

Interview with
MAURINE (BENTLEY) MILES

February 8, 2012

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MAURINE (BENTLEY) MILES

Maurine (Bentley) Miles was interviewed on February 8, 2012 by Wayne Pace in St. George, Washington County, Utah, a representative of the Sons of Utah Pioneers. She related her life experiences.

MM: I am Maurine (Bentley) Miles. I was born in St. George. For the first seven years of my life I lived across the street from the Woodward School building. It is the Bentley-Pratt home right next door to Judd's Store. It was a wonderful place for a child to grow up. Just to run in the store and look at all the candy displayed, even though very often I did not have money to buy candy and all the unusual items they had — harnesses [and] vinegar barrels. My mother would send me over to buy a quart of vinegar. It was a fun place to be able to go to, see people come and go and watch the milkman deliver ice. [He] would chip off some [ice] to take in and the [youngsters] in the neighborhood would stand around. The bigger pieces that came off tasted so good on a hot summer day.

WP: Did your folks [Matthew M. and Iris Bentley] have an address?

MM: I think at that time we did not, but it was a delightful place to live, right across the street from the Woodward [School]. I could run over across the street after school or during the summer and play on the playground. The giant strides were wonderful. The swings and slides were great. It was just the best place in town to live.

WP: What was school like?

MM: We did not have kindergarten. Some of us went to Miss [Sarah Louise] Conklin's [classes]. She was a Presbyterian missionary who was here. She [led] the Presbyterian church which is where the Catholic church is now. She had another building where she taught school. Our tuition was a nickel a week. If you didn't have a nickel, you could take a couple of potatoes or something from the garden and that paid your tuition. She was a very kind woman. If anyone was mean to one of the others, we really were chastised and taught that was not the way the Savior wanted us to treat our friends. Then I started first grade. I went to school in the basement of the college. At that time there was just the college building and the Woodward building. They were the only two school buildings in St. George.

WP: What year was this?

MM: [It was in] 1932. It was fun to be there because my dad worked upstairs in the office of the college. He was in charge of the finances. He had to pay the bills and

hoped there would be money to do it [laughter] because there was not much money anywhere at that time. It was interesting to be in the basement of the college with all the grown-up people. My second grade was at the Woodward School. The third grade [was] at the college [and] the fourth grade [was] at Woodward. [For] the fifth grade we had the new school building across the street west from the Woodward — grades one through sixth. We couldn't believe we finally had a new school building.

WP: What did you do when you weren't in school?

MM: I usually played with the neighborhood children. Because I was the oldest in the family I had chores to do. It seemed like there were always younger children. [Laughter] A new baby or someone who needed tending. I helped with the younger children. Before I had that responsibility, we played a lot of paper dolls with friends who would come [to visit]. That was how we amused ourselves a lot — playing [with] paper dolls. When we would get together with boys and girls in the neighborhood, we would play games. [We] had a good time being together.

WP: Who were some of your friends?

MM: Sybil Anderson lived about a block down the street. She was the granddaughter of Daniel D. [Duncan] McArthur. Dale Stevens lived on the corner. He was the grandson or great-grandson of Charles [Lowell] Walker. Bill Bringham lived between Dale and Sybil. Donald Lund and his brother Joe-Bob lived next door to us in the house in back of Judd's Store. We all played together a lot of the [time]. One time, Donald and I [were] in a lot of trouble. [My] uncle owned the home where we were living. Next to it he had a huge grape vineyard. Grapes were a necessity because if you didn't have good home-grown grapes to go with your bread and milk, suppers were not very good in the summer. One day Donald and I were playing, probably with some other [youngsters], and we decided to pick off some grapes and use them for the game we were playing. My uncle came home from work and saw all these grapes [laying] on the ground instead of on the vines where they should be. He was very upset. So we didn't do that again. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter] Did you ever go on a holiday?

MM: We did not have a car all the time I was growing up, so we didn't go on a lot of holidays. But I remember a time or two of going to Idaho with my mother to see her mother and some of her sisters and brothers who lived there. One time when I [was] very young, I don't remember how we got there, I vaguely remember being there and seeing my grandmother. She died when I was eight [years old]. When I was about eleven or twelve [years old] we went to Salt Lake [City, Salt Lake County, Utah] with someone. My mother, and I think two or three sisters, and

[we] got on the train and went to Pocatello [Idaho]. That was quite an experience to get to ride on the train.

