

Interview with Elmo Richard Lewis in April, 1975, by Judy Reich

EL: This is part of the history of Lafayette through the eyes of Elmo Richard Lewis who was born on the creek east of the main part of Lafayette. The spot was just north of the Lafayette sewer plant. The mine that was in the area was called the Haywood Mine and on top of the hill where the highway goes was called the Blue Ribbon Hill and also the Blue Ribbon Mine. It was called the Hill for a good many years. I don't know what they call it now, but it was called the Blue Ribbon Hill. There were many mines and their families lived in the area. There was a boarding house across Coal Creek where the single men lived. Others lived in tents, shacks, dugouts that were made in the side of the hill. There was a saloon on the northwest corner where the road goes to Erie. Just south and west of the bridge that crosses Coal Creek was a Johnson's store. It served the area. The store was washed away during the flood of the twenties. Many chicken coops and animals was in that flood.

We lived in a three-room house, barns for the horse, and chicken coops in the yard. We had a spring just about a half a block from the house. My mother would carry the water for drinking, cooking, and washing from that spring. I wonder how many of the younger generation would do that today. We had a happy time on the creek. My sister Maria which was the oldest, Bill my brother, and I had a lot of fun playing in that area. We went swimming in the creek in the summer and skating on the creek in the winter. I was small so I just slid on the ice, I had a sled on which my brother and sister would pull me along. One instance that I have a faint memory of was a flood we had coming down Coal Creek and I went near the stream and fell in. I was about 3 years old and my mother was able to dive in and pull me out. It was quite a thrill to the family and a lot of excitement in the area when I fell in the creek. We had a horse named Pet and mother would take us to the main part of Lafayette. I remember standing in the

back of the buggy. One time the horse ran away and knocked me out ~~the~~ the buggy and ran over my lip.

When we went to school we walked up the track. The freight train would sometimes come along and pick us up in the caboose. It was a real thrill. The caboose still gives me a lot of excitement and fascinates me. It was mighty' tough on cold, stormy days walking to school because of the blizzards and different things. But we would walk up and also walk home.

The big storm in the area was in the winter of 1913 when everything was stopped. We had a tunnel to the barn and chicken house to feed the animals. My dad was ill and the doctor said we had to move into town for him. We moved to the house at 108 East Simpson Street where my mother still lives. During the storm my sister went to my Grandmother's to stay over night, but my brother Bill decided that he was going to go home. He got on the train and when he got down to the area where he would get off the train the storm was so bad, the blizzard was blowing until you could hardly see your hand in front of your face, and the conductor talked Bill into going on to Erie and staying with him. My mother was very upset over it all and wondered what had happened to Bill. She went outside to see if she could find him, but the storm was so bad that she couldn't go more than 5 or 10 feet. Two days later here came by brother Bill back home.

During this time we were in a big coal strike.....what was called the 1910 Strike.

Before I go on I would like to go back to some past history of Lafayette. The present site of Lafayette was homesteaded by Mary Miller in 1869. Coal was discovered in 1872. The Simpson Mine that made Lafayette was sunk in 1884 by James Simpson and his son John. It was a 14 foot vein. The mine and Simpson St. was named after them.

Mrs. Miller laid out the town in 1889 and 1890. She was made president of the Lafayette Bank in 1900. She was the first woman president of a bank in the

world. Lafayette Miller, the husband of Mary Miller, passed away at the age of 41. This town was named after him.

I recall there was a power plant in the east end of town just south of the Simpson Mine that furnished electricity to the area. You could tell if Louisville had lights by looking down to the old Miller farm and if there was a light on it was a sign that Louisville was able to get light.

You think things are high now, but they were also high back in those days. In fact the prices today are climbing up to where they were back in the early 1900's. Butter was \$1.00 a pound, eggs were \$1.25 a dozen, flour sold from \$25-50 a sack, sugar \$1.00 a pound and, of course, the cheap part of everything around here was the land....that was sold for \$1.25 an acre.

My grandfather, William Richards came to Lafayette in the middle of the 1800's and he lived at 201 East Cleveland Street. My mother came to Lafayette in 1896 to live with her father and step-mother. They came from south Wales. My father, William E. Lewis came to Lafayette at the turn of the century. My father and grandfather were professional miners. Myself, having a family of miners, I never worked in any of the mines. My father and mother were married in 1900 and, as has been mentioned before, three children were born, Maria, William, and Elmo. My mother who is going on 95 and myself are still alive.

