

INTERVIEW WITH: Lowell Mecham  
INTERVIEWER: Jay Haymond  
INTERVIEW NUMBER:  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 14, 1998  
PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Tropic Ward House  
SUBJECT OF INTERVIEW: Experience 40 years ago on a road job in Tropic  
. Whiting and Haymond Construction  
TRANSCRIBER: Vectra Solutions/JN  
DATE: February 8, 1999

JH: I shouldn't register surprise because I don't want anyone to become intimidated by this recording process [Laughter]. I usually start with a general question so that the narrator can provide a little background, which makes the context for the things that the narrator is about to say. Lowell, tell me a little bit about your family, the family into which you were born, kind of give us a context for your memories.

LM: My family, we were three boys -- I have an older brother that only lived just about a week and he died and is buried over in Oak City, Utah. And then I was next, my name is Lowell, and then I have a brother Stan and a brother Jerry. So it was three boys, we never had the pleasure of any girls in our family so we didn't know about the feminine part of life but we knew boys and we did all those boys things as we grew up. And I am from here.

JH: Were you born in Tropic?

LM: I was born in Oak City, that was kind of tradition. My mother's family, they all went over to the family home and they had their children there, so that was just kind of tradition. The doctors would come from Delta, Utah, and we were delivered in the family or front room of my grandfather Lowell's home.

JH: Well, that's a great heritage. Millard County's a great place. Malen Mecham has lived here for a long time, he's your father?

LM: He's my father.

JH: Let's go to the road job. How did you get that job, do you recall?

LM Well, I just got home from an LDS mission. The way I remember it, it was in the spring of the year and we had been working for Pearson Croft Logging Company and my father had a TD9 International tractor and so we kind of got in the business of putting in the pipe and that was quite a milestone for us because at that time we didn't have a paved road from here to the Pink Cliffs up in the Bryce Canyon area and for some reason they'd started from Escalante and paved it over, I think to Cannonville, and then the road went from Cannonville up to the park line and so we were real full of gratitude to see some pavement come here into our valley. It seemed at that time and age that you'd have a mass exodus of people going up the canyon in the morning to jobs at the park and tourist places and then they had the logging, a saw mill that was located right on Highway 12 where Foster's is right now. But that road was good, I mean, whoever's in front, you always race to see if you could get that position, then they'd test their cars out and (laughter) the ones that had the best engines and if you had a real good car you could go out of the dump - we called it - in high gear, which was third, and usually with a load of men going to work and if you get in front and get the dust going then they couldn't see to come around you. So it was quite interesting. (Laughter)

JH: Did anyone drive to Panguitch at the mill there?

LM: Well, that mill didn't come about until years later. The first mill was run by Pearson Croft and they were the Pearsons in Richfield, they still have tire businesses throughout the state and then there was Arlis Crofts from Orderville and they first had their mill just below the Tropic Reservoir and then they moved it down on the highway, right by Foster's. And then later they consolidated with Arlis' father and brothers, they had a mill

over in Swain's Creek, and then they abandoned those two mills and then put the one in Panguitch.

JH: Let's go back to the culvert installation process. Describe that for me a bit. What did that mean? You had the tractor and what were you supposed to do?

LM: What we'd do, we'd go to all the drainage areas with pipe. First thing we did, we got Jim Smith, he was an old construction man from Henrieville, and he was kind of our engineer, we were the laborers, my brother and myself and Dad. So the first thing we did was take all of the pipe or the culverts to each location. We'd put them out and then we'd... He had a little hand level and he would get the grade and you'd have to level it off and then put the dirt, put a crown in the middle so when the cars came, I guess so it'd be level, and then with the little tractor we were able to push the dirt up around it and then called it "walking it in," tapped it in and then got the dirt over it so the bigger equipment could come and go over it.

JH: They'd grade over it.

LM: Right.

JH: Did you have a state inspector on a job, watching the quality of your work?

LM: That part I can't remember. I can't remember anyone coming. It seemed like we just more or less did our own thing. Maybe we had more integrity then, that we'd go do the right thing, we didn't have to have someone looking over our shoulder.

JH: Jim may have been the intermediary and maybe he made it smooth.

LM: Well, my brothers, one of them went on - Stan - and worked with the company for a long while and got to be a heavy equipment operator and my youngest brother, he ended up being a state engineer. In fact he did that `til he retired and now he's working as a consultant to an engineering company out of American Fork. So it was interesting, but I got drafted and went in the army. Then I came back and got an education but I still remember, I loved to get on a CAT and I had the opportunity when I was working here one summer - that was a day and age when we had to moonlight in the teaching profession - and I had a friend in Henrieville, Ray Chynoweth, and he was doing some timber work over by the Blues up in Stump Springs area that had a sale of lumber there and - this has been about 20 years since I'd been on one. I didn't start out doing that but I did other duties and he said, "Do you think you can still remember how to do it?" and I said, "Give me a shot at it." But it was amazing, I still was able to take that and it wasn't long `til I was doing that for the rest of the summer. I really enjoyed having that power and pushing and making roads and things of that nature.

JH: That's a good recount. Thank you. We were talking a little bit earlier about the project, that is the road project between Tropic and Cannonville. Often in the course of construction there's a mishap of one sort or another. You recounted the mishap of disrupting the water supply to Cannonville. Would you repeat that story for us please?

LM: Maybe I'll give you a little background but we have a family farm that's right in the area, it's right between Cannonville and Tropic. My grandfather, he at one time let Cannonville have the rights to a little spring that came up under the Mecham Dugway it's called and I remember as a little boy going and looking at that and I thought there should have been a state health officer looking at that too, because no one would have drunk water out of it the way it was then. But it was right under the road and they shored it up with timber and things of that nature and then it would run out of that into a little collection box. It was about, I'd say 10-15 gallons a minute, it wasn't a very good

spring. But I remember working on that and by one of the washes, one of the equipment operators got a little close to the pipe and broke it and he told them that... went and got Woody and Woody, he didn't see it, and he says, "Well, we got a problem." I guess he was used to big pressure and big projects. He says, "We've got to have a clamp, we need a clamp," and someone said, "Ah, you don't clamp, you just need an inner tube and some baling wire," and sure enough (laughter) they wrapped it around the pipe and did the baling wire and it did the job.

JH: I suppose it would be well to explain that that was a low pressure operation. (Laughter)

LM: It was, it was. But I remember that there was other things that I did while I was on that project and one of them was that I had to flag and I thought, now that would be an interesting job. But in that day and age there was hardly any travel and (laughter) standing for eight hours there doing flagging was very boring and monotonous and it seemed like it was an eternity to a young person with one of the first jobs. I remember being right in the Cannonville City limits, just on the outskirts there and there was a Dennett\* family that lived there and I remember the little girl bringing me cold water, she saved the day. (Laughter) She'd come and visit with me and that was interesting.

JH: Well, it's nice to be able to look pitiful enough that people will come out and offer you some help. (Laughter)

LM: And then I remember, I had a little Chevrolet, '51, it was a little hard top, one of the prettier cars of the day, and I remember they hired me to take and to - what they call it, pilot car...that's got a little further into the project and so I was the pilot car in that automobile and then kicking up some of the - was it the tack coat they used to put over the gravel? -and that was a little disheartening to see that spattered on that pretty blue but it came off and got things together. They kept me in gas so that was pretty nice for those

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days. Whenever I see a flagman that's one job I wouldn't want to ever do again. Seems like forever standing there and doing the traffic.

JH: Well great, thank you.

End of Interview