

JOHN SKINNER
Oral History Interview

Statewide Oral History Project, Abandoned Mines Reclamation Program
Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining

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This is Lee Bennett and I'm here today at the home of John Skinner in Ophir, Utah, to interview him for the Utah mining history project. With me is Jim Mattingly who will record the interview.

LB: Can you give us your name, your date of birth, and where you now live, please?

JS: My name is John Skinner. I was born October 22, 1946, and I live in Ophir, Utah.

LB: Ok. How did you get involved in mining in Utah?

JS: I got involved in mining because my great grandfather was a miner, my grandfather was a miner, and my dad was a miner.

LB: Did they all mine here in the Ophir area?

JS: Yes.

LB: All at the same mine?

JS: At the same mine, the Ophir Hill.

LB: At the Ophir Hill Mine. What brought your grandfather to this area?

JS: My grandfather was born in Scotland and the way over to the United States, his mother died on the ship and she was buried at sea. There were some people from early Utah who raised him. He came up to Ophir and married a Bates who lived in the canyon, and that's how he became involved in mining.

LB: When you were a child growing up here in Ophir, were there any other people that weren't miners, or was everything in the town connected to mining?

JS: There were people who worked down at the Deseret chemical depot, the Army depot. There were half and half. Some worked in the mines and some worked down at the Army depot.

LB: How old were you when you started to work in the mine?

JS: I was 18 when I started in the mine [1964].

LB: Did they give you any kind of training on how to be a miner?

JS: They just put me with an old-time miner and he taught me the trade. That's how I learned it.

LB: You learned by doing.

JS: By doing.

LB: Did you work in the same area of the mine as your dad?

JS: No, I worked in different parts. I did work in some areas as my dad. I was a motorman for a while, which brought the ore out and the waste outside. The tunnel alone is a mile and a quarter long, back to the hoist room, and then from the hoist room down the incline shaft was a 30 degree angle, it goes down to the 1400, 1500, 1600, 1700 [level], and below the 1700 [level the shaft] goes to a 60 degree angle, down to the 1900 [level]. Then you go a quarter of mile back farther and there was another hoist that goes down to the 2300 level.

LB: That was a very deep mine.

JS: It's a deep mine and a very big mine. The mine was first discovered in 1865 by some of Conner's army from Stockton, then it was worked continuously.¹ The mine closed on the 15th of December, 1972.

LB: Why did it close?

JB: Why it closed was there was no place to ship the ore. When the Tooele smelter went down,² where they shipped the concentrates from Midvale, Utah, there was no place to ship the concentrates. The owner of the mine wanted to ship it up to Anaconda, Montana, but the costs were too great for that. So they shut the mine down. It was just like a domino effect: all the other mines around the area started closing down, too.

LB: What was the name of the smelter in Midvale?

¹ Soldiers were attracted to the area by stories of Native Americans finding a metal for making bullets but little work was done in the area until 1870; many were exhausted by 1881. The Ophir Hill, Hidden Treasure, and Cliff mines continued to operate until 1971. Major episodes of ore production were 1901-1927 and 1936-1971. The Ophir Hill was a primary producer, yielding 10.7 million ounces of silver, 1.65 million pounds of copper, and 10.1 million pounds of lead between 1870-1972 (Carl L. Ege, Selected Mining Districts of Utah, Misc Publication 05-5, Utah Geological Survey, 2005, pg 12).

² International Smelting Company operated smelters near Tooele, UT. Their last smelter closed in January 1972 ("International Smelter at Tooele-Anaconda in Utah," updated 11 June 2013 at utahrails.net).

JS: It was just called U.S. Smelting Refining.³

LB: What products did this mine here in Ophir produce?

JS: Silver, lead, zinc, and copper. Very little gold.

LB: And what was it that was the most valuable?

JS: Most valuable during the 1960s was the lead. Because of the Vietnam war there was a lot of use for lead. So that's where the majority of the ore went.

LB: You said you started out as a motorman?

JS: I started out as a miner's helper, and then about a year later I became a motorman. I worked in the shaft, I worked on drift work, I worked in stopes. I did all the different things that a miner does.

LB: Start out, say, with a miner's helper. What did a miner's helper do?

JS: Miner's helper helped the miner drill the rounds with a pneumatic drill, load the dynamite, blast, and then muck the ore out with a mucking machine. Hooked up hoses for the miner, and just did whatever the miner told me to do or help him with.

LB: You say hoses, what kind of hoses?

JS: They were air hoses for the pneumatic machine and a water hose for the drill bit.

LB: Was Ophir a dry mine?

JS: No, it was wet. We had big Ingersoll pumps that pumped water out of the mine up to the main level, then it gravity flowed out and came out the portal of the mine.