In 1907 two great events happened in Lafayette. Elmo R. Lewis was born and the First Baptist Church of Lafayette was organized. The church where it is now was finished in 1913 and my aunt Eleanor Richards was the first person baptized in the new church. My grandmother Mary Richards was one of the pillars of the church.

During the five-year strike many things happened in Lafayette. I will try to bring out some events. My mother, Hannah Lewis Evans brings out some of the events in her tape. One thing as I recall we had an outstanding basketball team

in Lafayette. They even beat the University of Colorado. The players as I remember were Carl Swagger, John Magnuson, two Brown brothers, Conley and Raymond Harmon which were farmers who farmed in the Lafayette area. I think it would be interesting to bring out the way to Denver from Lafayette during those days. You traveled east to the other side of Blue Ribbon hill and then turned south to what is now 287 and south on Federal to Denver. Westminster College set off all my itself---nothing within miles.

As I mentioned, we moved to Lafayette during the big storm and, of course, our house was one of the most modern houses in Lafayette. It was so modern at the time it even had a water faucet inside and had electricity. Of course, the main plumbing was on the outside. Most of the lighting that was done in most of the homes at this time was with coal oil lamps.

Before we moved they had a big fire that burned down most of the business area but it was built back up. When we moved to town and I was a little guy the stores in the town was the Company store which was a two-story building. I think it was owned by the Northern Coal Co. The southwest corner of Simpson and Michigan which is approximately 410 Simpson St. was owned by J. P. Dow and a partner and right across the street from Dow's was J. S. Morgan which was 500 Simpson St. He had a grocery store and later on his son-in-law, E. J. Burns ran the store who I worked for and got my grocery experience with. Next to the drug store was the post office and then there was the barber shop and a jewelry store that was run by Mr. Hartz. I think this was the store which later became the O. C. Alderson or the Hub Store, then the mortuary was next.

I will have to tell a story about the barber shop gang. They were drinkers and always pulling off jokes. One day they got drunk and one of them passed out. They put him in the show casket which was near the front window.

He was there all morning and people would walk up and down the street and look in at him. They went on for quite awhile until the drunk in the casket came to. He thought he was in the Promised Land. He sobered up in a hurry and jumped out of the casket without any help. The people in the community had a lot of fun over this for a long time.

Next to the mortuary was a pool hall which we called the League of Nations. About everybody used to go in there of all nationalities. Then Skoll's Bakery and Grocery shop. Next was Sam Lucock's Men Clothing and cleaning and pressing. I think next was an ice cream parlour which later became a bank. Then the Company Store and on the corner was a bank that went broke in 1913, that wrecked the town.. Across the street which would be approximately 310 E. Simpson St. was another drug store called the Callahan Store. Next was Jackie Gordon, and then the Jones Livery Stable. Then came the Moon's Meat Market and then next was Bill Moon, where he lives now, and also the Congregational Church or where the Library is. On the other side of the street going east there was a theater run by a fellow named Woods, down where Joe Rodwick is now was another pool hall run by a fellow named Lipsey. Next to that building west was a bowling alley. Also there was a bowling alley under the Company Store. Where Hale is now was a two-story brick building owned by George Lamont and a partner. Upstairs was rooms and I remember a dentist's office was up there. Also upstairs above the Company Store was a dentist named Miller and the lodges also met up above the Company Store. Across the street from Lamont's near the alley was Joe Brown's shoe repair store. Next I remember was the Union Store that gave out groceries to the strikers. Next was the Webber's Store,...Webber's Stable. Then on the corner was the Mayhoffer Boarding House, which later I owned.

On the west side of the highway were the saloons. There were approximately 10 . On the east side, on Simpson St. about 101 Simpson Street was what we called Ed Lishon's store. He had a club foot and he ran the store for a lot

of the miners to hang out. That is where the Dairy King is today. Going north, the north side of the alley was a garage and next was a blacksmith shop run by Dan Evans (later he became my step-father) and the Nelson boys who later moved at the alley across from the Lamont Store or the present Hale's store.

Getting to the 1910 Strike as I saw the things that would happen. Union men would meet at the town hall and go out on guard duty to keep the Scabs as we called them from coming into town. The Company sent in strike breakers as the reason the strike lasted approximately 5 years. They say men would come into town and never be seen or heard about again. Things became quite hot around here. There was a lot of gun-firing around. It got so hot, as my mother mentioned in her tape, that we slept in the cellar. They would be shooting from the top of the Simpson Mine dump around the town and the Union men would be in a different area shooting up at them.

