

Interview with
BRUCE PICKETT

March 15, 2016

**MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION IN
WASHINGTON COUNTY, UTAH
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

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BRUCE PICKETT

Bruce Pickett was interviewed March 15, 2016 in St. George, Washington County, Utah by Dr. Stephen B. Armstrong. He related his experiences with motion picture production in Washington County, Utah.

SA: [Please] tell your name.

BP: I am Bruce Pickett.

SA: [Would you] spell it, please.

BP: P-I-C-K-E-T-T. I grew up here as a young boy. My experience with the movies would be directly with the movie *The Conqueror* [and] interaction with Susan Hayward and John Wayne. [They] lived across the street from me while they filmed this movie in St. George [Washington County, Utah]. Starting off with John Wayne, I was a seven year old child in our neighborhood. We would go to his place every once in awhile. [When] he came out, we [would take] pictures with him on the front porch; all of us five, six, seven and eight year old [children] in the neighborhood around him. He gave me a personal autographed picture that I treasure.

The first hand experiences [were] with Susan Hayward and her sons. When school let out in California, her two twin sons, Timothy and Gregory Barker, came and stayed with her. [They] ran around with us in the neighborhood. I was one of the younger ones. My older brother [Garth Pickett] was three years older than me. Timothy and Gregory were two years older than me. Several others of the older group [of children] in the neighborhood were who they ran around with [and] I was the seven year old [who] tagged along. [We] enjoyed, [the group of youngsters running] through [the] Dixie State [University] campus, which was all sagebrush [then]. We would come out through here and play. It was a real experience for those two boys, Timothy and Gregory. Our family took these young men fishing. My father [Elmer Pickett] was an avid fisherman. We went up to Pine Valley [Washington County, Utah] and got a string of fish. When we came back, [we were] on the front lawn of our home. Susan Hayward came across [the street]. We have pictures of Timothy, Gregory and Susan Hayward and our family with that string of fish. That was a real experience for Timothy and Gregory.

Also, my father was The [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] bishop at that time. We met in the [St. George] Tabernacle. It was interesting that they went to church with us one Sunday. After church, they came up with a \$5.00 bill and said, "There was no plate passed around. What do I do with this [money]?" My dad said, "You just keep it in [your] pocket. We do not pass a plate in the

Mormon church.” That was their experience. I do not know what came of it. We just had some great experiences.

SA: Was that [the] LDS story that you were going to tell before I started the tape recorder?

BP: No

SA: Could you tell that [story]?

BP: When they filmed the *Windows of Heaven*, I was a fourteen year old young man. I was in that film. If you get the uncut version, they zeroed in on me in the tabernacle. [Laughter] Plus, I was one of the [children] going down the street when they went over to the old Cotton Mill [in Washington City, Washington County, Utah]. [They] filmed segments of that [area]. I was in that over there. Again, [I was] part of the crowd group. That was the *Windows of Heaven*. Other movies I did not have firsthand experience. Across the street and down a couple houses, Marlon Brando rented [a] home during one of his movie filmings [in St. George].

SA: Do you remember the title?

BP: I do not remember the title. I was actually on my [LDS] mission when they filmed that [movie]. My younger brothers [Kevin and Brian Pickett] and sisters [Pam and Jeanene] told me about it. [They told about] how the limo would come, pick him up and take him off to the movie set. I am not sure what that movie was [titled] with Marlon Brando.

SA: Okay. Could you tell the actual streets where [they lived]?

BP: Marlon Brando lived on approximately 550 East 200 South [Street]. John Wayne lived in the home that was known as the Wendall Motter home. The family moved in with his foster parents next door and lived there [during] that five month period. That is the second house north of 200 South on 600 East [Street].

Susan Hayward lived in the home of Dr. [Ellvert Hiram] Himes, who, at that time, was the president of Dixie Junior College. He moved out and rented a home for five months. It was one of the most modern homes [here] in 1953. That is the home that Susan Hayward lived in.

SA: Did any of the stars, cast or crew stay in your home?