LB: And into the creek bottom?

JS: And down into the creek.

LB: You worked as a miner, as well?

JS: Yes.

LB: Tell me about that job.

³ Probably the U.S. Smelting, Refining, and Mining Company smelter at Midvale, UT. Concentrate from the Midvale operations were shipped to the smelter at Tooele, UT. The Midvale operations closed in November 1971 ("Midvale Smelters" updated 2 July 2012 at utahrails.net).

JS: As a miner, you would drill with the pneumatic machine, you would load the round with dynamite, you'd blast, and then you'd go in with a mucking machine which was air operated, and muck the contents out. Put track in, lay ties, and then go on ahead and do the next thing the next day. Drill it out, blast it, and muck it. That was the job for the miner. Then I pulled pockets. What a pocket puller is, is where they bring the ore out into a grizzly. They dump it in and then they had a chute that went into the skip on the main shaft. You loaded the skip and the hoist hoisted that up to the top, and then dumped in chutes. From there it was trammed out by the motorman, outside. So I did all that.

LB: When you say lay rails, the motor, obviously, was on rails, so the ore carts were also rails?

JS: What we had is a little Comanche operated battery motors on the levels down below, which brought the ore out. Then the main motorman was a trolley line with a trolley pull. It had electricity and a trolley line that brought the ore out on the main motor.

LB: What kind of explosives were you using?

JS: We used Giant powder and we used Prell. We'd load both of them in and then pack the dynamite in. We used electronic primers to set the charges off.

LB: How about ventilation?

JS: They had ventilation pipe that went in and we had blowers. What we did from the old workings up above, there was a natural draft that brought cool air in, they'd take that air back and put it into the other workings. So we had blowers that blew through vent lines to clear after we shot a round out. That would clear the smoke out.

LB: You described earlier that the mine dropped at about a 30-degree angle and later it went to a 60-degree angle. How did the miners get down there to work the mine?

JS: They went down in a skip. The skip was about a 4-ton skip and it ran on rails. There was a cable hooked [from the skip] to the hoist and they'd take that skip down and that's how the miners would get down. The miners would get into the skip and that's how they'd go to the workings. At the same time that's how they hoisted the ore out, was using the skip.

LB: How did they communicate with the hoist man?

JS: On each level they had a phone that went up to the hoist man. Then we had a system of bells, different bells that rang and would tell you if there was a man on the bucket, or if they wanted to hoist ore, or if they were lowering equipment down the shaft.

LB: Did they give you any training on safety?

JS: Yes, there was some training on safety. That was the first thing I had to do when I first went in the mine. They told us we had to wear ear plugs, safety glasses, they gave us hardhats, rubber

boots with toes that were made out of steel so you wouldn't get hurt if you had a rock or something fall on you. They did give us safety training.

LB: Do you remember the pattern that you drilled, and the order of the explosives when you were working the face?

JS: Yes. In a drift, we put in a 5-hole burn. You'd drill a cross-cut, like a T, and you would load those first with the primers, then all the other holes around it, and then the lifters on the bottom were the last to go. So the center would shoot out, then everything would go to the center, and then the lifters would blow everything back from the face of the drift.

LB: Were the explosive charges detonated whenever the miner was ready? Was there a specific time of the day when that was planned?

JS: Once the round was loaded, we had a wire that was hooked up and we'd go out to the main station. We'd throw a switch, which electronically would send a signal to all the primers and they'd go off in succession. There were delays. The first ones, like I say, were in the center, they would go first. Then the outer perimeter would go second, and the lifters would go third and blow all the muck back from the face. So it would be easier to muck it out with a mucking machine.

LB: You mentioned main station. What is that?

JS: That was like the 1400. It was where you went out and dumped the ore into the grizzly. You'd load it from the grizzly into the pockets, and then you'd hoist up the skip. That's where we'd eat our lunch, too. We'd go out onto the station, which was anywhere from 100 yards to 300-400 yards away from where we were doing the blasting.

LB: What happened to the material that didn't go through the grizzly?

JS: You'd have to break it up with a double jack. You'd get out on the grizzly with a double jack and break it up. That's why you'd have to wear safety glasses, so nothing would come up into your eyes.

LB: Was the double jack pneumatic?

JS: No. It was all manual.

LB: Did you get to do that, too?

JB: Oh, did that too! It was a lot of physical work, but I enjoyed it. It was good money, I was young.

LB: Do you remember what you were making?

JS: When I started out I was making \$3.02 an hour. But later on we had bonuses, so if you were drilling a drift or in the shaft you'd get \$14 a foot. If you could break an 8-foot round you'd get like \$14 a foot on each round. And then we had an ore bonus contract. If you got out a certain amount of tonnage of ore then you got a bonus on that, too. So it was actually good money. In fact, sometimes I made as much on my bonus as I did on my regular check. So it seemed like every week I was getting a paycheck, either a bonus check or a regular paycheck.

