 1922 I've been deeply interested in historical research, especially as it pertains to the story of the conquest of America: particularly between the red man and the white man here in the West. And whenever an opportunity has offered itself I've spend much of my leisure time pursuing this historical research work.

HF: Very interesting. Now pursuing our questions further, will you state to me the name of your father, and just briefly, something of his pedigree?

JEB: Well, my grandfather was...

HF: Oh, your father first.

JEB: Oh, my father? My father was James Thomas Birch, better known in the valley here as Jim Birch. He was brought to this valley by his parents in the year 1884. At that time he was four years of age. He spent his entire lifetime with the except of probably three months while he was in England. All the rest of his lifetime he spent right here in the St. Anthony-Wilford area. He lived to be 88 years old when he passed away. So he had considerable experience and considerable knowledge of the valley and its infancy so far as its occupation by the white man is concerned.

HF: Well [inaudible] to the Birch name did the ancestry come from England?

JEB: They did both on his father and his mother's side. His mother was a Beard and they both came from England. Both families had joined the LDS church and they crossed the plains into the Utah Valleys. I think that both of them came across the plains in 1856. A rather unusual thing happened: my great-grandfather died crossing the plains in that year, and my great-great grandfather arrived in Salt Lake City very tired. And he laid down on a makeshift bed. His family tried to arouse him to get him to remove his boots, and he said just let me lay down here for a little while with my boots on and he died in Salt Lake City, without having enjoyed any of the benefits or...

HF: Now this was the Birch name?

JEB: That's right. That is on the Birch side.

HF: Now will you state to me your mother's maiden name and just briefly of her pedigree?

JEB: My mother was a Stewart. They spell that name S-T-E-W-A-R-T. She is of course of Scottish decent. Her father came to America when he was a lad, 18 years of age. He left his family over in Scotland and came here alone. He undoubtedly is of the house of royalty. And those on the Stewart line who have made it a point to do genealogical research have decided that the name should be spelled S-T-U-A-R-T instead of S-T-E-W-A-R-T of the two Tudor line that he is a royalty and his mother worked for the royalty. Now would that sufficient on grand-dad or?

HF: I think so, on the Stuart name...

JEB: He and his wife came to Wilford in 1891 or 92 just prior to the country here becoming the State of Idaho. It was still a territory when they came here.

HF: The Stewart family?

JEB: The Stewart family.

HF: In other words, your mother's parents?

JEB: That is right.

HF: Your mother's parents?

JEB: That is right.

HF: Now let us by questioning and response get ourselves and your progenitors into here into the eastern part of Idaho. More particularly as we say into the Upper Snake River Valley. Why and what were the reasons that the Birch family moved into the Upper Snake River Valley?

JEB: Well that maybe somewhat of a guess right now as to the reason, because I don't know of any history that they have left. The three Birch brothers came to the valley in 1883. And my honest opinion is, and of course this isn't in the history, but my honest opinion is that they were motivated as much as by anything else by the desire to prospect. They had that bug in their blood. And they did considerable prospecting at that time. And they came here and grandfather fell in love with the area around Wilford. They returned to Utah in the following spring, in the following June, he brought his family into the Wilford area.

HF: Now when you say the three Birch brothers now that would be your grandfather and...

JEB: His two brothers.

HF: And two brothers?

JEB: That's right.

HF: Were they younger or older than your grandfather?

JEB: I think my grandfather was the older of all. There were, I think, either seven or eight brothers. I'm not certain how many now. It was a polygamous family. And there were seven or eight brothers. But there were two other brothers came with him when he came here.

HF: Now your father came as a married man?

JEB: That is right.

HF: With one wife?

JEB: Yes.

HF: And how about the brothers of your grandfather? Were they married men?

JEB: I'm not certain about that now, when they came here. But they later, all of them came later on and raised large families in the area. That's how the Birchs...

HF: These three brothers, these other two brothers you mean?

JEB: Yes and some of the other brothers besides those two.

HF: I see. So my subsequent question will be: was your grandfather the progenitor of the Birchs in the Upper Snake River Valley? And that would be no, wouldn't it?

JEB: No he wasn't the progenitor of them. No, his father...

HF: Your grandfather I'm talking about.

JEB: No my grandfather wasn't...

HF: Wouldn't be the sole progenitor?

JEB: No, No.

HF: These other brothers of his would also had decedents?

JEB: That's right.

HF: As you understand it?

