

Providence City Oral History Project
AUDIO TAPE LOG

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Interviewee(s): Gary Millburn
Interviewer: Rachel Gianni

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General description: This is a word for word transcription of an interview conducted by Rachel Gianni with Gary Millburn about his memories of Providence, Utah. Gary Millburn lives at 132 West 580 South in Providence, Utah.

(Log #), Interview question, contents

Side A, Tape 1 of 1

(000) Can you tell me your birthday and where you were born? Where did you grow up?

My birthday is December 14th, 1939. I was born in Long Beach, California. We moved when I was in early grade school from Long Beach to Salt Lake City. Then we moved when I was in about the third or fourth grade. We moved from Salt Lake to Logan. We lived in Logan for a about two and a half or three years. My father and a friend of his from California, built a restaurant in Logan across the street from the Field House at Utah State campus. It was called Millwalks. We lived down on the Island on Second North. After about two and a half years, my father's partner wanted to go back to California, so then we moved back to Salt Lake when the restaurant was sold and then I graduated from high school there. When I got a job, I worked with Safeway stores and I traveled and had different stores. I had the store in Murray, Utah; in Bountiful, Utah and Pocatello and then I was transferred to Logan. It was at that time that we moved to Providence, my wife and I and our children. I believe that was in about 1971.

(022) Why did you choose to move to Providence?

I didn't really know that much about Cache Valley, although I had worked one summer in Providence for a fellow by the name of Chester Zollinger. We were living in Salt Lake and my father wanted me to have an experience working on a farm, so I worked for Chester one summer when I was 14. I just remember Cache Valley as a wonderful place when we lived here for two and a half years as a young boy, that it was a wonderful place to grow up. There were a lot of things to do for a young boy. So, when we had a chance to come back with Safeway down to Cache Valley, we did. I just happened to have a missionary companion living in Providence. He was Don Loosli.

We ended up moving just across the street from Don. He has since moved, but this has been home now and we have enjoyed it very much.

(034) What was it like to move to Providence with a family?

We found it a very easy move. We found the people to be very accepting. We've always felt like you get out of an area about what you put into it. We became actively involved. One of the first events that I remember, even before we moved here, I was working here, my family was still in Pocatello and I was just staying with my friend Don Loosli. I would stay during the week and then go home on the weekends. One of the first activities that we had was making sauerkraut. It was in the fall of the year. I remember him saying, "Oh, I've got to make sauerkraut. Do you want to come with me?" And so I went with him. That introduced me to the famous Providence sauerkraut.

(042) What were Sauerkraut days like back then?

We didn't really have celebrations back then. We just had the turkey sauerkraut dinners. We had them in either the school house or a church house. It was a looked forward to event by the citizens of the whole valley. We would have thousands come to the turkey sauerkraut dinner. When they would split a ward, then the other ward would also hold a turkey sauerkraut dinner. It got to the point where I would say that there were just thousands of people who had a turkey sauerkraut dinner. I remember them putting the big fifty-gallon wood barrels in the irrigation ditch up there so the wood would swell and it would become kind of tight so that the sauerkraut and the juices would stay in the barrel. And they'd put them up in the ditch before they did the sauerkraut so that the barrels would become ready. Then we'd go get the cabbage and sometimes we'd raise the cabbage locally here. We'd shred it up. It was a big event to make it and then can it and then of course have the dinners. I think changing of the dinner for health reasons and that, and doing food, they weren't able to continue it. It was a big event. It was a lot of fun.

(065) What has your involvement been in the community since you moved here?

I managed the Safeway store in Logan for five or six years there. As I was getting started, I became quite involved with Logan activity because that's where I was involved business-wise. I was a member of various of clubs and the Chamber of Commerce in Logan. When I left Safeway, they wanted to transfer me again and I decided I didn't want to move because we were happy here. So I left Safeway and that's when I became more involved with Providence. I left Safeway in about 1977. But another reason was that I was bishop of the Providence Third Ward. At that time, we didn't want to move, so I took a job at Theurer's Market. Scott Theurer and I were friends and I worked there at Theurer's Market. I got involved. I ran for the city council and held a post on the city council for a number of years.

(084) What were some of the notable events you saw happen during your years on the city council?

During the time I was on the city council, we just really tried to keep an open ear to the citizenry here and tried to make it a nice rural place to live. There was a

progression of different ordinances that had to be passed because of people wanting to build on inner lots and things like that.

After I was on the City Council, Ken Braegger was on the City Council and asked me if I would run for mayor. I did and I ran against Don Briel for mayor and won.

While I was mayor, probably the biggest thing that took place was that we had a vote on the sewer. I remember at that same time, Smithfield City was contemplating a sewer also and it got to be a real nasty and ugly political thing up there where people called people names. It just was ugly. I remember we had a public hearing at the school up there, Spring Creek School that had only been built about a year. At the beginning, a lot of people came because it was a divisive issue whether to put a sewer in or whether to just let people stay with their septic tanks. I remember with everybody there, the attorneys and engineers and everything, that I told the group, "Now we're here to share ideas and we can do that civilly with one another. The minute that we start letting emotions take over, I'm just going to stop the meeting and everybody's going to go home." As a result, we really did have a good meeting and covered a lot of ground, those that were for it and those that were against it and that. We held the election and of course it passed. I think there were a lot of people who were surprised that it did pass, to be honest with you. The next year then we put in the sewer.