LB: Was the bonus check just for the lead ore?

JS: No, that was for all the ore.

LB: Is copper an unusual mineral to be associated with lead or silver?

JS: No, in the Ophir Hill they called it carbonate ore, so you had silver, lead, zinc, and copper that were all mixed together in with the lead. So it was not uncommon. They'd separate that at Midvale in the concentrate, then ship that concentrate to the Tooele smelter to get it smelted.

LB: Who was the ultimate buyer of this material?

JS: I'm not really sure who the ultimate buyer was. It went to all different companies in silver bricks. They separated the copper, sort of like what Kennecott does with the gold and silver they get out of there, and the copper.

LB: Can you describe for me what was on the surface at the mine opening?

JS: At the surface of the mine opening we had two compressor houses, where the compressors would generate enough air, pneumatic air, to run the machines and the mucking machine. We had a waterline, we had a superintendent's office. We had a dry [house] where we'd come out and change our clothes and shower after every shift. The shifts were from 8 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon on days, and from 6 in the afternoon until 2 o'clock in the morning on nights. There were two shifts.

LB: What was the point of the gap between the shifts?

JS: Just to let the smoke and fumes clear out before the next shift.

LB: So you'd basically blow at the end of one shift and let the circulation take the dust out, and then the next crew would go in and muck.

JS: That's right, yes.

LB: Which shift did you work?

JS: I worked both shifts. We'd change shifts every two weeks.

LB: Which one did you like better?

JS: I liked, probably, the day shift because I was young and that way I could go and we were working six days a week. We had Sunday off. You'd get overtime for so many hours after 40 hours a week, so that Saturday was actually a bonus.

LB: Was the mine wet enough that dust wasn't a problem?

JS: No, in some parts there was a lot of water and in other parts there weren't. So we'd have to use water hoses to clear the dust. After we'd blast we'd go for the water hose and then we'd wash it all down with the water hose so there'd be no dust before we started mucking.

LB: Describe one of the mucking machines for me.

JS: The mucking machine was pneumatic, you stood on the side of it. It had a bucket and a car behind it. It would go in and scoop up the waste or the ore, and heave it back over the top and it would go into the car. Then once the car was filled you'd take the car out with another little Comanche motor, the battery operated motor, then you'd hook up another empty car and do the same thing. It was dangerous, it had a swivel on it and it could go either way. And it had a bucket that went completely over [the top] and filled the car up.

LB: What was the size of the tunnel?

JS: The tunnel, usually, was about eight foot high by about five foot wide, sometimes six foot wide. The main shaft was nine foot high and about anywhere from 10 feet to 12 feet wide.

LB: Single track or did they run parallel tracks?

JS: They had double track in the shaft where you had one skip going down, the empty going down, and the full coming up. So the full would come up and dump into the chute while the empty was at the bottom being filled. It was just back and forth, one being brought up full and the other was going down empty. So that had double track. And in the drifts you only had single track.

LB: So the little Comanche worked in the drift?

JS: Yes. The small Comanche motor worked in the drift.

LB: Was it on a track or rubber tired?

JS: It was on a track, on a T-rail track.

LB: So it would latch onto the full one that the loader had finished filling and haul it out?

JS: And pull it out.

LB: And then bring and empty back in, or did it come in with an empty?

JS: It would come back in with an empty.

LB: Not a lot of room to maneuver.

JS: No, there wasn't.

LB: When you were mining, were you working alone or were there other people on that mine crew?

JS: You always had a partner with you.

LB: So there were two of you on the face?

JB: Yes.

LB: One person operating the Comanche.

JB: Yes

LB: Were there people out at the chute?

JB: Yes, usually there was one guy out at the chute. When you'd come out he would be breaking up the ore through the grizzly and the other two guys would be inside.

LB: So the ore came out of the cart, when onto the grizzly, fell through the grizzly and into the chute to the skip.

JS: To the skip, yes.

LB: So what distance are we talking about here, between where the ore went into the grizzly and the skip at the chute.

JS: Probably 10 feet at the most.

LB: So, you made a lot of use of gravity.

JS: Lot of use of gravity.

LB: Outside the mine when the skips came out loaded with the ore, what happened out there?

JS: The skips never came outside. They were just in the hoist. What came out was the motor; I usually pulled 8 to 10 cars, 3-1/2 ton cars, out of the mine at a time. We'd bring it out to a chute

that went down and we just dumped the car. They had a front-end loader that would load the trucks that take it over to Midvale. Then the waste went around into Wildcat Canyon, they called it, and you'd dump all the waste rock over there. If you were running a drift to get to an ore body, you'd take the wastes over the other way and take the ore to this place where you dumped it down the chute.

