

**Russell A. Taylor**  
**Zion National Park Oral History Project**  
**CCC Reunion**  
**September 28 or 29, 1989**

Interviewed by: Nancy Harms  
Transcribed by: Camyce Nay  
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Nancy Harms: This is Nancy Harms. I'm interviewing Russell A. Taylor who was a member of the CCC's from 1934-1935. He worked at Zion National Park as one of his places with the CCC's and he'll be telling me about his experiences. Russell where did you originally come from before?

Russell Taylor: I was from Plain City, Utah, which is west of Ogden, about eight miles.

Nancy Harms: And where do you currently reside?

Russell Taylor: Now?

Nancy Harms: Yes.

Russell Taylor: Slaterville, Utah.

Nancy Harms: Slaterville, okay

Russell Taylor: Spent most of my life in Ogden, near Weber College on Edgehill Drive, since we've been married up there most of the time. But we moved up, about ten years ago, to Slaterville and started breeding quarter horses.

Nancy Harms: When you were here at Zion what was the age that you came originally? How old were you?

Russell Taylor: I was 17 when I graduated from high school and I just turned 18 when I came down here in July of 1934. Peterson brothers in Ogden had a contract to haul us down. They were buying horses from the Navajos; hauling horses back up in their trucks so they put planks across the cattle truck and hauled us down in the cattle truck.

Nancy Harms: Do you want to just tell me about your experiences here?

Russell Taylor: We came down in July in this cattle truck. When we first got there they didn't have any straw for us to make our beds so we had to lay on the boards the first night or two. Then they got a pile of straw, gave us a mattress cover and told us to go out and make our mattress out of that. So we had straw beds the rest of the time. It was hot when we got down here.

The first job that they sent me on was up to Temple of Sinawava where we were planting trees with the wheel barrows, wheeling dirt, filling in a little area and planting trees.

When we finished that we came down and started on the rock crib along by Angel's Landing, not too far from the lodge down there. We worked on there for most of the heat of the summer.

Then in the fall I went into the kitchen on a permanent KP basis for a short time. Then a fellow by the name of Powell that was a Mess Sargent was leaving so Meryl Towers who was the baker asked me if I'd like to be the baker. He showed me how to bake and he took over the Mess Sargent job so I was the baker the rest of the time until I left in April of '35. I liked that job because when the kitchen crew would clean up, when they were finished at night about seven 'o' clock or so, I would go in and I had to have two desserts for the next day, either cake and cookies or pie and cookies or whatever, but had one for lunch and one for night. And so I had the kitchen all to myself when I was there working. One of the things I liked about it was because I had all day off. After I got through, if I was baking pies, for 200 and some odd men that I had there, it usually took me 'til about two 'o' clock the next morning. If I was baking cakes I could finish by about midnight. Then I had all the next day off until of course I come back to work at seven, so if I got to bed at two I was all right, get up at eight 'o' clock. So I enjoyed that. They had a truck that went in about three times a week into Cedar to pick up bread; they had a contract there to pick bread up. Then they had a contract in St. George for laundry so I'd make that circuit. I liked to go on that ride. I enjoyed in the winter time dropping from Cedar down into St. George, it was nice and unusual. Then also I did a lot of hiking up in the Narrows and different areas in the day time so I really enjoyed that job.

Harms: When you were building and doing the rock work across from Zion Lodge and working on the riverbank, how much digging did you do to enhance the area to actually make it into more of a deeper riverbank area?

Taylor: We went down quite deep. It seemed to me like that crib was about ten feet wide at the base. It tapered as it went on up and I suppose the top was probably about six feet wide now at the top. I don't know but I would assume five or six feet wide, so we tapered it up. The height of it must have been at least eight or ten feet because I remember one day, our foreman's name was Whipple.

Harms: Was what?

Taylor: Whipple.

Harms: W-H?

Taylor: Yes.

Harms: I-P-P-L-E?

Taylor: Yes. And I remember one day we had a fellow named, we called him Dutch. I'm trying to remember his first name. Anyway, he was from Ogden. He was working on the crew

there, of course it was real hot and the crib must have been real high because I was working back a ways. I looked back and there was Whipple standing there at the top. Dutch hadn't seen him and he was down below, so he said if you see the old man coming holler. He sat down and Whipple looked down on him and he said, "What's the matter Dutch, you tired?" Boy did that feller jump up and go to work in a hurry.