WP: What do you remember about going to [The] Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]?

MM: We first went to church in the Woodward School building. Our ward did not have a chapel. The only chapel in St. George, at that time, was the [St. George] Tabernacle. The East Ward met in the tabernacle. The West Ward met in the Woodward School building. The South Ward met in the college building. They had Sunday school and sacrament meeting upstairs in the auditorium and then went into the classroom for classes. When the new school building was built across the street from the Woodward, about 1936, our ward rented that [space]. That was where I went to church until just before I graduated from Dixie College in 1946. Then we had our chapel. It was finally started and World War II began and all building ceased. There were no available materials, so the chapel sat there partially built, waiting to be completed, until the war ended. That was a wonderful day when [the] chapel was finished.

WP: What was the church experience like? [Did] anything happen at church?

MM: I am sure something happened, but I just remember sitting in the school building and looking around. We went to Primary on Saturdays some of the time in the Woodward School building. It seemed like it was on Mondays and was just a continuation of school. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter] [Inaudible] What do you remember about your teenage years?

MM: [My] teenage years were fun. There was a group of us — girls and boys — [who] had a lot of parties and did a lot of things together. No one had any money. Maybe we all were poor and didn't know it. Everyone was in the same situation, so it was just the way it was. We would get together, play games and had fun times. School dances were great because of the school setup. At the Woodward, it was the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth grades. The two years of high school, eleventh and twelfth [grades] met over at the college. Because the ninth and tenth [grades] were high school, we could go over to the dances [at] the college on Friday nights. We felt like we had died and gone to heaven! [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: We finally could do that. But after World War II started, about a year or two [later] and after we had graduated from high school, there were no young men. So if we went, we hoped the younger boys would dance with us. [Laughter]

Sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't. [But it was fun] growing up and being that age with nobody to go to dances with or [to] do fun things [with].

WP: [Laughter] What did you do for social activities when you were not dating?

MM: We went to movies.

WP: So there were movies?

MM: Yes, there were movies. [On] Saturday afternoons growing up, if we were lucky and had a dime, we could go to the movie. We would try keep up with the serial *Burn 'em up Barnes*. I can't remember the others, but I do remember [that one]. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter] When you were a teenager did you have any family chores?

MM: There were always things that needed to be done. When I was young we needed chips to start the fire and we needed wood brought in. We had chickens. After we built our home on 200 West and 100 North [Streets], we had a chicken coop. We would feed the chickens and gather the eggs. We got milk from my aunt who lived about four blocks away. In the mornings before school, my sisters and I would take turns and go to her place [to] get the milk in an aluminum or metal gallon can with a lid. Sometimes I wondered as I ran home to make sure I got home and back to school in time, if I shook the milk too much. [Laughter] But I didn't get any complaints so I guess it was okay — it didn't turn to butter!

WP: In those days, when you were a teenager, did you have any fads? Like hairstyles or clothing?

MM: If we had any clothing, we were lucky! — just whatever you had. When saddle oxfords came [along], it was wonderful if you had a pair to wear to school.

WP: Where did you get your clothing?

MM: [We go most of our clothing] from [JC]Penney. There was one other dress shop [making it] two dress shops in St. George. Everybody dressed alike, [laughter] I guess, but the mothers did a lot of sewing. Finally, when sweaters were available, it was great to have cardigan and pull-over sweaters.

WP: During that period of time the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp was built. Do you remember anything [from] that time?

MM: Oh, I do! We were warned to not be out late on the streets when the CCCs were going home. We lived up in the same end of town where they could be passing by

[on] the way to camp which was located on the northwest-end of St. George. As time went on, several of them married St. George girls. They were very nice people and their families were nice. But we were just told terrible stories. [Laughter] I guess people did what they needed to do.

WP: When did you start dating seriously? When did you meet your husband?