LB: The motor hauled that waste out?

JS: The motor took the ore out but to go around into Wildcat Canyon they had another little Comanche motor that would hook up two cars and take it around. It was especially bad in the winter; you'd have to put a little snowplow on it because it would get a lot of snow. You'd have to take the little Comanche motor and get the track cleared with the snowplow and then come back and get the two cars. You could only take two cars at a time around into Wildcat Canyon.

LB: How did the miners know which direction to take a drift to get to an ore body?

JS: What they had were engineers that came out and they used an instrument called a Brunton [surveyor's compass]. They would look at the ore at the beddings, and they'd say, "Ok, this is the way you need to go to get that vein." And that's what we relied on, was the engineers to tell us ok, we've got to run this way or we've got to run a little more to the south, or east, or west. So we relied on the engineering.

LB: They were employees of the company that ran the mine?

JS: They were employees of the company, yes.

LB: And which company was that?

JB: McFarland and Hullinger from Tooele were leasing from U.S. Smelting Refining,⁴ [who] owned the mine. We had to do so much development work for them, that means you had to run a certain drift to see if there were any other ore bodies in certain directions. You did a certain amount of development work plus you did a certain amount of mining where you got the ore out.

LB: How was the underground area lit?

JS: The hoist room was lit by lights and on the stations they had lights, electric lights. But everything else was just by the light on your hat, electric light.

LB: How much of a circle of light did that give you?

JS: Not much! The motor had a small light on it in the main tunnel. But that was only light, plus the little light on your hat.

⁴ U.S. Smelting, Refining, and Mining Company.

LB: Were those battery operated?

JS: They were battery operated.

LB: Did you ever have one go out on you?

JS: Yes. So when that happens you really are by yourself. What you have to do is kind of feel the side of the drift and see where you're going and eventually work yourself out. But if you have a partner with you, he would usually say, "Ok, stay here. I'll go out and get another light. Just stay here and we'll come back in." So it is a good thing to have a partner with you at all times.

LB: When you were mining, what was a typical day like?

JS: A typical day was you went up to the mine, you change your clothes. You got into the 2-1/2 ton cars, they had a lagging that went in and you sit on this piece of wood and you faced each other. The motorman would take the cars into the mine to the hoist room, you get into the hoist room and they everybody would just gather. Two guys would get into the skip at a time and go down the shaft to the workings. So that was typical day.

LB: From the time you donned your mining clothes until you actually got down to the face where you were going to work, how long would that take?

JS: That was probably an hour and a half. So some of the time was spent just transporting yourself going in and then coming back out again.

LB: When you were a motorman, what was a typical day like?

JS: A typical day when you were a motorman, you would go in and talk to the Hoistman, because you were right there with the Hoistman, and you'd look and see how much had been brought up from the night shift or day shift. Then you'd go and load the cars and then you'd come out, dump the cars. If you had to bring timber in you'd go out and get some timber and bring it in with you. That was a typical thing for the motor. On day shift you'd bring the superintendent in on the front of the motor in the morning. He'd spend the day then you'd bring him back out at noon for lunch and you'd eat outside, where the compressors were outside [the mine].

LB: How did you get the ore into the car you were hauling out?

JS: That was the same thing, with the chute. The skip came out and would go dump into a big chute, and then you'd get underneath the chute and just fill the cars. Lift the chute handle and fill the car and close it. Move the motor ahead to another car. It was all manual work. You'd have to go up a ladder to get up to the chute. So it was all physical work.

LB: I'll bet you got strong in a hurry.

JS: Yes. I enjoyed it. It was good.

LB: What was your favorite job?

JS: I think my favorite job was drift work because you made more money. Like I say, you got \$14 a foot if you broke an 8-foot round. Hoist job was a good job; it was stressful, because you were responsible. All you had was a marker that told you where that skip was and if something happened, you know, all you could depend on was those bells. When the guy was ringing the bells from the station, so you had to be real careful.

LB: Did you ever have anything go wrong?

JS: I never did. When I was working there in October of 1971 there was a fatality. A guy got killed in there and one guy got hurt bad on the main level. But I never did get hurt. A few guys got their feet broken, got their hands broken, but that was just part of mining. It was kind of a dangerous job.

LB: When you were drilling, how often did you have to change the bits?

JS: On the limestone we changed the bits, like on a 5-hole burn, we'd probably change the bits twelve times. At the end of the shift, after we did the drilling, we'd take those steel out, bring them outside. There was a guy outside that would sharpen those bits. In the morning, when we went back in, we'd take those bits with us.

LB: Were the bits physically attached to the rod?