BP: No, we were neighbors.

SA: Just neighbors. [Dr. Douglas] “Doug” Alder told us that section was —.

BP: No. We nicknamed our street, 600 East 200 South, “Hollywood and Vine.” It is interesting. When we were taking pictures with Susan Hayward of the fish that we caught, a fellow came driving by and saw us on the lawn. [He] pulled up, runs [over] and wanted his picture [taken] with Susan Hayward. [Laughter] We wondered how he got in the picture. He quickly got in and wanted his picture with Susan Hayward.

SA: So this was not a person you knew?

BP: [He was] just driving by.

SA: What do they call that [kind of thing]? [It is] called photo bombing these days.

BP: [Laughter] He just came up.

SA: Maybe we could [hear] some more specifics. [I need] to pick your brain a little bit. Could you give us an autobiographical background detailing your personal experiences leading up to your experiences interacting with the crew and stars in Washington County? I know you were just seven years old.

BP As far as interacting, the only movie that I personally interacted with would have been the BYU [Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah County, Utah] film, *Windows of Heaven*, which you are probably familiar with. Other than that [film], it is just growing up with the stars sons, how they ran through the neighborhood and enjoyed playing with us each day.

SA: You have given the names of the stars and some of the movies. You [said] though that there were second-hand stories.

BP: For example, when Robert Redford and Jane Fonda did the *Electric Horseman*, you could not drive down the street. They filmed that [movie] around the old college [building] which is now the Children’s Museum. It was fun to recognize different areas as he was riding his horse through the back lots of some of these homes and recognizing some of the homes. That was from the film. [That was] not watching them filming, but was after the film was put together. That is the same way with *Jeremiah Johnson* with Robert Redford and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and their interacting and going out to Snow Canyon [Washington County, Utah] and the different areas as they filmed that [movie]. [They also filmed] in Grafton [Washington County, Utah]. I watched that [film, but] I was not part of the [filming].

SA: Was it the fun of recognizing your hometown?

BP: [It was] just the terrain around the different movies and [knowing] that is such and such, that is such and such [and] that is so and so’s home.

SA: Yes. Do you remember seeing the equipment trucks? Or seeing them set up for shooting?

BP: Whenever they would set up, you would see the great big trailer that would have four or five rooms in it that the actors would go into for make-up or just relaxing. The diesels would park those [trailers]. [They] would have the different equipment trucks. They would haul the port-a-potties along with them and things of that nature. You could not go [through] the town without seeing that experience.

SA: Were you seven [years old] in 1973?

BP: [No], I was seven [years old] during the *The Conqueror* with Susan Hayward. I was fourteen [years old] through the filming the *Windows of Heaven*.

SA: I just want to get a sense of your age. Could you tell a little bit more about the sights that you recall where motion picture production was taking place?

BP: One of the experiences after the fact was always going up into Snow Canyon and seeing the front [old castle]. If you go inside, it was just a shell. That was Clark Gable and the *Four Queens*. As a young man, everyone in town would go up there and play around [the] movie set that was left there. That was where the Snow Canyon campgrounds are [located] now.

SA: Fantastic! Are there any other places [that are] rugged or developed?

BP: Off the top of my head, nothing comes to mind.

SA: Okay. Do you remember anything about the *The Conqueror* with the stars coming into town and eating at the restaurants? Any of that [experience]?

BP: [Being] a seven year old child, I stayed in the neighborhood. [I just had] the interaction with Timothy and Gregory.

SA: What about later on [with] the other productions?

BP: You would, even as teenagers, if one of the stars were in Dick's Café or somewhere, word got around. You [would] go by and try to look in. No, [it was] nothing intrusive.

SA: Could you tell about Dick's Café?

BP: Dick Hammer, who happened to be a neighbor, [owned] Dick's Café. With many of these movies, he had the catering contract. So he would go out with the catering service to feed these [people]. He became a good friend with many of the stars, such as Clark Gable, John Wayne, Gary Cooper and different ones [who]

would come into town to shoot segments of their various movies. I am not sure who in the Hammer family you would be able to contact to give you some rich experiences of that [relationship with the stars]. Craig was my age. This is not Craig with the school district, but the other Craig Hammer.