JEB: That's right. They were all from Willard, Utah.

HF: That's the home then?

JEB: That's the home, yes.

HF: Willard Utah?

JEB: That's right

HF: Just north of Ogden?

JEB: Yes.

HF: And now were spelling... how is this name spelled for the record?

JEB: B-I-R-C-H.

HF: Has there been any change in that spelling as far as you know?

JEB: Not to my knowledge within our own family. There are other Birchs in this area that spell their name differently B U R C H. But so far as I know they're no relation of ours.

HF: Now you mentioned that originally these three brothers came in 1883.

JEB: That's right.

HF: And your grandfather fell in love with the Wilford area.

JEB: And returned in the spring of 1884 with his family.

HF: With his family?

JEB: Yes.

HF: And now with whom did he return? His wife and how many children?

JEB: Well, now that is a question that I am not able to answer. I asked my aunt that question today and she being one of his children well I thought she guessed at, but we're not positive whether he had two or three children. He came with my father and my Aunt Leona and I think my Aunt Lydia, but we're not positive about whether Lydia was born before he arrived, or whether she was born shortly after he arrived. I'm not positive about that and there's no way of finding out to my knowledge now.

HF: Now according to your understanding Mr. Birch, who were some of the very close neighbors to your grandfather upon his arrival and settlement in the Wilford area?

JEB: I'm basing this on the evidence I have as my memory serves me in talking with father, I think there were three families located in Wilford at the time when the Birch family came there: the Blacks, the Burrells and the Pratts.

HF: Now how would you spell the Burrells?

JEB: B-U-R-R-E-L-L.

HF: And the Pratt, P-R-A-T-T?

JEB: Yes.

HF: And the Black of course, we know that.

JEB: Yes.

HF: And did these people, including your grandfather, locate on the north side of the Teton River?

JEB: Yes they did. Grandfather's plot of ground in fact joined right up with the north bank of the Teton River.

HF: And how far east would it be from the road now which goes between Teton City and St. Anthony?

JEB: That road would be the west boundary on his farm.

HF: On his farm?

JEB: Yes.

HF: Very interesting.

JEB: He homesteaded 160 acres there.

HF: And did he divert water from the Teton River for his farming?

JEB: I couldn't answer whether he did or not, but there were later developments there. The Steward family did that later on, but I don't know whether grandfather did or not.

HF: How did your father, excuse me how did your grandfather earn his livelihood?

JEB: Well, now I don't know whether he engaged in farming himself very much or not but after locating in Wilford I think it was but a very short time until he opened a small mercantile store. And he had diversified lot of goods there. He sold most all kinds of goods. He had hardware. He had clothing. He had a meat market and I think manufactured goods in general that were available at that time and could be brought in from Market Lake. I think he handled all those things and supplied a good portion of the valley. People from as far away as Teton Basin, far above Ashton, and all over the valley came to Tom Birch's store in Wilford. And he, for a number of years, had the post office in connection with his store.

HF: Now this store was located I guess on the Wilford town site?

JEB: No. No it's located on... the old homestead is still retained by the Birches. My father's brother passed away here about a year ago, but up until he passed away he had ownership of that farm. And now his son has that and this store was located on that farm.

HF: And his son is?

JEB: Lyle Birch.

HF: Lyle Birch.

JEB: Yes. And Garry Birch, I should say Garry. I think Garry is the one that owns the farm. Lyle and Garry are brothers, but I think Garry is the fellow that actually has the farm.

HF: And this is the one which you described to me as being on the North Bank of the...

JEB: That is right.

HF: Of the Teton River just east of the road.

JEB: That is right. In the early days, there used to be what we called the old slew. A channel that came down through the country there taking out probably a mile and a half

east of granddad's farmland from the river. And then going down through the country and then rejoining the river possibly a mile and a half west of Granddad's place. But this old slew, traveled down there and he was located just on the north side of that slew, was his little store. In those days of course there weren't any fences and the roads were of no consequence either.

HF: Do you remember the store?

JEB: Yes I remember the store. Now, I don't have to create a misconception here. Granddad died when I was six months of age. But the store was kept there for a few years afterwards. And I do remember the store. And I remember a good many of the articles that supposedly had come in from Market Lake for the store and they eventually found themselves in Grandmother Birch's attic. And as a kid going to grandmother's I went up there time after time after time to play with those trinkets and whatnot that they had up there. I saw button shoes by the hundreds up there, big bolts of calico and velvet and such as that.