JS: Yes. To the steel, yes.

LB: Do you remember the brand?

JS: Yes, they were Coronet. They were made in Sweden. They were shipped from Sweden and they were the Coronet brand, they called them. But they were actually Swedish-made drill bits. The pneumatic machine that you drilled with were Ingersoll. We had different names for them. There were smaller ones, larger ones, some of them we called the Tiger or the Lion, depending on how big. The Lion was the largest machine, then you had the Tiger, were the smaller ones. We used them, like in the stope, where we had to actually haul the machines up with ropes to get them up into the stope, so you wanted to use the lighter machines. You'd have to climb ladders, use a rope, tie onto the machine, then hoist up manually, by hand.

LB: So, a stope has a slope and a drift doesn't?

JS: The drift is straight in. A stope is where the ore is. That stope could be on a 30-degree angle, could be on a 60-degree angle. But we had three different types of stopes. We had the green vein, which was about 4-1/2 feet high. We had the red vein, which was six feet high; and

then we had the yellow vein, which was over 20 feet thick. The green vein is the worst job I had, that's where I started when I first went to work. You'd have to crawl up in there with the miner, then lay on your side and drill. You'd have to drill a hole first and then put a chain on the stinger. A stinger is what forces the drill up into the hole. You'd chain that stinger then you'd lay on your side and drill. But it was the richest, it was the most valuable stope, was the green vein.

LB: That had a high lead content?

JS: It had high lead and silver content.

LB: What does that look like as it's coming out of the ground? What did the ore look like?

JS: It's black. When you're drilling it, it's black. You can smell it, it's kind of an arsenic smell. You could tell when you hit ore because it was black. The limestone was just mostly white. You could tell when you were in ore, galena. The red vein was fairly rich, but not as rich as the green vein. Then the yellow vein was not as rich as the red vein, but the yellow vein was a large stope. You could go in after they'd mine, you'd have to put roof bolts in. You'd start at the top, roof bolt it, keep taking layers out until you got down. Then you could shine a light up and just barely see the roof bolts in the top. The stopes were way high. Large, large stopes. I think McFarland and Hullinger made a million dollars off one yellow vein stope alone.

LB: How long did you work at the mine?

JS: I started right out of high school but they wouldn't let me in the mine. I was outside because I wasn't 18, I was still 17 after high school. So I worked there until I became 18 in October, and then I went in the mine and worked from 1964 to 1971. Seven years.

LB: Before they would let you underground, what were you doing for them?

JS: I was grooving pipe, air pipe. I was helping out around, I was cleaning up different things. Helping the guy sharpen steel, helping the blacksmith with different chores. But they wouldn't allow me in the mine because I was not 18.

LB: And what is grooving pipe?

JS: You have a groover that has a sharp blade on it. You put it around the pipe and make a groove in the pipe about 2 inches deep for the _____ coupling. When they tightened that up around it. That's just what that was, a groove in the pipe, for the air pipe. And I went to trade tech [school] on and off, and I worked weekends for a while in this eight years. I'd only work weekends, go to school over in Provo at trade tech, and then I would come back and work on Friday and Saturday nights at the mine. I did that for two years.

LB: What were you studying at the trade tech?

JS: Electronics.

LB: Did you find that of interest because of your mining experience?

JS: No, my brother was an electrician at the mine and he said, "I think you ought to go into electronics if you're going to go to trade tech." So that's how I got involved in it.

LB: How did what you did as a miner differ from the way that your dad worked when he was of a similar age?

JS: When my dad worked there he was mostly a motorman. But when my granddad worked there, and my great granddad, they drilled with a single jack hammer and a drill bit that they would hit, turn, hit, turn, and that's how they drilled it. So my grandfather got silicosis from that, because there was no water. You'd drill everything by hand and it was all dry drilling. There's the big difference. Until they came out with those pneumatic drills there was a lot of silicosis in those old days.

LB: At the time they closed the Ophir Hill Mine, how extensive were the underground workings?

JS: Whew! It is one of the largest mines at Ophir. I'd say there's at least 18 miles of underground workings alone, just in drifts. And then those stopes were humongous because of the old workings. There was a mill that sat next to the old mine, it [the old mine] was called the Wild Delirium and Miners Delight.⁵ Why they called it Wild Delirium is they'd get in there and get lost because there were so many old workings. Enos A. Wall was the first one that built the mill and he later became a millionaire and had a mansion up on North Temple in Salt Lake.⁶ He sold it to W.A. Clark, who was a senator from Montana. He [Clark] improved the mill and built this house over here, the company house [visible from John's front window] in 1905.⁷ He shipped a lot of the concentrates by wagon over to Stockton, where the narrow gauge railroad terminated. Later on he actually built the railroad from Salt Lake to San Pedro, California, down through Rush Valley. He was a millionaire but he was from Montana. In 1912 he built a

⁵ The Ophir Hill Mine was also called the Ophir Hill Consolidated Mine, and included the Wild Delirium, Miner's Delight, Bartlett, Northern Light, Bannock, Burnett, Cooley, Sever, Maud S., Our Boy's, and first northerly extension of the Miner's Delight. In the early years Ophir Canyon was known as East Canyon (James Gilluly, Geology and Ore Deposits of the Stockton and Fairfield Quadrangles, Utah, Professional Paper 173, US Geological Survey, 1932, pg 120, 148).