SA: There are two Craig Hammers?

BP: Yes. Craig, with the school district, came in here to [Dixie] College at that time and was a basketball player. [He] married a local girl and came back after [he finished] school. The other Craig Hammer, who was my age, lived next door and his father was Dick Hammer.

SA: Did he pass away?

BP: No, he is still [alive].

SA: Craig Hammer, Dick's son, is [still alive]?

BP: Yes. He could give you a lot of his experiences.

SA: We had him on our list of people to approach [to interview].

BP: Keep those two Craigs [separate]. If you go over to the school district, he will not know what you are talking about. [Laughter]

SA: [Laughter] Do you know what Craig Hammer's employment is [now]?

BP: I think he is self-employed if he has not already retired.

SA: Is he a barber?

BP: No. You are thinking of Knells Barber Shop, which was next door to Dick's Café. Ron Knells passed away, but his children are here. I would not know what experience they had interacting with the movies. [Arthur] "Art" [J.] Hale, H-A-L-E, which has Art's Barber Shop on 100 West [Street], came in later. I do not know what interaction he had with them.

SA: His name is on our list, too. Is that Sheree Jones' dad?

BP: Do you mean "Art" Hale?

SA: Yes. We have contacted his daughter, Sheree. She does not have direct memories of the experiences.

BP: "Art" could give you some of the later ones. He is several years younger than I am. As soon as he got out of barber school, he became Ron Knells' partner. When

Ron retired, he took over the [shop]. You could see “Art” right now by going to his barber shop.

SA: Good. We will probably head over there or invite him here. Do you have any other anecdotes or recollections of your days? If I threw out a name of a site, could you perhaps tell a story about it like the little children running around in downtown St. George?

BP: Our family worked in a business downtown.

SA: What was the business?

BP: [It was] Pickett Lumber [Company].

SA: Okay.

BP: As far as direct, yes, you would see some [stars], but those would be very vague. They did not stay with me like running around with Timothy and Gregory. [Laughter] I was the young child. I was the tag-a-long. My older brothers had great fun playing along. We would come out here where the present [Dixie State University] campus is and run and play. This was our whole playground as we made the assault toward the Black Ridge, [which is] the east Black Hill. That freedom of running around was different than living in southern California where they did not have that kind of freedom. So they had a great experience. I often would like to meet with them again and recollect some of those [times]. I have not pursued that [idea].

SA: Maybe we should do that?

UV: Yes.

SA: We are in contact with Tab Hunter, who came out here with Gary Cooper to do *They Came to Cordura*, which was another Snow Canyon film. Do have you any recollection of that [film]?

BP: Not directly.

SA: Yes.

BP: There were a lot of different films done here at that time. Not being directly involved with [them], those [films] did not retain with me like the ones I was directly involved with.

SA: Okay. Let me press you about the *Windows of Heaven*. Give some basics about it. What was the story? Do you remember?

BP: Yes. It was when President Lorenzo Snow came to southern Utah. He had his vision to reemphasize tithing. It was interesting how they took the street in front of the [St. George] Tabernacle and put about a foot of red sand on it so as they came in, it was like back in those days. You did not have oiled streets then. They were able to bring back the small white picket fence around the tabernacle. They were bringing it back to that era. It was interesting going out to the Cotton Mill as [it was] in Washington [City]. They were filming out there and [I was] part of the crowd. Most of my experiences in that film would have been in those two locations where they had the crowds. I was fourteen [years old] at that time. That was an interesting interaction. That was my first experience of how films were [made], cut and retake and things like that. You never realize it until you experience [something] like that.

SA: Were you paid for that experience?

BP: No, it was a BYU film, so everything was well attended. [Laughter]

SA: Sure. I guess I should have anticipated that. Was that the only film you were an extra in?