MM: My husband [Richard “Dick” Miles] and I were in the same first grade, so I had met him. He lived east of Main Street, about five blocks, and I was a block or two west of Main Street. We were just in the same first grade. We went all the way through school together and were in the same crowd that ran around together. I did date him occasionally, but we didn’t date seriously until after he came home from the [United States] Navy. I was getting ready to go to school at the ‘Y’ [Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah County, Utah]. All the boys in our class were drafted when [they] turned eighteen [years old]. Most of them, a lot of them, joined the [United States] Navy before they turned eighteen with the hopes that they could finish high school. We graduated [from] high school the latter part of May on a Friday night. On Sunday night the midnight bus left the Big Hand Café [with] “Dick” and four of his classmates to go to the Navy. They went to Salt Lake [City and [got] on a train [for] San Diego [California]. Several of the young men in our class had gone the Tuesday before graduation. Some of the older ones had gone into [military] service earlier than that. That was kind of what happened to our class, our parties and our dating. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: There were no older ones around, so dates were few and far between.

WP: The [St. George] Temple was constructed [in 1877]. Did you ever sneak down around the temple [in 1941]?

MM: That is where we were all baptized. The day I turned eight [years old], my girlfriend and I left school. We were in the same grade at school in the basement of the college [and] we walked down to the temple at noon. Her father baptized us and we went right back to school. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: That was the way it was. People didn’t have cars. They didn’t have a big program or anything. That was just what you did. [Laughter]

WP: Did the college sponsor sports or [events] like that?

MM: They did. They had football, basketball, track and eventually baseball.

WP: Did you go to the games?

MM: The high school had basketball and six-man football [teams]. Yes, they were the highlight. As I grew up, at a very early age when we still lived across the street from the Woodward, my dad would sell tickets to all the football and basketball games. Usually, he would not get home to eat before the games, so mother would make a sandwich. I would run down thru the [Town] Square and take a sandwich to him. I would say, “Can’t I stay and watch the ballgame?” [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: I got hooked on basketball games at a very early age. I didn’t want to miss a [game].

WP: Those [games] were played in the gymnasium. That was close to your home, wasn’t it?

MM: Yes, it was. That old gym was less than a block and it was a couple of blocks after we built.

WP: Was it a nuisance to your mother having something like that close to the house?

MM: No, it was nice to have something exciting [by us]. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: There were not many cars, so you didn’t have to worry about people parking in the wrong place.

WP: That is right. There is a picture of a Dixie radio service that shows people listening to the World Series. Do you recall [doing] anything like that?

MM: The first time I remember anything about the World Series — I was up at the ‘Y.’ I went into class one afternoon and I thought [the] teacher was so strict. The first thing he said that afternoon was something about the game being played that afternoon. I decided: oh, he is human. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: [I] saw [the] picture [at] Dick’s Café. It was a real treat to go to Dick’s Café when you were on a date or to get something to eat.

WP: What about the drive-in theater?

MM: That was a fun, fun thing [to do].

WP: You had to have cars to go to a drive-in.

MM: By then we had a car. We were married for about a year or a year and a half before we had a car. [Laughter] I don't think "Dick" ever got over that. Because, when he could, he just bought too many cars and I think it was because he went that long without a car. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: Growing up [inaudible] a car.

WP: Did you ever go to the roller rink?

MM: The recreation hall was made into a rink; we skated in the "rec" hall.

WP: The "rec" hall?

MM: The church built it. It was right in the back of the old gym. It was south and east of the tabernacle. It was a big building, a fun building. That was where we had all the dances. My dad was on the High Council [of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]. I was about twelve [years old] when it was built. My girlfriend's dad was on the High Council and she said, "You know [that] dads had to pay \$100.00 towards the construction of that." They asked all the men on the High Council to pay \$100.00. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: And \$100.00 then was a large amount of money.

WP: Did you ever have to go to the [Dixie Pioneer] Memorial Hospital?

MM: That was a blessing to be able to go there. My third child was born there. The first two were born in the McGregor Hospital. It was the best we had, but the Memorial Hospital was a blessing.

WP: This is a picture of a rainstorm. Did you experience rainstorms when you were growing up?

MM: One Saturday, it was in June because it was the day before Stake Conference, I must have been about six [years old as] we lived about a block from Mathis Market [and Supply Company], there on the same street outside the Gaiety Theater. I went over to pick up a few groceries, whatever I could carry, and it

started to rain while I was there. It just rained torrents! My mother telephoned to the lady working there, "Keep Maurine there until it quits raining." When it stopped, my dad came over, got me and carried me piggy-back through the water. He had on boots and the water was coming over his boots.