⁶ Enos A. Wall was involved with mining at Silver Reef but left Utah in 1879 for Idaho. With his family he returned to Utah in 1885 and was involved with mining in the Mercur area, and it may have been during this time that he became involved with Ophir. He is best known for the fortune he made on his copper claims in the Bingham Mining District. He bought a 2-story home in Salt Lake City in 1904 and had it remodeled to resemble a Renaissance villa now known as the Wall Mansion (Doris F. Salmon, "Wall, Enos A." in Utah History Encyclopedia viewed at http://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/w/WALL_ENOS.html).

⁷ According to a trade journal, W.A. Clark financed construction of the St. John-Ophir Railroad to service his Ophir Hill mine and mill, which were managed by E.W. Clark (*Mining Science*, Vol. 65, No. 1675, March 7, 1912). An interesting biography of William Andrews Clark can be found in Stanley Pitt's An Unjust Legacy: A Critical Study of the Political Campaigns of William Andrews Clark, 1888-1901, MS Thesis, University of North Texas, 2006 (http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadac5251/m2/1/high_res_d/thesis.pdf).

railroad spur from St. John up to Ophir, called the Ophir-St. John Railroad, and then he shipped the concentrates by rail to the smelters in Salt Lake.

LB: Did you ever mine for the limestone itself?

JS: No.

LB: When you weren't mining, what did you do for recreation?

JS: Like any teenager, and later in my 20's, I bought a 1965 Chevelle Super Sport, dated, and went to movies.

LB: Where did you go to do all that?

JS: In Tooele. That's where I graduated from high school so I knew a lot of friends in Tooele. That's where I would go.

LB: Was there any recreational activity here in the canyon?

JS: I went to the branch church, LDS church, on Sundays here. Like I say, before I went into mining I went to grade school up here. There wasn't much going on in Ophir at that time.

LB: Do you remember what the population was then?

JS: Population when we were up here was, probably, maybe a hundred. Right now there are only 14 full-time residents in Ophir; a lot of summer homes.

LB: And your source of supply is still Tooele?

JS: Yes.

LB: Thinking back to your time working in the Ophir Hill Mine, what was your favorite experience, your favorite story, you'd like to share?

JS: My favorite experience was the people, the miners I worked with. There were only about 30 of us and we all got together and we'd have parties. That's what I liked the most about it was the people that I worked with. The miners. I met a lot of different, interesting miners. A lot of tramp miners would come from Butte, Montana and different places to work here, and then they'd head out again. It was interesting. You met a lot of interesting people.

LB: What was your most scary experience?

JS: Scariest experience was that day that friend of mine was killed in that October incident. I'd just taken his waste out with the motor and when I came back in that's when we found that they'd been caved on back there. That was probably the worst.

LB: Was the mine timbered?

JS: Certain spots were. The majority of it wasn't, but certain spots of the mine were. Back where they were working was timbered and they were debating whether to drill it that night. But they decided to drill it and that's when it came in on them.

LB: Did your father retire from the Ophir Hill Mine?

JS: He retired from Army depot.

LB: What kind of things did a child find to do in Ophir?

JS: Oh, we had lots of fun! We'd play kick-the-can, run-sheepy-run, we'd go out and sleep out all the time. Climbing the hills. We had school parties. We would go to Tooele and go swimming, we'd go hiking all the time. We'd go collecting fossils. It was a fun time being raised in Ophir when I was a kid.

LB: And your Ophir friends were also the kids of miners?

JS: Some of them were, and some of them weren't.

LB: Was there any mercantile service here?

JS: Yes, we had a store up here called Minnie's. It was a general merchandizing store and she had it right out of her house up here. She ran that store until she was 98 years old. We really liked Minnie's because you could go in and buy penny candy and pop and different things from Minnie. That's what we liked about growing up in Ophir, you could go to the store and buy candy and whatever you wanted.

LB: Did you have to pay cash or did you run a chit?

JS: We paid cash.

LB: Anything else about your time as a miner that you'd like to share with us?