HF: Now your grandmother survived your grandfather?

JEB: Yes for many years.

HF: So you remember her very well?

JEB: Oh very well.

HF: Now was she living at the time on the homestead?

JEB: Yes. Yes.

HF: And let's see was there dwelling quarters?

JEB: Yes.

HF: And separate place from the store?

JEB: Yes.

HF: I see.

JEB: The dwelling quarters were immediately east and just back of the store.

HF: Is that house still standing today?

JEB: Yes. It's been re-modeled two or three times, but much of the foundation and the main frame work for the house are of the original building.

HF: Now for the Birch. You mentioned that these goods were brought in from Market Lake. Can you just briefly tell me the route that your grandfather would follow in going to Market Lake and returning with his supply of goods?

JEB: Well, let me make an explanation. I don't know just exactly when Grandfather established his store. But the information that I obtained from my father was that he was the go between. He was the one who hauled Grandfather's produce, the grain, from his little farm down to Market Lake. Then in return he came back with the merchandise from Market Lake for the store. And I think my father did ninety percent of the traveling between these two places. And the road at that time, of course Market Lake is now Roberts and it started off to old Market Lake is a slight distance north and east of where the town of Roberts now stands. And along that old sled trail that still exists there. And the road meandered through the sagebrush and the lava rock and the sand going in a pretty much a northeasterly direction until it got well up to where first 335 on the Sage Junction Highway of today is located. Then it followed through well the Sage Junction Road up to the Henry's Fork or the North Fork of Snake River. And there they had to cross the river but...

HF: This would be west of Rexburg?

JEB: That was west of Rexburg. But in order to cross the river in those days, instead of crossing where some of the Mormons crossed later on, they went north along the north bank of the Snake River to a point that was known as Eagle Nest Crossing. That was up the river probably three or four miles. And then we crossed over the Eagle Nest Crossing and then he would angle off in a southeasterly direction to come to the location of the store.

HF: Let's see he would in that point he'd, let's see he could have passed through... Let's see, would he be north of the north fork of the Teton River?

JEB: Yes, he would be north of the north fork of Snake River, Henry's Fork. He would be on the north bank of Henry's Fork.

HF: Right.

JEB: Until he got up to the Eagle Nest Crossing.

HF: Yeah then he would cross over the river?

JEB: That's right.

HF: But he would be at that point, north and east of the Teton River wouldn't he? So he wouldn't have to cross that again to get to...

JEB: No he wouldn't cross the Teton River at all.

HF: He wouldn't have to cross?

JEB: No he wouldn't cross the Teton River at all.

HF: He wouldn't have to cross that at all would he?

JEB: No. That's right. By the way it might be interesting to know that we have a farm now that on the north boundary line extends right up to the south bank of Henry's Fork of the Snake River to the exact spot where that Eagle Nest Crossing was located. In other words, our northwest corner of our farm on the bank of the Snake River was right where the Eagle Nest Crossing began to go across the river in those early days.

HF: Now in point of interest, this would be with reference to the bridge which crosses the Snake River, North fork of Snake River, on the Salem Parker Road, this Eagle Rock Crossing would be what would you say, two to three miles?

JEB: It would be approximately two miles.

HF: Two miles to the east?

JEB: East and a little north following the meandering of the river. And that crossing was known as the Eagle Nest Crossing according to my father because of the great number of eagles build their nests there in the cottonwood trees.

HF: And this was the crossing which a lot of the pioneers used.

JEB: The majority of them.

HF: Until such time as the Ricks brothers and so forth got their ferry in west of ...

JEB: That's right.

HF: Rexburg.

JEB: That's right. There's one exception now. A little further north and east along the Snake River there, there was the old soldier's crossing where the army crossed in the early days. That was up at approximately... oh that was another mile and a half northeast along the river. And that was in the extreme western end of what is now the city of St. Anthony.

HF: You commented the other day that your grandfather while... and he had operated this store for many years had had some interesting little experiences in conjunction with the operation and the even after his death. Someone from the basin came down and ah paid a little obligation that was owed. Recall that will you for us?