Harms: (Laughing). When you first started working on the terrain there and you were digging down, how wide across was the river? Do you remember where it was able to cover?

Taylor: No I would really hesitate on giving a figure on that. I really can't remember. I go back and look at that every time I'm down here and it's still sitting in its right place. That was a heavy wire that they used on that to put the wire completely around it. It certainly hasn't moved.

Harms: No it hasn't, not in most areas anyway.

Taylor: You know, there's a feller here with us that was in our group.

Harms: Who?

Taylor: He was being interviewed right now.

Harms: Walt?

Taylor: No, he was interviewed a little earlier. Milt was with a group of scouts that come down through the Narrows when they were caught in that flash flood a few years ago. As I understand it, he saved himself and his two sons by taking his belt and putting it around a tree and he held his boys up like that. There was quite a few killed in that one too.

Harms: Staying around here in Zion. You entered Zion National Park for the first time when you were a member of the CCC. What were your impressions of Zion?

Taylor: I loved it, especially in the winter time and in the spring when we had heavy rains and they'd come cascading off as waterfalls. That was so beautiful.

I'll tell you an experience. About ten years ago a distant relative of mine from Scotland, and his wife come over and visited with us. My mother was from Scotland. So we took them up to Yellowstone, took 'em to various areas and going back they were flying out of Las Vegas to Los Angeles then back to Scotland. They'd been with us five weeks and we'd done a lot of touring. So we went to Bryce and came to Zion. We walked up the trail up to the Temple of Sinawava, to the head of the trail. We sat down there and he looked around and said, "You saved the best for last." He really loved this area as much as I did. I tell so many people, everybody that I ever meet, if you ever go to Utah don't miss going to Zion Park, it's heaven on earth.

Harms: So it's an area you've always kept still quite special, and make sure you visit occasionally?

Taylor: I've tried to get my wife to move down to Southern Utah the last forty years I guess, never been successful.

(Laughter)

Harms: How did you find the area? Had you visited very many National Parks or did you think there were a lot of visitors at the time?

Taylor: At the time, well of course it was during the depression in 1934 and I don't suppose there was too many visitors, but it seemed like there's quite a few. But I remember all of those that did come through seemed pretty wealthy. I remember the first time I seen people wearing shorts. It seemed kind of unusual to me because I'd never seen people wearing shorts like that. Some of them were driving big automobiles from New York. I remember this one particular day. It was on a Sunday and we'd hiked out to the East Entrance. It was in August I guess, 'cause it was really hot, and we used what water we had in our canteen. We was on our way back. We tried to get a ride. but those people even though there was only two of them in a car, they just turned their noses up.

Harms: Were you in your uniform?

Taylor: Yes, we all had our uniforms on, but they wasn't about to give us a ride, you know. It seemed to me at the time that just about anybody that came through had to be pretty wealthy. I don't think many ordinary people were traveling because I don't think they could afford it, you know.

Harms: Did you find the visitors amiable to you, welcoming to you, think that you were doing an important job when they would come across you in Zion? How was your experience with the visitors?

Taylor: I never had much contact with them really. They just kind of stayed away from us and we stayed away from them.

Harms: What about the people in Springdale? Did you find them welcoming?

Taylor: Yes, they were friendly. We used to truck girls up here from Hurricane, you know, and have dances, and some from Kanab.

Harms: Did you used to go down to Hurricane and Rockville for the dances?

Taylor: When we had a chance. Yes, one night my cousin and I who was here in the camp with me we went down to Hurricane for the dance. We had to walk all the way home. We got left down there (Wind blowing in mic).

Harms: Uh-oh.

Taylor: That was a long night. I think we got there the next morning. (Laughter)

Taylor: We had a band. Did anyone ever tell you about our band here? Well we had a little band here. It didn't learn too many pieces of music, so they'd play the same ones over and over, about three of them I think, they played over and over and over. [singing] "Must have been moonglow, Way up in the blue; Must have been moonglow . . ." (Laughter) I never forgot that one. We had a fellow here that played in it. His name was Tex, big fellow, got a picture there looking at him, I don't even know where he was from but he was quite a character.