WP: [Inaudible]

MM: It was so frightful how much water came down so quickly. At conference the next day, mother said everybody wore a winter coat — it was cold. [Once] on the Thursday of the rodeo, probably about 1948 or 1949, the afternoon parade [was to] start at 5:00 p.m. About 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. we had a cloud burst and it came down off the Red Hill through [JC]Penney's store. It flooded a lot of stores. I know "Dick" had to put [something] behind the door at the market so the water wouldn't come in. They were afraid they wouldn't be able to have the rodeo. It was bad! We did have rainstorms.

WP: When was the Sun Bowl created? [Inaudible]

MM: It was started before World War II. It sat and waited to be finish. The first rodeo was in September 1947. The summer of 1943 I worked at the swimming pool which was right across the street. I was the cashier and looked out at the Sun Bowl all summer long.

WP: What happened to it?

MM: They filled in the pool and [put in] a volleyball court [laughter] and built another swimming pool.

WP: Somewhere else?

MM: Yes, I guess they needed a bigger [pool].

WP: [Inaudible] Were you married in the St. George Temple or the Salt Lake Temple?

MM: Yes, the St. George Temple.

WP: What was "Dick's" [employment]?

MM: He was working in the grocery store. His [father and mother had built the grocery store, the O K Market before he was born. In 1935 they built the new one where Zions Bank is [now]. While he was in the Navy, his father's health deteriorated. He wrote to "Dick," "If you want to take over the store when you get out of the service, I will hang onto it, otherwise I will sell it." "Dick" always thought he

would go to school when he got out of the service. But he told his dad he would come into the store, so he was working [at] the O K [Market.

WP: I [have] a picture of a football game. It doesn't look like it is being played in any stadium.

MM: I think it was played at the Dixie College track that was on the corner of 200 South and 200 West [Streets]. The track went around [with] bermuda grass on the inside and bleachers on one side. It was right across from the Dixie Market that we bought and [operated] for a few years. The college would have invitational track meets in June and it was a busy day. We all had to run the store because everybody came in to buy candy bars [laughter] or to use the restroom. There were no restrooms over there, so we were [very] popular. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter] That was good! [Did you participate] in any clubs in high school or college?

MM: I belonged to Lambda Delta Sigma in college. I belonged to, this is strange, a homemaking club in college. In high school, if we could be in the pep club, that was about what we wanted to be. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter] There is a reference to what was called the old St. George Hall. Was that in existence when you were growing up?

MM: Not as the St. George Hall. I think [it] was the Foster Hub.

WP: [Inaudible] general merchandise.

MM: That was the Julius Foster Store.

WP: What did they sell?

MM: Well, not food, but everything else. [Laughter] It was an experience to go into Julius' store.

WP: [Laughter] You had your first children when you lived here in St. George.

MM: Yes.

WP: [Did] you have a hospital to go to at that time?

MM: Yes, and we had to stay right in bed for at least a week. I was told when I went home that [I] was not to get up for two weeks. I remember that when my mother came home with a new baby that was the time we had [outside] help. A woman

came in and prepared our meals and took care of mother and the baby for at least two weeks. With my second child it was way different. I got up the next morning and took care of everybody. [Laughter] I should have enjoyed it while I had the chance!

WP: [Laughter] Was the Opera House still active?

MM: That was the processing plant [for the] Sugar Beet [Seed Factory].

WP: The Opera House?

MM: Yes, upstairs. They used those buildings up there for their processing. When they moved, it closed down. The city took [it] over and did the restoration. I am not sure how it all worked out,

WP: [There was] something called the Gardner's Club Hall. Did you ever hear of it?

MM: I didn't. It is that little house. I think it is still on [St. George] Boulevard right next to the motel, just south of Ancestor Square. The Hardy House is what I think we knew it as.

WP: Did you have any farmland or anything of that sort?

MM: I didn't until my last year of high school. My dad bought his mother's farm in the Washington Fields [Washington County, Utah].

WP: Did you work out there?

MM: I had a job so I didn't have to go out and help hoe the beets. He [grew] sugar beets, [but] my sisters all had to go help. They never did quite forgive me [for not] having to go out. [Laughter]

WP: Did you ever have any experiences with the Indian population?

MM: We had some in our classes at school. We knew them [from school]. They were good [youngsters].

WP: [Inaudible] What about other churches in the area? Did you associate with the Presbyterians?