JEB: Yes. Grandfather may I say [inaudible] a good many early-day prospectors. But this particular party that you have referenced to was a lady that lived in Chester. And she came to my grandmother who lived for some forty years after Grandfather passed away. And she said to my grandmother, "Mrs. Birch, I want to pay an obligation that I owed your husband before he died." She said, "I bought some merchandise from him when he was operating his store and I didn't have the money to pay for it and he told me to go ahead and pay when I could." And she said, "I don't want to go on the other side meeting him over there owing him that obligation." She said, "I've owed it for forty years." And she says "I'm here to pay you today for that obligation."

HF: Isn't that interesting. Well now would it be our thinking that the store which your grandfather operated was perhaps one of the very earliest and perhaps the sole store at the time or part of the time of its operation in that whole area.

JEB: That's true. It was the first and the original mercantile business in that area. There were a number of others that came later on, not exactly on that location but in the Wilford area, but that was the first and sole mercantile institution at that time.

HF: Now this would have been before Mr. Moon came to the north...

JEB: Oh yes.

HF: Which later became known as St. Anthony.

JEB: Yes.

HF: This would be perhaps before Teton City...

JEB: Yes.

HF: Was laid out and a few little homes over there built.

JEB: What might be an interesting side light just to divert a moment and say that the Wilford town site and the Camas Town site were plotted and laid out before any of these other modern-day town sites were even thought of in this area. The Wilford town site and the Camas Town site were plotted. And you can go down to Bingham County today to the courthouse in Blackfoot and there you can read the history on the planning of those two town sites.

HF: Very interesting. Of course Mr. Birch, it's possible to say that the Wilford town site was laid out before Bingham County came into existence, which is probably true.

JEB: That is very possible.

HF: Bingham County came into existence in the 1885 legislature.

JEB: I know this. I have heard father many a time say it was a fact that he had lived on one plot of ground for a good many years and while living on this particular plot, he had paid taxes in three different counties on that plot of ground: Oneida County, Bingham County and Freemont County.

HF: Isn't that interesting. Isn't that interesting; very, very interesting. How did your father earn his livelihood?

JEB: My father was a farmer exclusively so. He did have some civic activity. He served for some forty years as a member and chairman of the school district in the area where he lived.

HF: This would be in?

JEB: Franklin School District.

HF: And this would be in Wilford?

JEB: North Wilford.

HF: North Wilford.

JEB: He served one term as a county commissioner. He served for a number of years as Bishop of Wilford Ward. And offhand I don't recall any of his other activities, but he was principally and primarily a farmer.

HF: Incidentally, do you have a knowledge as to what area the original Wilford Ward embraced? And with that question has the boundaries of the Wilford Ward been restricted and, you know, made smaller than the original?

JEB: Yes I think that would be true. I couldn't tell you just exactly how but I rather think that the boundary of St. Anthony Second Ward extends now into what was part of the original Wilford Ward. I'm certain that it is. I think some of Twin Grove does. Some of it's questionable but some of Teton Ward could also. But I'm certain that the Wilford Ward boundaries were much larger originally than they are at the present time. You're speaking particularly of Wilford Ward?

HF: I'm talking about the original Wilford Ward.

JEB: Yes, I'm sure that is true.

HF: Now with reference to your grandfather's homestead, where was the town site for Wilford laid out?

JEB: The town site was half a mile north of where he had located.

HF: Half a mile north?

JEB: Yes.

HF: And that would be half a mile up from that road then?

JEB: That's right. Right along the Teton Highway.

HF: It's along the Teton Highway?

JEB: The Teton Highway intersects the town site part of it being on the eastern and part of it on the west side of the highway.

HF: Oh I see. And did they ever organize a town over there with a town board and everything like that?

JEB: Well I don't know how extensively or intensively the organization was, but I think they did have an organization of some sort. As I said at one time there were thirteen or fourteen different businesses in there. There were a number of butcher shops. They called them butcher shops in those days. I think there were four saloons, two or three clothing stores, a post office - there was a dance hall; they had frequent dances - and a chapel. And I think did for some time they had a town organization. Just what it consisted of I couldn't say.

HF: Now from the town site, where is the Wilford Cemetery located?

JEB: The Wilford Cemetery is one and one quarter miles east of the north side of the Wilford town site.

HF: Well, Brother Birch you mentioned that your father had served the Wilford Ward as its bishop. Could you give me what dates, approximately the dates, of his service?

JEB: No I can't. I think...

[Continues on to disk track two]

HF: Side two continuing the interview with J. Edgar Birch. The same will be completed on this side.

JEB: ...it would be in the late thirties and the early forties as near as I can recall. I think his term was either five or six years. I'm not positive as to that.