At this time I'd like to bring out some instances that happened. There was a fight in one of the saloons between one of the strike breakers who was a Mexican and a local man, a marshall, which was known as Ed Wichley came up and stopped the fight by arresting the Mexican . He was taking him down to the City Hall at Ed Lishon's corner. Next, the Mexican pulled out a knife and cut the Marshall's stomach. Dan Evans ran down and held the Marshall and the Marshall died in his arms. The Mexican got away. Another instance, a local fellow got in a fight with a Mexican , the Mexican drewed a knife and took after the fellow, I think his name was Benton. He was running down the road at about where the drug store is now and he stumbled and fell and just lucky his hand hit on a rock. He threw the rock back and fortunately it hit the Mexican man in the head and knocked him down and this gave the opportunity for Benton to get up and run home. I think he lived at 106 E. Cleveland St. at the time. It continued to get tougher around the area. In fact, as a little fellow as we went to school why, there were fights

every day at school between the Union kids and the strike-breaking kids. About every night there would be a rock fight where we'd be running home from school. I have a scar on the top of my head where one of the rocks hit me at that time. It got tougher around here because the Companies got an injunction against the Union leaders and they had them put in jail in Boulder. The fighting carried on and the governor decided that he should do something about it so he sent in the militia. I remember them in front of the City Hall and across the street. They leaned against the fences and broke them down. The militia searched the houses and if they found guns they confiscated them. People buried their guns so that the militia would not find them. It was still dangerous around the area so President Wilson sent in the regulars. They were stationed behind the old school and us young kids had a soldier buddy and we used to eat lunch with them. I remember going in line with the soldiers for our meals. We would also carry notes back and forth to their girlfriends and try to make dates for them.

It was really a hard time on the miners around here. Some of the miners left the area and went to Wyoming to live. After my father passed away in 1913, it was really tough on our family. The Union store cut us off from our rations, the bank went broke and lost all the money we had. In July I took sick with blood poisoning in my eyes. It was a real trying time. I always like to tell the story about one day when I went to school, I was late coming into school. The teacher said, "Elmo, I see you're a little behind". I said, "Yes, teacher, but if my mother had had one more safety pin you wouldn't have been able to." Mother took in washings and ironings. It was done on a wash board and the iron was heated on the coal stove. I got a job cleaning spittoons at the two pool halls and my brother and I cleaned ash pits. You can see, it was nothing like today. You had to make your own way. Later on, mother got work at Nederland in the boarding house, Bill and Maria stayed in Lafayette and I went with mother. Later

we went to Colorado Springs for a short period of time. When I came back, the Boy Scouts of America was organized. I recall there was Harry Noble, Fountain Noble, Cliff Alderson, Glenn Cundle, Ralph Harmon, Fred Autrey, and myself. Fred Autrey has passed away. It was tough to keep the scouts going because the miners thought the scouts was a training place for the milita. I still carry a scout card.

In 1922 we had the first football team since before the war. We won the district but lost it in the semi-finals. In those days they had only one class so we did all right. I was happy to be a part of the team. I had to drop out of school after that. I recall that during this time the educators thought that we needed a new high school and so they put it up to the vote of the people and, of course, the school was defeated. Then the following year there was a lot of commotion in town because some were for and some were against. There were fights going on between the people of the community. The following year, they voted again and voted to have a new high school which is now the junior high school. When it was built, it was so arranged that the payments would not have to start for 30 or 40 years and we had to pay interest on that bond issue for that many years before we could start paying it off. I think it was paid off in the first part of 1960.

In 1927 we had another big strike. They called it a wobbley strike. Men and women would go from Lafayette to Erie where they would get coffee and donuts. They would go through the Columbine mining camp where the mine was being worked by strike-breakers. On this special morning they had the gates locked. The miners started to climb over and under the gates when the guards turned a machine gun loose on them. Some were killed and several were wounded. That brought a lot of excitement in town. I was working in a grocery store at the time. From that time on, coal mining started to slip and natural gas started to come into Denver.

Another interesting happening at this time, two men were interested in the same woman and, of course, they were jealous of each other. Finally it got so



hot that they were out gunning for each other. Finally it came to a head in a store at 305 East Simpaon St. One of the fellows called "Wild Bill" was in the back of the store and the other fellow came in, they saw each other and they both drew. Wild Bill couldn't get the safety off on his gun so the man in front shot first and hit Bill in the hand and knocked the safety off in his hand, so Bill shot and killed the man in the front of the store. There was a lot of excitement at that time around town when this killing was going on.