JS: My grandmother had some pictures of my great grandfather at some of the mines that he worked at. Then I kind of got involved with the history of mining and then I really got involved when I started doing more research on Ophir Hill and different mines around the area, like Lion Hill. Porter Rockwell had a mine up there on Lion Hill on the south side. But there were interesting characters here in Ophir, so I got more involved with the different miners, the mining community, and Ophir City, and everything that revolved around the mining.

LB: In your historical research on Ophir, have you found any surprises?

JS: Not really, no.

LB: So you had a pretty good feel for the history of this area?

JS: Yes. Just from talking with my grandmother and grandfather. I never did know my great grandfather. My dad would talk about certain things, but my grandfather would tell stories about when he worked in the different mines up here.

LB: How many mines were in this area?

JS: In the 1870s there were 2700 locations [claims], that doesn't mean it was a mine, it could have been a prospect hole. But the biggest mine was the Ophir Hill, there was a Buffalo, the Hidden Treasure, the Buckhorn Mine, the Cliff Mine, the Tiger Mine, the Lion Mine on Lion Hill, Porter Rockwell's mine, and the Chloride Point; there were a lot of mines.

LB: Did you ever go into any of them?

JS: I used to go into them all the time. That was a favorite thing of mine. A friend and I would go into these mines; it was unbelievable what you'd find. You'd find a shirt hanging on a nail. The elements wouldn't destroy anything. It was just like walking back in past time. You'd find old lunch buckets, candle holders, carbide lamps, bottles. That's what I like about going into the mines, it was just like walking into the past but there was no elements to destroy anything; it was just left like it was.

LB: You said earlier that the first ore discoveries here were by some of the soldiers.

JS: Yes.

LB: And then there was some later development. How big a role do you think the mines in the Ophir area played in the State of Utah?

JS: They played a big part. You go back into the 1870s newspapers, the *Salt Lake Herald*, the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Ophir was in the headlines on mining, like Alta. Alta and Ophir were headlines stuff in the newspapers back in the 1870s. Like I say, Ophir's population peaked at about 3500 people in Ophir Canyon in the 1870s. Four hotels, saloons, breweries, attorneys, all kinds of general merchandising stores; it was a big mining town. It had a daily stage that ran out of Salt Lake to Ophir, Lyons and Kimball ran a stage to Ophir daily. It left early in the morning from Salt Lake and landed its passengers here in the evening at Ophir. Ophir was a large mining community.

LB: Was Tooele very big at that time?

JS: Tooele was probably a little bit bigger than Ophir but not much. It was mostly farming. It was the county seat. Later on, Mercur was a silver mining camp to begin with and then when

they discovered how to extract the gold with the cyanide process, then Mercur really became a very popular place. Its population reached anywhere from 6 to 7,000 people.

LB: When did the Ophir community begin to decline?

JS: A lot of the surface workings on Lion Hill, these high-grade silver mines, started to decline in the 1880s and that's when Ophir went on the decline. Until the 1890s when Enos Wall and E.W. Clark built the mill in Ophir, then things started to revive again. When they started to get the mill going and bring the ore out of the Ophir Hill. But there were other small mines operating then, too.

LB: Where in the area here was that mill?

JS: The mill sat right next to the Ophir Hill tunnel. Right next to a big ledge right here on the outskirts of town. Then it burned down in 1928. It was not operating then, but it caught on fire. There was a watchman there and it burned down.

LB: How many of the people in Ophir today are descendants of the miners?

JS: Right now in Ophir, there are probably three.

LB: So you're seeing a little population change-out.

JS: A little population change, yes.

LB: What strikes you as an outstanding event or theme in the history of Ophir?

JS: Probably when the railroad came in 1912 on August 1st. That's where we came up with this Ophir Day. We have an Ophir Day on August 1st every year where we get all the old timers to celebrate. We go up to the park and they call it Ophir Day. That's why they celebrate, that's when the railroad came in on August 1st in 1912. It was not a narrow gauge railroad, it was a broad gauge railroad that E.W. Clark actually built.⁸ It had coach cars. In fact, my grandmother and grandfather took the coach from Ophir down to the main station at St. John, then rode from the main station to Salt Lake and got married in Salt Lake.

LB: Where is St. John?

JS: It is down in Rush Valley. It's about six miles from Ophir, down where the main railroad line comes through, the one still in use [Union Pacific].

⁸ A trade journal reported that J. Ross Clark was president of the St. John & Ophir Railroad Company at the time it was incorporated on March 5, 1912. At that time they anticipated most shipments would come from the Cliff Mine, but the Ophir Hill operation had just overhauled its mill and completed a drain and transportation tunnel and was expected to increase production ("Salt Lake City" in Editorial Correspondence, *The Engineering and Mining Journal*, Vol 93, No. 11, March 16, 1912). Clark was also the Vice President of the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad; on April 15, 1912 his son and wife were killed when the Titanic sank (Allan R. Ellenberger, "Titanic--The Los Angeles Connection," April 14, 2012 and viewed at <http://allanellenberger.com/tag/william-andrews-clark-jr/>).