HF: And now he was brought to Wilford when just a little four year old tot.

JEB: Yup that's right.

HF: And so he had occasion to live there and you mentioned that he didn't change his residence at all, all those years, so he lived under virtually all of the bishops?

JEB: He did change his residence. He changed his residence when I was four years of age. He moved about two miles northwest of the old home site. He bought a farm of his own and there he resided from the time I was four years of age in 1904 up until 1968 when he passed away. But that took in the Wilford... that was part of Wilford Ward where he lived during his latter years. And he served as a bishop while he was at this later location. And he did live under every one of the fourteen different bishops.

HF: Can you relate, Brother Birch, some of the tradition that has come down as told by your father of all that might be of interesting little comment of bygone days of Wilford?

JEB: You want me to tell this?

HF: Uh huh.

JEB: Well I recall father making a statement to the effect that one of the general authorities of the LDS Church upon learning that the area had been given the name of Wilford, he said it will never prosper because it carried his name. And he said it would never prosper and certainly that was a true prophesy. And as far as the business district was concerned because that has completely eliminated itself and there's nothing there now except a ward chapel and a farming area. There's an old school house that they no longer used since the consolidation of the district and it's standing there, but the chapel is the only building of any business nature that stands there at all today in Wilford.

HF: Has the chapel – of course it's a newer chapel – but replaced and rebuilt almost in the same site as the original?

JEB: No. It's one block south of the original. The old – not the original chapel; the original chapel was made of logs - but the one that followed that and the one I recall as far back as I can go in my infancy, the old log building is still standing.

HF: And the new one is a block or so from that?

JEB: It's a block south.

HF: I see. But on the old town site?

JEB: Yes, it's on the lot that originally held the dance hall.

HF: Now in this day, in 1971, can one still see where some of the old blocks and lots were located?

JEB: Very easily. They're fenced and they're farmed in that way as the lots and blocks were planned. Particularly the blocks, they're fenced off some of them, in the block size. So you can see that and observe it.

HF: Those blocks were probably all connectors...

JEB: Yes.

HF: Weren't they? As patterned after the Salt Lake blocks?

JEB: Well I rather think so because that's about the size.

HF: Now any other comments and incidents that your father may have related to you? Of course we know that... let's see your father must surely have known Beaver Dick?

JEB: Very well. He on many occasion told me of riding the range with Beaver Dick. And Father upon a few occasions lunched with Beaver Dick and his family in the home. He played with Beaver Dick's children and he said that he was always afraid of Beaver Dick's daughter Emma. She was quite large and he said she was quite tomboy-ish. And he thought she was a little bit rough and he was always afraid of her. But he romped and played with them and he knew Beaver Dick exceptionally well.

HF: Now Beaver Dick's home would have been up the river from the homestead?

JEB: That's right.

HF: How far? Maybe...

JEB: Oh it could have been between two and three miles; North and East along the Teton River.

HF: Did the community of Wilford quite a populous community?

JEB: Well in its day it was, yes. I would say that it was... oh I wouldn't estimate the number, but I'd say it was fairly populous. In the early... between 1912 to along probably 1915 and 16 there seemed to be an exodus from Wilford that went northward beyond St. Anthony out into what is now the sage and rocks and sand north of St. Anthony. They located there at Wilson, New Hope, and Cerelda, and Ora and some of those places in there until actually the greater part of the people at one time were living out in that area. And that has all been abandoned now. Some of them have returned to Wilford, some of 'em have gone to other places. But there was one time when they thought dry farming was really going to be prolific and they went out there and a lot of them had some very sad experiences.

HF: Now did they travel back and forth or did they actually homestead?

JEB: They homesteaded and build out there. We had the little towns of New Hope and Wilson out there where they maintained one or two stores and a school house and a chapel. But those things have all disappeared now.

HF: Is there anything at all remaining out there?

JEB: I think there are one or two old log buildings either at Wilson or New Hope; I don't recall which location. Those two places were in close proximity of each other. I don't know how far apart they were but...

HF: Would this be on the way to Salmon Creek?

JEB: That's right. That's right. And much of it now was located down north of Parker, out in that area.

HF: Did all of these little settlements are now abandoned?

JEB: That's right.

HF: There's just nothing there.

JEB: Yes that's true.

HF: Do you remember, Brother Birch, about how long the post office remained in the Wilford area?

JEB: No that would simply be a guess on my part. I don't know.