Of course, during the depression, we in the community had a real hard time because we had a very good bank but because of the credit the bank put out it went broke and all the people of the community lost their money and we really had a depression. It if hadn't been for the bank going broke I believe that Lafayette would have weathered the storm pretty good.

Another interesting thing during the early days of Lafayette was that almost all the people of Lafayette was Democrats. I think that if a Republican had appeared, he would have been tarred and feathered and run out of town. I believe this came about by an outstanding family called the O'Days. Two of the girls worked for the Democrats in the County Court House. When election time came around they'd be out electioneering for the party and they convinced the town to vote Democratic. When I became of age, I decided we had to have a two-party town so I registered as a Republican. Not that I believed in all the philosophy of the party but I believed but I believed in a more-than-one-party system. As a result of the last days, Lafayette is still a Democratic stronghold.

In the early twenties the Ku Klux Klan was formed in this area. They'd meet on the hill just east of Lafayette, just beyond the Blue Ribbon hill. You could see them burning the cross. Also they would burn the cross in different parts of the town and in other towns. They'd have big marches. I remember one

when they marched through Lafayette and then through Louisville. There were several thousand of them....some on horses. My first experience with them was in the Congregational Church where the Library is now. It was an evening service when they came in. We were all scared to death. They lined up in the aisles of the church. The leaders came in and said a few words, and they left leaving some money. This procedure was done in other churches in the community. Later on the Ku Klux Klan died in Lafayette.

Another interesting thing in Lafayette was joining the Lafayette Fire Department. It was a real experience that a person never forgot. I will bring out a few activities. When a candidate came in he would climb a post to see if he could climb and then he would come down in a tub of ice water. Then they'd put on some overshoes to warm his feet. The overshoes were lined with wire and they'd give him a shot of electricity that would knock him off his feet. They'd have him give a jig and dance and then give him a shot of electricity and down he would go. This was done many times. It was quite a thrill for the audience to see these fellows doing the jig and flop down they would go on the ground. The candidates would then be shaved with a razor and sandpaper. The soap was asafetida and it was put on the face and also in the mouth. It tasted terrible. There were other activities that I cannot mention at this time. It would be too shocking. Near the end they would put a big belt on you and hook you on a line that ran from one end of the hall to the other and would pull you along. All the members had big paddles and they would hit you as you went by. When you reached the other side you couldn't sit down. Your old bottom was good and red. Then you took the yoke of becoming a fireman, then someone would put cow itch on that would almost drive you crazy. I fought the cow itch treatment until it was outlawed in the fire department. Many times during the initiation if they would have let you quit you sure would. It is something that is never forgot----the years I was a fireman. In fact, as I look back they were among the best years of my life.

Young men of the community had a lot of fun. We also were the leaders in the community spirit. We headed many projects one of which was paving Simpson and Cleveland Streets. The sad one was the swimming pool, the cause of many hard feelings and was closed down. We bought the old Chevrolet fire truck that is an antique at the present time out of earnings that we won in tournaments. The first siren was bought by us.

I'd like to bring back some of the activities I've missed in regards to how business is carried on in Lafayette, especially in the grocery stores. In the mornings we'd go out and take orders from the town. Each store had their own customers and we'd go out and pick up the orders. Then we would go back to the store (end of tape #1)

Tape #2-----and make up the orders and in the afternoon we would deliver the orders. And so most of the people except on special occasions would not come to the store, except on Saturdays. Saturday was the day that everybody would sort of get out and go to the grocery store and do some visiting in the stores.

Another interesting thing that happened during the later times as I carried on was the proposition of natural gas. As we tried to progress in the town of Lafayette, I brought it up one time in a Lions meeting at the starting of the forties of having natural gas into Lafayette and, of course, it was the cause of quite a stink in town for the special reason that the town was coal miners. I was called upon the carpet accusing me of going against the coal miners. I wasn't, I was only for progress for Lafayette. When they contacted me in regards as to why I was for gas I asked them exactly how they were heating their hot water and they told me they were heating their water by electricity. In my home I was still heating my hot water by coal. So I asked them how they could accuse

me of going against the coal miners when they were interested in their own conveniences. I knew that gas would finally come in. In later years, others saw the light and now we have natural gas.