Harms: Your camp that you were in was located where again?

Taylor: We were on this side of the river, not on the other side. I think there was only eight of us here today that was on the camp on this side of the river.

Harms: Right about this basic locale?

Taylor: Yes, right down in here, just down in the flat area down there. I think the number was 1966, I think was the number. You know, I'm a little bit twisted on the directions. I always think this is east but they're telling me its north.

Harms: North.

Taylor: What's different? Where is East?

Harms: East is over there.

Taylor: Okay, all right, then we were on the west side of the river. That's the east camp and this is the west side. Ok, never realized. I always thought the canyon ran this way and ran east and west.

Harms: Do you remember the education, the classes they used to have, that CCCs would provide in the evenings.

Taylor: I never knew they had any. I never seen any of them.

Harms: Okay, so that answered that question (Laughing).

Taylor: Yes, they were talking about that. That must've come later after I left because I sure never seen a class of any kind there. There may have been some that I didn't know about, working like I did, you know, at night. There may have been some, but I wasn't aware of them if they did.

Harms: Now the work you were doing, the rock work, the placement of the rocks that you did definitely all along the embankments and you were digging, what other types of tools were you using and types of work did you do?

Taylor: Most of my work was with a shovel, some placing rock by hand, you know. A lot of shoveling.

Harms: Did you remember any of the stories of the trails being built by other CCC's? Do you remember the stories that they would talk about the Watchman trail area being built?

Taylor: No, the other camp built that trail up there I guess. Our camp, most of the fellows were involved with this rock quarry or working on the cribs. I think two crews on cribs. When I first got here we planted a lot of trees up to Temple of Sinawava there. I didn't stay up there too long, I don't know just how long I stayed there. I don't think it was too long.

Harms: Any movies filmed while you were in the area?

Taylor: Yes, yes. Irene Hervey and Georgia O' Brien, and \_\_\_\_\_ Lewis (?) [The Dude Ranger].

Harms: Did you get a chance to work on a movie at all, or you were busy with the CCC's so that was your work.

Taylor: I don't think any of the CCC guys worked on them.

Harms: Do you remember any special kidding that was going on, always the games going on between people or did you partake in any of that or were you always serious?

Taylor: About the only thing I can remember is the fellows who sent the new KP to get a key to the oven or something like that. Send him off somewhere then they'd send him somewhere else, looking for the key to the oven.

Harms: (Laughter). Key to the oven.

Taylor: Yes, that's about all we did.

Harms: Well becoming a baker, did you use that in your later life?

Taylor: No, except when I was married on December 4<sup>th</sup> of 1941 and December 7<sup>th</sup> was Pearl Harbor. I left January 9<sup>th</sup> after being married a month, I left for four years. They immediately sent me down to cook and baker school. They saw my discharge from the CCC's so I went through cook school at Camp Roberts, then I was sent as a Mess Sargent rating down to Camp Cook, the fifth armored division. Then I was supposed to go to \_\_\_\_\_ to another division, they were forming and I was in the hospital for an operation on my nose, while I was in there 'cause I'd had a broken nose. \_\_\_\_\_ went

out, so then my outfit went to North Africa were in on the Invasion of Casablanca. From there I went through North Africa on the invasion of Sicily. We were scheduled to go to Italy, and then they changed and sent us to England, sent us to Omaha Beach on D-day there. So I never really did much cooking 'cause I was mostly in on the \_\_\_\_\_ section. We was in a tank outfit and most of the time I was getting gas to our tanks.

Harms: But they had started you originally to be a cook?

Taylor: Yes, they sent me through the cooking school, three months of it down at Camp Roberts, strictly because they seen that I'd been baking here. So I never used it really.

Harms: What about your experiences with the CCC, were they good?

Taylor: I enjoyed it.

Harms: Do you think the park benefited quite a bit by having the CCC program around?

Taylor: I'm sure they did, just that rock cribbing I'm sure benefited a lot. Certainly planting the trees helped.

Harms: Do you see the nation having benefited definitely by the CCC's?

Taylor: I often wish that they would have come back with it a few years ago instead of this other program they started, Job Corps. I think it should have been CCCs, but I guess that Job Corps trains a lot of people for what the jobs are now days. I think to get the people out in areas like this like the CCs did, you know, I think is so beneficial to so many young people. I met fellows from places like New York, you know, that went into the CCs, it was really great for them.