HF: I mean as a young man, it wasn't there when you were just a young man.

JEB: Not, not that I'm able to recall. It was there when I was born, I'm sure of that, but I couldn't go beyond that.

HF: Now you were born, as you mentioned, at Wilford?

JEB: Yes.

HF: Now the other day you made quite an interesting little comment about your near becoming a caveman and a few other things and I'd like to have you repeat that and in the form that you presented it to me the other day was quite humorous.

JEB: Well I said that by the skin of my teeth I missed being born a caveman. For about eight months after my father and mother were married, they lived in a cave in the side of an old slew that ran through my grandfather's property, and they moved about eight months after their marriage up to the town site of Wilford and established themselves in the living quarters of the post office. The post office at that time consisted, as I recall, of

about three rooms. The front room was the post office, and then there were two rooms in the rear for living quarters. And my father and mother lived there, and I was born there a month after they moved in, so I've often said that I'd rather be a post script than a caveman any day.

HF: That carries quite a lot of interest and requires a little bit of explanation, doesn't it? But it's very interestingly put, I think.

JEB: That might be one reason why I'm kind of an eccentric in a lot of respects. I'm a left hander from way back, and I have a lot of odd ideas and it might have been partly responsible for the influences that influenced my father and mother just prior to my birth.

HF: Well, I shan't comment on that at all but we shall continue on and put another question to you. Where did you get your early schooling?

JEB: I got my early schooling at the little school known as the Franklin School. That was the district that joined Wilford on the north school district; joined Wilford on the north. Well the schoolhouse itself was only a half mile from where my father was living at the time that I was going to school. And it was often known as North Wilford. If we had a ball game and we of north Wilford won the game, why of course it was North Wilford. If we lost and Wilford won, why we were Franklin in the eyes of the Wilford people. They made that distinction. They claimed us if we won, it was just Wilford anyway because they said it was North Wilford. But if we lost to them it was Franklin District. They made that distinction.

HF: Was this kind of a Gentile community?

JEB: No.

HF: Or anything like that?

JEB: We had very few Gentiles. We had a number of Jack Mormons. But it was principally an LDS community.

HF: But Franklin and this different distinction perhaps no explanation for it then?

JEB: None other than the jealousy that seemed to exist between the youth of the two localities.

HF: I see. Now would this so-called area of Franklin or north of Wilford be and would it lie west of that highway?

JEB: A portion of it. The major portion of it would be east. Oh. You were speaking of the Teton Highway?

HF: Uh huh.

JEB: I misunderstood you. I thought you were speaking of the Highway 191. Yes, much of it would be west, some of it to the east.

HF: But pretty far over to the north.

JEB: That's right.

HF: Adjacent maybe to...

JEB: St. Anthony

HF: present day St. Anthony.

JEB: That's right. My high school training two years in St. Anthony and the last two years at, it was then Ricks Normal School.

HF: I see. Now you say high school. When did you attend some type of high school at St. Anthony?

JEB: Nineteen-Fifteen and 1916.

HF: But it wasn't a full high school, accredited high school?

JEB: Yes it was, but my folks prevailed on me to go to the academy I suppose because they thought a stronger LDS influence there. There were numerous non-LDS in the St. Anthony area at the time. In fact I believe it was the school board was administered pretty much by mostly non-LDS people. And my parents were quite religious and they prevailed on me to go to Ricks Normal School which at that time you could receive both your Junior and Senior high school years of education there.

HF: And this would be in 19...

JEB: It was 1917. I missed 1918 because of the influenza epidemic, then I returned to graduate in 1919.

HF: But you attended high school at St. Anthony in '15 and '16?

JEB: That's right.

HF: In '15 and '16?

JEB: Yes.

HF: Well this is interesting to me, interesting to note that there was a high school at St. Anthony at that time. Now it must have just got started.

JEB: Well I don't know about that. It was a full fledged high school at the time and a number of the students that I enrolled with as a freshman went off to graduation as a senior in that school in 1919 when I ... and some of them graduated in '18 because of the fact that they kept going there, and I didn't go to school in '18 due to the flu epidemic.

HF: I see. Can you recall for me, Brother Birch, some of the names of the very early teacher who taught you while you were yet at Franklin?

JEB: Yes. Mr. and Mrs. Baseton, Elda Lowel - her name at that time however was Elda Kurr - Mr. Peck, Mr. Smith, and I graduated from the eighth grade under Carl Decker. Those were the teachers I had at Franklin.