Another outstanding thing happened when we paved our streets in Lafayette which was a great project for the community. We had a lot of fights at that time because there were pros and cons. Some of the people didn't care to see Lafayette be a nice town to live in and they fought the paved streets in Lafayette. The people who were on the City Council voted to have paved streets. They were business men, and of course were interested in business and because they were in favor of the streets, the people that were against the streets quit doing business with them. They lost them as customers and so they kind of slowed up and didn't take an active part in getting the streets paved. The opposition organized a city group which was against the pavement. Frank Miller and myself joined the opposition to try to convince them that the thing to do was to have the streets paved. At meetings, many times I've had people throw their fists at me when they'd get mad at me over the paving the the streets. My next door neighbor wouldn't talk to me for a long time because of the paving of the streets. After we joined we got together and voted us out of the organization. But it was taken to the Supreme Court and finally the Supreme Court sent it back and the town revoted on it and we got the paved streets in and I'm sure that the ones who opposed the streets of Lafayette would be the first that would fight if anyone would want to take the streets out. That was really an exciting time for Lafayette.

In closing, I would like to read a short history of one of the sons of Lafayette after he grew up, which is myself. I dropped out of school in the 9th grade and went to work. I worked on the highway when they paved it from Broomfield to Lafayette. I worked at the Valmont Plant when they were building

it. In the transition period when they were transferring the activities from the Lafayette Plant, west of Lafayette, to Valmont I worked as a section engineer on the 4:00 o'clock shift till they closed down. I worked for the local laundry driving the truck and washing clothes. I also worked on construction, worked in Wyoming and in Texas and also worked in the local stores. In 1927 I worked for the Alexander and Eagle Rock Airplane Co. in Colorado Springs building airplanes. When the '28 crash came I came home and worked for Heinz and Sons selling Fords, then they were forced to close because of the depression. I then went to work for Arnold in Boulder selling cars in Lafayette. When the Ford Motor Co. quit making the Model A and started to work on the V-8, we did not have any cars to sell so I went to work for David store in Erie in the grocery store. I worked, as I mentioned before, in the local stores in Lafayette when I was growing up. I worked in that store and the Lafayette store and later on Davis put me as manager in the Louisville store until I bought out Guy Keller in the Phillips 66 station in 1937. I ran the station myself from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. seven days a week. I wonder if this generation would work like that. My mother would bring my meals. I worked there these hours until I got out of debt and I hired a helper. In 1937 a beautiful school teacher by the name of Frances Frank came to teach in the local school. She took to my fancy and I started dating her. On July 23, 1939, we were married. Just before that I bought the property at 409 and 411 E. Simpson Street where we lived and ran the apartment house. Our lives was very happy. And then the war came on in 1941 and I enlisted in the Signal Corps Reserve. In the fall of '42 I was called into training in November and went to Greeley and then to Steamboat Springs. I studied and passed the test to go on into special training in the electrical engineering school at Colorado University. I took basic training at Miami Beach and then went on to more specialized training in radar. I then went to Fresno, California, for research and design for extending the radar system. I was discharged in November

of 1945. I could not find the work that I wanted so in January of '46 I started to school at Denver University. I was able to pass the entrance examination and yet I was a drop out. I took my Bachelor of Science degree in 3 years and went to work for the Delco Co. as a Sales Engineer. Six months later I went with the Federal Housing Administration as credit analyst, then a senior analyst, and the last 15 years I was the director of mortgage credit for the state of Colorado. I left because of a sick spell that ended up with three major operations in one month's time. I'm here only by the grace of God. Now I'm retired, waiting for the Lord and Savior to call me home. I've had my ups and downs but as I look back, I have had a happy life with my real help-mate and my son Bill whom we got in 1949 and my mother Hannah Evans who is still living at 95 and relatives and friends.

And now what interest would a local son have in his own community? What organizations and who things would he take an active part in? And these are some of the activities that I have participated in in Lafayette in the years I have lived here. As I mentioned 'way back in 1919 and 1920 I joined the Boy Scouts of which I am still a member. I was active and served on many committees with the scouts. I even acted as Scout Master. I'm coming up for the 34 year pin. I was an active fireman for the number of years required. And, as they say, once a fireman, always a fireman. My first activity with the firemen was in 1923. I was a member of the local Masonic Lodge for 35 years and a member of the Lafayette Lions Club for 35 years. I have been president, zone chairman twice, and deputy district governor of the area. And, of course, I am a member of the First Baptist Church where I have served as Sunday School Superintendent for over 15 years and also a deacon of the church. I also worked on the committees of Lafayette. At the present time I am a member of the Variance Board and represent Lafayette on the Regional Council of Government for solid waste.

I have covered the history and other activities briefly and I know I have left out many events that I hope someone else has covered. I sure appreciate the opportunity of making this tape and telling things about my life that will go down in the history of Lafayette.