LB: Kind of gave everyone a cosmopolitan connection, didn't it?

JS: Yes, it did!

LB: Most mining towns that I've been aware of have some stories about robberies or hangings, and differences of opinion and things like that. Is Ophir any different?

JS: In the 1870s there was a lot of shootings in saloons. No hangings that I know of. But there were gun battles. There were conflicts over different claims; people get in conflict over their mining claims. There'd be conflicts.

LB: Was there a court here?

JS: There was no court; everything went to Tooele. But there was a constable here in Ophir. Like I said, part of the Ophir Mining District was Jacob City, another town to the north of us in the next canyon. It was quite a wild town. Ophir had little suburbs. They had a place down the canyon called Walkerville. The first actual stamp mill in Utah was down at Walkerville, down below the canyon here. That was the first stamp mill built in Utah.⁹ There were a lot of mills that were run by waterpower because of the creek that came down out of Ophir. They had big water wheels that [powered the stamps] used to crush the ore. New Jersey Mill, Wasatch Mill. They had a couple of smelters in Ophir way back in the early days, but they were mostly failures because the firebrick they used was not of quality. So 1870s was the big time for Ophir.

LB: So a century later when the mine closed down, there'd been a lot of changes.

JS: A lot of changes. Yes.

LB: When you were working in the mine were you aware of how the town was changing during that period of time?

JS: Ophir didn't change much. It hasn't changed much since. There have been some new homes built, but Ophir is the same to me that it has always been. Just a quiet town. It has been discovered, you see a lot of people up here on the weekends. They read about Ophir and they like to come up; it has kind of been discovered. When I was a kid you didn't see the traffic up here like you do now, today.

LB: The historic section up here that has been preserved, were those buildings preserved in place or were they moved in from elsewhere?

⁹ The Walker brothers from Salt Lake City erected the Pioneer Mill in 1871 to process ore from the Zella claim group and other mines on Lion Hill (James Gilluly, Geology and Ore Deposits of the Stockton and Fairfield Quadrangles, Utah, Professional Paper 173, US Geological Survey, 1932, pg 120).

JS: Some of them were in place and some of them were moved. We moved them.¹⁰ In fact, right across the street here was my grandfather's and grandmother's house, and we moved that up there three years ago. That's our schoolhouse now. The old build schoolhouse, built in 1914, they demolished it so we thought we need a schoolhouse, so we took the house of my grandfather that sits across the street from where I live, and we moved it up there. That's our schoolhouse now.

LB: What's the rock building up there?

JS: The rock building was an old miner's cabin. It had two rooms in it and it was built as a miner's cabin. Now are you talking about the little one or the great big one with the iron doors?

LB: I was talking about the little one.

JS: Yes, that was a miner's. The rock building just up the street from us was a Wells Fargo. That's why it's got the big door. It's the oldest standing building in Ophir, it was built in 1873 and it's going on the National Register for historic sites. It was built in 1873. There was a store, Larrs Brothers, had a store in the top; Wells Fargo had a place in the bottom where they stored their bullion, their silver bullion from the 1870s. So it is a Wells Fargo building.

LB: And Wells Fargo was buying from the mines?

JS: Yes. They were buying the silver and transporting it to Salt Lake.

LB: Anything else you can think about that you'd like to let us know?

JS: You don't see many hard rock mines anymore. It is kind of thing that's gone from the past. You don't see hard rock mines like you did back in the 1960s. A lot of things now are being open pitted. It is kind of a dying thing of the past now, hard rock mining.

LB: If you could, would you go back?

JS: Yes, I enjoyed it. I'd go back.

LB: Were the mines here union mines?

JS: No.

JM: Why are the hard rock mines not as prevalent anymore?

¹⁰ The Tooele County Historical Commission contracted an inventory of historic buildings, including those of Ophir. The author noted that during the mid-1980s a town resident "began to move available older houses" to an area on Moore Avenue that became the community's historic area (Beatrice Lufkin, Erda, Ophir, and Stockton Reconnaissance Level Surveys 2008, viewed at <http://www.co.tooele.ut.us/Historical/2009Reconnaissance.pdf>).

JS: Why the hard rock mines are not operating is just the cost of doing hard rock mining. You have a lot of things that they just don't allow anymore. Like, you can't pump water out if its got arsenic in it; too many rules anymore for hard rock mining. Plus the cost of actually mining hard rock; it is a lot cheaper to do open pit mining any more.

LB: Alright, thank you John!