HF: That's remarkable, that's very remarkable. Now at St. Anthony High School?

JEB: The superintendent of the high school was Mr. Markel. Some of my teachers were Mrs. Eskellson and I guess I'm going to check out there. I don't recall the others.

HF: Very, very good. After graduating from Rick's College, or let's see was it Rick's College then?

JEB: Rick's Normal School.

HF: Rick's Normal School. In 1919 was it very long there after that, it wasn't long there after that until you were called on an LDS mission?

JEB: I was in the mission field within two weeks afterwards.

HF: Tell us how this came about, who called you, and into which mission.

JEB: That I don't know how to answer. My bishop at Wilford at that time was Bishop Charles Murry. But whether he sent the call in, I presume that he did, but I was never interviewed, my father was never interviewed. The first information that we had of a call coming to me going on and LDS mission was when I received my letter from Box B in Salt Lake City telling me to be in Denver Colorado on the 12th of July and that was just about two weeks after I'd gotten out of school here in Rexburg. And of course I was there in the Western States Mission on the 12th of July.

HF: Now in those days did they give you any preparation training?

JEB: None whatever. The only thing they did was the setting you apart as a minister and a blessing that followed at the hands of some of the General Authorities.

HF: I'd like to hear from you Brother Birch just a brief comment about your experience in the mission field, its affect on your life perhaps?

JEB: I served for 29 and a half months in the western states mission with the headquarters at Denver, Colorado. I was immediately sent to the North Dakota Conference. I labored throughout the entire state of North Dakota traveling much of the time without purse or script. They sent me to teach a term of school on the Fourth Birthold Indian Reservation at the Shell Creek District because of the fact that district schoolhouse had burned down and we had a little chapel there that they wanted to use for a schoolhouse. The mission president told them they could use it providing they'd let a missionary qualify and do the teaching. I was sent there with that responsibility. So I spent about eleven months there alone on the reservation with the Indians and just very few white men that were located close around. I served as conference president there as I recall for about nine months. It was while on my mission that I definitely got interested in the history and historical research. I couldn't help but observe the condition of the Indians on the reservation and I was aware of the stories that the white men had told and were telling at that time about the Indians and I found that the white men at that time was exaggerating and untruthful in the statements he made. So I became interested in the Indian and his welfare. And I started studying history at that time and doing my research and it's been carried on ever since. That was in 1920 to 1922. I returned home of course from my mission in 1922 and the historical bug had undoubtedly bit me very hard because it's disturbed me ever since. My research has been with these two cultures and their conflicts and their contacts and everything else while they've mixed and had troubles and had pleasures and all. I've been interested in those things.

HF: So you have pursued this interest all down to your present day of livelihood?

JEB: That is true. And I'm still pursuing it.

HF: And you've done a little writing?

JEB: I've done considerable. I've presented a number of manuscripts. They all however have been returned with different comments and I have some wonderful rejection slips, some beautiful ones, but I'm still working on some of them.

HF: And has your interest in archeology and historical items, oh kind of localized quite a bit in the history of the stagecoach?

JEB: Well...

HF: Bridges maybe?

JEB: I would say yes wherever there's a historical aspect of this area I'm definitely interested in it. Let me go back just for minute to my early history. And hen I was a lad, I would say between the ages of 10 and 16, it was nothing uncommon for me to most every Sunday play around or upon the premises of Old Fort Henry, most every Sunday. It was within two miles of my home. And I recall very vividly the excavations that had been made in a bank of clay there. There'd been a wash go through there with water— the water was high – and washed out and there were excavations made back in this bank of soil and

I don't know what purpose they'd served, undoubtedly they were for storage purposes or something at Fort Henry. And I recall those excavations we boys playing there and also recall a number of old burnt logs that were there. And that later, twenty five years later, historians and archeologists went in there and proved that that was Fort Henry. I wasn't aware of the fact that it was at the time I was playing there, but I played there for six or seven years prior to the time that anybody knew that it was Fort Henry.

HF: And in the thirties it was when Doctor Beal and an attorney over there in St. Anthony a Mr. Miller...

JEB: Well yes and John Elliot. Jack Elliot.

HF: Did some excavating.

JEB: Well this would be from 1910 to 1916 when I was playing there.

HF: Oh I see. Well isn't that interesting. Now we're talking about this point what maybe half a mile east of the present bridge?

