

Rudger McArthur/Opera House, St. George, Utah, July 26, 1995

At the request of LoyAnn we did a little research and decided to talk about the Opera House as we knew it. Now in this life there are various ways to doing things and we see refurbished and rebuilt but we never see anything restored so I want to talk to you for a few minutes about the outside then talk about the inside..

When I was a youngster growing up there were no oiled roads and the restrooms were on the north side of the building outside and there were hitching posts for horses around the whole corner and people would come to meetings - productions here and they'd tie their buggies and their horses around the confines of the building on the outside and it was quite a sight. It was really fun to watch and see so when I say it was not restored it is not back to what I wanted, to what I knew. Now my neighbor, Henry Crosby, puts this best. He says, "Well, it isn't what was here but what's here now is nice." And I will agree with that. So we're going to talk a little about that and a few things.

Now, LoyAnn you can cut out of this tape what you want. But when Aunt Enid was born Mother couldn't nurse her. But, Aunt Wanda Snow lived out the street a block. She had a child named [Alma]. December weather, rain and shine, Aunt Wanda would walk three times a day, from her house to mother's house, and nurse Enid and walk back. So we're related to the Snows through that but I can remember Aunt Wanda coming through that rugged, muddy road to take care of her.

Let's come to the building and some of the things that I know. The first thing that I am going to talk about is a meeting that was held in August of 1927. President Heber J. Grant was coming to St. George and we'd seen articles in the paper about whether he was coming or not but when he got here they put a program together which included myself and my sister, Adrene, _____ Snow and _____ Pierce lived in St. George and those two teenagers had taken the two of us and taught us to sing and we sang around at this, that and the other.

And for those who just came in my name is Rudger McArthur and my wife, Erma, is in back of me. My grandfather was Daniel Duncan McArthur who was a body guard of Joseph Smith, who captained the 2nd handcart company that left Illinois, the first one to come to the Salt Lake Valley. But he wasn't the first one admitted into the valley because Brigham Young said, "Well you know, Brother Ellsworth left first and he's coming into the valley first", so the two handcart companies came into the valley at the same time. He was one of the first settlers to come down here and they had their first city council meeting in St. George on the 4th of December, 1861, and he was elected a member of the city council. So we've been in this racket around here for a long time. Now when you folks started coming in we were talking a little about a program that I was involved in in this building. President Heber J. Grant was coming to St. George in, I think, August of 1927. They were in the process of preparing a program and so my sister, Adrene, and I were being coached by a couple of teenage girls who lived in St. George and they decided we were going to sing in the program. So we did and it was fun and my mother was excited and scared. She said, "Weren't you scared?" and we

said, "No, we're too young to be scared." I was 5 and my sister was 7. So I was the youngest performer I believe, to my knowledge, who ever sang here. We had a ball.

I wanted to talk a little bit. We're going to go back now and talk about this building as I knew it, not as it is now because they would not put into the building now what it was then. For instance then the outbuildings or toilet buildings were out houses in the back yard. There was no plumbing at the time and no water system at the time and that is what they used. People came and they came by horseback and they came by buggy and there were hitching posts and tying rings all around the corner. You would come in and tie your horse up and come into the program, come back and find your horse and sometimes they weren't there because the kids would take them and the buggies. It was really interesting to watch people come to the old opera house to performances and the old seating area - you used to be able to raise it up and down and it was quite interesting to a boy that was my age. But my mother was in some of the plays. That would be LoyAnn's grandma.

(Papers shuffling) You know, I'm going to get down to that picture yet.

This is an idea of what people looked like and what they wore. And we like to show this little thing around to see if anybody knows why it's that way. Now the kids wouldn't remember. Do you know why it's that way? You put it in an eye piece and it gave you three dimension so the two pictures overlapped and that was it.

My father sang I think in every operetta that was performed here during his years. And we're going to talk about one in particular tonight that my mother was so upset with him about. They were singing Blue Moon and upstairs on the stage they had a beautiful blue crescent moon and they had the ability to raise it up above the stage. And as father was sitting on it and it raised up and the moon tilted back so he was pointing away exactly under the _____ and when Father was ready to come over and sing that part, the part was written for a lady originally, but he was singing it and my mother stood her four children up in front of their father and said now this is your father. I remember telling my mother my father didn't look like that. That wasn't my dad. They had him wigged and made up in a skirt and shoes and everything else. But he sang and it was an exciting time to be there. The Blue Moon, of course, was the one that we all remembered but they also did Student Prince, the Debtor's Song and all of those operettas. Now they call it the opera house but there was never to my knowledge an opera performed there. It was too small. They just didn't have the facilities to do it. But it was a social hour, a social place and a social time. They just had a lot of fun and we had a lot of fun. Operettas is what we called them and they were just a small version of an opera, plays.

Now I'm going to circulate these but I want them in my sight constantly. You must not take them out of my sight. (LoyAnn - Is that for my benefit Rudger/) That is for the benefit of everybody. Now let me tell you what happened, why I say that. My grandfather was a body guard of Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith wanted a black horse to lead the Nauvoo legion on. And my grandfather who would be LoyAnn's great grandfather, had the black horse. So on the streets of Nauvoo they traded the horse for

a watch fob. Now all the watch fob is is a piece of jewelry. It took us a long time to find out where it came from and what it was so sister McArthur and I took it to Salt Lake to the museum, to the archivist up there, to have it authenticated and he said they would like to take it into the next room and five of them examine it and I said you bring the five into this room. So that's a little about the story.