BP: Yes.

SA: Okay.

BP: It was interesting when they had the reenactment of my great-great-grandfather, William Henry Thompson [and his] band coming down that dirt. [There were] different sort of things like that [in the film].

SA: Who were some of the names that were attached to the film?

BP: For the *Windows of Heaven*?

SA: Yes.

BP: I picture them in my mind, but [Bryce] Chamberlain was one name that I remember. He has been in many LDS films. I cannot think of [others] right off.

SA: This is a question that is coming up right now. Do you recall when these movies that were made in the area had their movie theater screenings in town?

BP: I think several of them did have their world premiere at either the Dixie Theater or the Gaiety [Theater]. My recollection and details on that is not that great. It was interesting as you would [see] different people. I was younger when they had some of those [screenings]. We did not venture up town to see those [premieres] with the Hollywood stars coming through on the red carpet experience. I did not personally interact with those [premieres].

SA: Okay. Was there no memory of the *Windows of Heaven* coming to town?

BP: [Do you mean] as far as the world premiere is concerned?

SA: Just being in the movie house.

BP: I do not know if that ever made it to the movie house. I think that was more of a film they showed in church to teach about tithing. The one they show today is cut to only twenty [minutes or] a half-hour.

SA: Yes.

BP: You would have to go to the archives at BYU to get the full uncut [edition], which I think [is what] we first saw in town. I think it was an hour and twenty minutes or an hour. [It was] somewhere in there. They really cut it down so it could be a teaching [aid]. It was made to be a teaching aid.

SA: Jim Dark is coming down to Dixie State [University] on April 22, [2016]. He is going to be the guest of undergraduate research [team] for our consortium. We are going to have a research day. He is going to give an address. You might want to come and talk to him.

BP: Would he bring that uncut film? I would love to see my fourteen year old picture on there. [Laughter]

SA: Let me check the time. As soon as we [have finished] with this conversation, I will go shoot an email to Jim. He did not interview you for the book that he did?

BP: I was not a major player.

SA: Yes, but you were in it.

BP: There were how many [extras in that film]? My wife [Kathryn (Graf) Pickett] and her family were in it. When they took the shots of President [Lorenzo] Snow talking and then going into his vision, [my wife], as a little girl, and her mother [Sylvia Graf] and father [Sylvan Graf] were zeroed in on in those pictures. That would be in the original film. I am sure she would like to see that [uncut version], too. [Laughter] I know I have tried —. They have [made] it [available] so you could buy the film, but it is the cut down version.

SA: Right.

BP: It does not —.

SA: I will contact him. Do I have your email address or did we do everything by telephone?

BP: [It was done] by texting.

SA: We do not have to record it. We can just write it down.

BP: You can turn it off. I think we are done with the questions.

SA: There is just one more question about the *Windows of Heaven*.

BP: Okay.

SA: For the record, can you explain the spiritual concept or theology behind tithing and how Lorenzo Snow articulated it at that time in church history?

BP: At that time in history, which was the 1870s or 1880s, St. George was going through a tremendous drought. Because of that [problem], he received that vision. [His vision was] that if they would pay their tithing, the windows of heaven would open up. In that film you see where it is raining. It was coming down raining shortly after that vision. That is the story of the *Windows of Heaven*. Being a fifth generation Dixieite, some of the names that would come up with that were my great-great-great grandfathers and my great-great grandfathers and my great-grandfathers and so forth. I had heritage, but as a fourteen year old boy at that time, I did not connect with it. I connected with it as an adult by seeing the film and mentioning certain names and so forth.

SA: Thank you very much. I am going to turn [the tape recorder] off now and finish up. [There is] one thing. This is for the record now. We have a professional team who will take our conversation and —.

BP: They will take all the ‘uhs’ and ‘ahs’ out. [Laughter]

SA: You will be able to review it before it goes into the final archive. If there are any corrections, any inundations or [anything] you do not want to be in the transcript, [you will be able to correct it]. I am going to turn this off now.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]