JEB: Parker-Salem Bridge. Yes.

HF: And it would be just south of the Snake River, the river bank?

JEB: Yes, in fact almost on the bank. It in fact is just a very short distance.

HF: Was there a little spring of water in that area?

JEB: I wouldn't say that there was a spring. It was a – you wouldn't exactly call it a tributary – but it was as I say in those days we used to call them little slews where the earth had broken way and some of the water had found recourse down through there from the river. Traveled this...

HF: Now of course we know that these men when they made these excavations in the early thirties had to go pretty deep. How do you explain the fact that these artifacts which they uncovered were buried somewhat?

JEB: I think that was due in large measure to the high water situation of the river when it raises during high water time in the spring and it washes down through there and carries debris and dirt, sediment, and everything and deposits around in these places like that. And I'm sure that's sediment there. But they could have been buried to some depth when I was playing there because I say all that I saw was the excavations there. There were two or three of those excavations I recall vividly and these old burnt logs that were laying around. So they could have been buried to some extent at that time.

HF: Now you have made some... and in your interest has been localized somewhat in early bridges in the area.

JEB: Well I might say this way, I have made a study of the Snake River from its beginning up in Island Park and Yellowstone Park on down through oh well to its current flow to the Columbia almost. I was interested in some of the first bridges. Of course, the Taylor Bridge down here crossing at Eagle Rock I've made a study on that, but the primary study that I have made on a bridge was the first bridge that crossed the Snake River at St. Anthony. There's a very narrow confinement there that the Snake River has to travel through as both banks come in close together with a rocky cliff on each side. And the confined to an area that's less than, oh not more than 40 feet wide. It confines that Snake River down 'til it just roars through there. And the old timers built a bridge across this here particular spot and it was authorized by the Bingham County Board of Commissioners. And they submitted the bridge on bids and it was put in there for three hundred and fifty dollars made of course entirely of wooden beams and plank. And then after they got the bridge completed they wanted to paint it so they asked for bids on painting and the lowest bid was 150 dollars. And they said that's too much money. So they hired it painted and paid a hundred dollars for it painted. So they put up that bridge and painted it for 450 dollars. It lasted for over 40 years; served the public. Then they came along and then next bridge they built was just immediately east of that across the channel where it was much wider. And they spent anyway 50 to 60 thousand dollars, the state did, and that served for possibly for fifteen to twenty years and they widen... [tape cuts out]

HF: Isn't that interesting.

JEB: Now that for a long long time that was the only bridge across the Snake River up in this area.

HF: Brother Birch, you've served your community publicly as an elected official of Fremont County. Will you comment when this was and to what office you were elected?

JEB: Well I served as the assessor of Fremont County from 1945 to 1949 inclusive. I served as a member of the elected school board of St. Anthony from 1929 I think to 1932: a three year term. I think those are mostly my public services that I have given.

HF: Now in your church service will you make a brief comment?

JEB: In my church service, I believe that I have served in beginning with the stake high council; I have served in every capacity in the Stake from thereon down such as... I've been the first councilor in the Stake Superintendency of the Sunday School; I've been the Superintendent of the Stake Mutual; I've been the Chairman of the Stake Genealogical Society. And I have served in ward capacities mostly in teaching capacities. I served in the St. Anthony First Ward for over twenty years as a gospel doctrine teacher and I have served in various other classes in that ward. At the present time, I'm more or less on the shelf. I'm serving as a home teacher. Now do you want my family?

HF: Now in conclusion as we complete the interview, will you give some, make some appropriate comments as to your personal family, your marriage and to whom and when, and your boys and girls?

JEB: In 1924 I married Vita Monk. She was a local girl living in St. Anthony at the time. To our union we've had three children born: Lowell, Vincent and Joan. Joan married Gordon Rigby and they live in New Sweden out west of Idaho Falls. Her activity has been more in the musical and the dancing lines. She's been an activity councilor and president and instructor in the Wooddale Ward in the Shelly Stake. And she conducts dancing classes at the present time teaching many of the youngsters from around Idaho Falls. She very actively engaged in musical and dancing lines of activity. Both of my sons have served in the Bishopric. My older son Lowell is at the present time bishop of the Wilford Ward. My son Vincent served as bishop of St. Anthony ward for a number of years. First as a councilor, he served under Max Mortenson when he was bishop. And at the present time, Vincent is serving as the second councilor in the Yellow Stone Stake Presidency.