Now, they had all kinds of programs here but the ones I liked best were the boxing matches and the wrestling matches and they dropped the seating area down and they put the mats up on top and we'd sneak over and come in and sneak out. Now on the bottom of some of those you'll see that they'll give you a 50% discount on your ticket if you'll pay cash because admittance to things here in the opera house were many times by produce - - honey, molasses, squash, corn, grain, or potatoes but sometimes the Bishop's Storehouse got a little too full so they had to sort of lop it off. And it was quite interesting.

And when we cleaned up my Grandpa Morris's stuff there were two civil war swords that were used as props in this building. I couldn't get the City to take them so I gave them to somebody that wanted them and they are now crossed and mounted over a door in Logan. But the building served a big purpose. Somebody said, well why didn't they make it any bigger and the answer to that was there was no need. There weren't enough people here at the time to worry about it.

In the 1930's, of course, they converted it to a seed processing plant for Utah Sugar Company and they sort of messed it up but as far as the old opera house was it was a cultural center of St. George even though there was never an opera performed there and it was the cultural center of St. George and every body that was anybody attended functions at the opera house.

Now I don't know if any of these youngsters would recognize any names on any of those or not. (There's lots of familiar names - unknown speaker) My grandpa R. A. Morris and R. A. Morris, Jr., the Picketts, Adams and the whole bunch of them. (LoyAnn - Any Larkins? We've got a Larkin here.) No they were a later implant.

Money was not a thing that you had or that you had to have - really. You could just about buy anything you wanted with barter. (Unknown speaker - I wish it was that way again.) If you could barter the right stuff. I had an eye implant lens and I told Ron Snow that I was going to pay him off in corn and he just about died.

I would hope that LoyAnn and all of you and your programs that you will someday tell the world that it wasn't always this neat and it wasn't always this nice and they didn't have all the modern conveniences that they have now. But they were a great people they were a very choice people

Martial Band picture? That wasn't taken in 1961 that was taken about 1934. That was one of the bands. On the 4th of July and on the 24th of July when the sun came up that bunch of guys got on the back of a truck or a wagon when I started with them, and then

a truck, and we went around this town and woke everybody up and if they weren't awake by the time the shooting was done up on the hill they were by the time we got through with them. There were certain places in town where that wagon stopped and my mother told me that if I ever got off that wagon she would beat me within an inch of my life. (Unknown speaker - How old were you then?) Oh, probably 15. (Unknown speaker - Still young enough that your mom worried about you.) Well she worried about the home brew they did at those stops. There was really no way to know what was in it.

Whitehead's store was down on Tabernacle Street. It was a furniture store and it was also an emporium where you could buy just about anything that was sold. You have to realize that a store in those days - one or two kinds of cereal at the most and that would have been one of the grain cereals. You special ordered. We have a little girls dresser that was ordered from Judd's store, Erma? that was bought before the turn of the century. We have also a rug that was loomed by my Grandmother McArthur before the turn of the century.

LoyAnn - They've been to the Tabernacle and they got to stand at the podium. Could you tell about Daniel D. at the podium?) One of my very favorite stories about Daniel D. was told to me by Willard Nisson. He and I were laying corners on Howard Morris's house on Diagonal Street and he said, "I've got to tell you a story." I said, "All right. I'll listen to the story." He said, "We used to come from Washington to St. George to go to church in the tabernacle. We stayed to the opening song and the opening prayer and then we'd go over and play cards across the street in an old fig orchard where Jolley's Ranchwear now is. We knew it was time to go back to the tabernacle when D. D. McArthur began to beat the pulpit with a cane." I have the cane. And he said, "Then we'd go back and listen to the tail end of President McArthur's talk and the closing prayer and then we'd tell our folks what we guessed went on in the meeting and they thought we were there all the time." Now the cane that President McArthur beat the pulpit with is one that we display and until the last remodeling job on the tabernacle they still displayed the nicks in it made by that cane so he must have been quite a person.

He [Daniel D.] spent some of his summers bringing saints into Utah before the RR was finished. Before he died he went blind. Sister Alice Barton got me cornered one day and she said she wanted to tell me a story about my grandfather and I said all right what was it. "Well we were sitting in the yard one night and he heard the kids go by and he said, 'Dunk, did you water the horses?' Nobody answered. 'Dunk did you water the horses?' Nobody answered. So it came time for dinner that night and he said, 'Now Dunk, when I talk to you I want an answer.' He [Dunk] said, 'you haven't talked to me all day.' 'Well who did I talk to?' 'That was the Worthen kids.'" Now this same cane that I have he took and he tapped through the corals and stuff and he went over to Worthen's house so he knocked on the door and Sister Worthen came to the door and she said, "Well what have my kids done now?" He said, "They haven't done anything. I want to talk to your kids." So anyway, to make a long story short he apologized to the kids for being gruff with them. And Alice, she would have been what - 80 when she told me that story, had never forgotten. She was a little 3 or 4 year old child. But they were also afraid of this gruff old man who was blind and couldn't see anything. Every place he

went he found his way through with a cane. He had at the time of his death in his collection of horses and buggies, we would call them cinnamon colored horses and an open top buggy, that he was going back to build the temple.