MM: I didn't really know anyone who belonged to the Presbyterian Church, but quite often on Sunday afternoon at 4:00 [p.m.] Miss Conklin had us [over to her place]. My grandmother lived across the street, right on the corner, so it was barely across the street from her place. My cousins and I quite often would be up there

playing, climbing her trees and chasing each other. [Inaudible] “Shall we go over to Miss Conklin’s?” We would straighten our dresses, pull up our long socks and go across the street to Miss Conklin’s for church. [Very] often. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: I think we made up her congregation, [laughter] so I guess I associated with them.

WP: Did they proselyte any members of the LDS church?

MM: I am not aware that she did.

WP: When they started to repair the roads through Santa Clara [Washington County, Utah], did you ever go to Las Vegas [Nevada]?

MM: Oh, yes, many, many times, up over Utah Hill [Highway 91 in Washington County, Utah]. In the summer, especially, it was very difficult coming back from Las Vegas, that long, long stretch, coming up that slope. It was just a two-lane highway. [If] you would get behind a truck that would shift down to low, low, low, everybody’s car would boil because you were going so slow.

WP: [Laughter]

MM: They would pull off to the side of the road with hoods up, steam coming out and hoping that they brought extra water with them. [Laughter] In the winter, it seemed like it frequently snowed. There would be a lot of wrecks [of] people coming down Utah Hill into Santa Clara. A lot of people had bad car accidents.

WP: Did you, personally, ever have any accidents in [an] automobile?

MM: [One] night during the Christmas holidays, “Dick” and I and two other couples were coming back from Las Vegas late at night. It had snowed a light covering, but as we came down and around a turn, the car started to slide. It flipped around and hit the hillside, flipped around and hit the hillside again. The back door flew open and we grabbed whoever was sitting next to it.

WP: [Laughter]

MM: No one was hurt and we made it home. We had borrowed my husband’s parent’s car [for the trip]. [Laughter] [Inaudible] I guess we lucked out.

WP: That is interesting.

MM: I am probably taking too long on [these questions].

WP: There is a picture of St. George in 1952 showing the [St. George] Temple [as being way of town.

MM: It was — way, way, way out of town.

WP: Did you have to walk to the temple?

MM: Quite often on Sunday afternoon, we would walk down around the temple [grounds]. It was just a pleasant walk. When we had cars we would drive around to see who was parked by the temple. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: It was just a nice place for all of us. I don't think that was the purpose it was built for. [Laughter]

WP: What happened when you were raising your children? Did you have any unique experiences with the little [children] growing up? Did you handle them differently from your parents?

MM: I think I did. [Laughter]

WP: In what way?

MM: They had more material things. I felt they needed to have some of the things I didn't have. I am not sure they did, but I felt they did.

WP: What was Christmas like when you had children?

MM: Well, it was way different than when I grew up. "Dick's" family always, I think, had quite nice Christmases. My dad was not into many material things and we would get something for Christmas, but not an elaborate Christmas. Consequently, my children had much more than I, but it was fun. We got our oldest son [Richard "Rick" Steven Miles] a tractor from [the] Firestone [Store]. We picked it out months [before] Christmas, put it on layaway, and paid \$10.00 [or] whatever we could to get it paid for [by] Christmas. That was how you bought whatever you [gave] for Christmas.

WP: What do you remember about your grandparents?

MM: My Grandmother [Mary Ann (Manfred)] Bentley was the only grandmother I really knew. My Grandmother [Rhoda (Bybee)] Stowe lived in Idaho and died when I was eight [years old]. I did not see her very often. All I know about her is what a hard worker and kind person she was. My Grandmother Bentley was a

very interesting lady. I was one of her younger grandchildren. She died when she was ninety [years old] and I was about twenty-three or twenty-four [years old]. It was fun to go to her place. When I needed something to eat, quite often it would be a slice of bread with cream skimmed off the milk, and it was heavy cream with sugar on it. It was a treat. [Laughter]

WP: [Laughter]

MM: I liked to sleep [at] her place in the summer because she slept out on the south porch — no air conditioning. I think I must have slept on the sofa in the house. It was fun to go to grandmas [to] see her fun piano and her pretty sofa. She had some very nice furniture. As I think back, I am glad that she had some nice things, because her life was not an easy life.

WP: That is true. [Inaudible] Thank you very much!

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]