Harms: With those people from the East and South that you were meeting, were you surprised at their... Well I suppose in a way maybe not because you were astonished at finding Zion very special yourself, different than what you came from. Did you find their expressions quite different as they would come through and enter the canyon and realize all of a sudden that this land was different than what they had come from?

Taylor: Yes, someone that has lived on pavement all their life is going to change.

Harms: Do you remember expressions, as far as how they worded it or anything?

Taylor: No, I'm sorry I can't. But right now I just talked to a fellow day before yesterday. . He's merchandise manager at a big company, well the biggest in their field, a company called Wooster Brush Company and they're the biggest paint brush roller in the United States. They employ around 600 people. He's going to retire in April and he's coming out. He's never been here. He's been all over the United States and a good part of the world, but he's never been to Zion Park. He's been to Salt Lake a number of times, so he's going to

come and we'll bring him down to Zion. A lot of people that I've met, another fellow in Ohio that's retiring in November, he's coming out. So we try and arrange all that we can to get them down here because I know they'll really enjoy it when they come down.

Harms: Is there anything else you would like to talk about, a particular area? You said you worked up canyon, did the planting, that type of thing. While you were planting and working with the area, did you learn anything about the park and why it was necessary to have it set aside?

Taylor: No, I don't think so. I guess I always was a little bit environmental. When you're raised on a farm you kind of lean a little bit that way I guess. It was easy to understand the reasons for the planting, also keep that river from washing out the banks.

Harms: Do you remember any flooding while you were here?

Taylor: No, we didn't have any while I was here that I recall. We had a few good rain storms.

Harms: Before you came to Zion in 1934, that was about the time I heard that there was a fairly good flood that took out a bit of the road, which is one of the reasons you were instigated to digging out and trenching things.

Taylor: I don't know. I didn't hear about that.

Harms: Anything else at all you'd like to talk about?

Taylor: No, just I really appreciate them doing this. I've been trying to collect names for years. This by the way was our crew (show picture). Think you can find me in there?

Harms: Give me a minute.

Taylor: That's before I was a baker when I first went in.

Harms: I think I'd be able to find it because of your eyes.

Taylor: Up here on the top row here. Let's see where. I'll have to look to see. I'm right here.

Harms: Is that right?

Taylor: Yes, I had dark hair.

Harms: Oh my goodness sakes.

Taylor: A lot of dark hair. But this fellow here, his name is Powell, really a handsome fellow. He was the Mess Sargent. When he left Meryl Towers here, who was the baker became the

Mess Sargent and he's the one that hired me. These two fellows here were the "dog robbers." Do you know what a "dog robber" is?

Harms: Officers \_\_\_\_\_?.

Taylor: Yes, they took care of the officers. This one took care of the colonel and this one took care of the captain, the lieutenants. I talked to him on the phone the other day. He ended up being superintendent of schools in Hollister, California. I talked to him day before yesterday and he said that he made \$50 a month down here that he was able to send home by doing different things for the officers, washing their cars and things like that.

Harms: Oh they'd pay him extra?

Taylor: Yes, they gave him extra money. So that put him through school the next year up at Utah State. He said when he graduated from Utah State, he met his wife up there, they graduated together and Weber County Schools offered him \$900 a month. They went to California and got jobs down there for \$2200 a month. He moved down there and ended up being superintendent down there.

Over the years I've always wanted to have a reunion with these fellows, so everyone I could think about, I'd write down their name. I cut this article out about this fellow and his wife with their golden wedding anniversary, you know. I wrote their names down. So five out of the eight in our group are down here because I notified them. They didn't know about this and I notified them. A lot of others, I notified but were not able to come. One of them was coming; he just retired from the Navy. This fellow here was in the Navy forty some odd years and his wife just had to go over to Fitzsimons Hospital so he wasn't able to come. Then Francis \_\_\_\_\_, he's in Sacramento and his wife just got out of the hospital three days ago. I think there was seven or eight of them that got to my place here about six months ago or something like that. I called them and they came up from Salt Lake. We had a little reunion of our own, you know.

Harms: (Laughter). That's great.

Tape ends abruptly. End Interview.