I think the sewer has had a definite impact on the City. With the sewer, we had an agreement with Logan City that we would use their ponds, their lagoons, and that we would run our sewer down into there which we still do. Some businesses came down on the Lane there, the Maverick and Don Shaffer's bakery which later became Kate's Kitchen and is now empty. We tried to get Logan City to allow us to let those businesses that were in Providence attach to the city which Logan City did not allow. As a result, those businesses then annexed into Logan. Any tax revenues would go to Logan and nothing to Providence. That changed when they put Spring Creek School in. That was not a revenue producing entity so Logan allowed that to be hooked on the sewer. After the sewer bill passed, sewer was going to be everywhere in Logan and businesses just expanded. You look at it now, for example, we would not have what's happening now in the business district in Providence if we didn't have a sewer. Let's face it, it would just not be there. As a result, now we've got the northwest corner of our city that is going to be just about all businesses. That's had a big impact.

When I was mayor, I joined the Lions Club. I think that at that time the Lions Club was considered a real viable part of the activity of the City and projects that were being done. They did a number of projects there. There were various boweries in parks and sprinkling systems and ball diamonds at the elementary school. Just a lot of projects. Well, that was because of the Lions Club. It's a little different now today. The City has much more revenue and they don't seem to need the volunteerism that they needed before, so they can go out and pay for things. Before, it was just people contributing to their city.

I think the sewer was probably one of the biggest things that took place when I was mayor. That was controversial. Some people just thought it wasn't worth that kind of money. Their septic tank worked well, but there were other people in town where their septic tank did not work well. When you had a septic tank fail, they needed to dig another and put in a different septic tank. There were properties in the valley, they didn't have another place to put a septic tank. A lot of the soil around here is very clay and does

not absorb the moisture like some other areas that are rocky. So you have both sides of the story. The cost itself, Providence had to go into debt. We took a 20 year bond issue out. I can't remember the exact cost but it was expensive. But I'm glad we did it then instead of waiting to do it till now. It would have been so much more expensive now.

We hired Nate Done as kind of a city manager at the time I was mayor. That's the first time we ever hired anybody like that. One reason why was because Nate Done was retired. Nate Done had had a lot of administrative type jobs and was familiar with administrative work. Not only that, those that served on the city council and myself as mayor, we had full-time jobs. We were part-time. Taking on a project like putting a sewer in required someone to kind of be involved and watching over the project. So Nate Done agreed to come and be kind of a city administrator at the time, a city manager. He worked part-time and he was here during the day when this was being done. He was kind of our lead person in that and did a great job in seeing the project through.

The project took a year and a half to put in. There was a lot of disruption, of course. I would come home from work every night and try and go and see where they were working at the time. More than once I'd get called out by a neighbor saying his water quit because they had broken the water pipe or whatever. That just goes to show you how the water system was put in. Now, when you put a water system in, it goes down the street and follows a grid, and we have maps now where this line is or where that line is so that if we have to do work, we don't break the water lines. That wasn't the way it was when they recently put pipes in in this town. I imagine most towns, if I wanted to put pipe in a house that was three blocks away, I just took the shortest route and put it in and it could have gone anywhere. And we didn't have any maps of what the water system was. So, as they dug the trenches for the sewer, there were a number of pipes that were broken that we had to fix. That was disheartening to a lot of people. But all in all, I think it went in well and it was a good project and I'm glad we did it when we did it and not waited till now. Because eventually we would have had to had a sewer system. I can't imagine Providence now with close to 6000 citizens without a sewer system. Everybody on their little septic system would have been catastrophic. In fact, the State might have come at this size and said, "You will have it," and be forced to put it in. I'm glad we put it in when we did.

Another thing that happened while was there, I don't think it affected everybody, in fact I know it didn't, but I think it affected a few of our citizens in a very positive way. At the time I was there, we had good employees working for us, but our employees working for us had no benefits, as far as sick pay or vacation pay or retirement. So, that's one of the things we started as I was involved, allowing our employees of the City to be able to have some kind of a retirement and various benefits of their employment, and I think that helped. It certainly helped us keep our good people by having that. I think it was a positive in their lives to know that if they got sick, they didn't have to come to work sick because they had a couple of days off that they could take. I think that was a positive thing that happened. We had a very limited staff in the City at the time. As far as employees go, we had maybe two in the City Office, a treasurer and a recorder. We had Marion Demler as the city treasurer, and the city recorder was Kathleen Gale. That was our staff at the city office. Our maintenance people, we had two full time and a couple of part time people. Things were a lot less complicated then.

(255) We used to have a lot of softball. Now, the softball, they don't even hardly have anymore. That was a big activity for our young people and some of our older people too. It was a big thing when we'd play Wellsville and some of the surrounding communities. There was kind of a league there. We used to play the games at the Providence school there on that ball diamond behind the school there. That was the best ball diamond we had. We had some little benches and bleachers out there for them. The Lions Club built that little building behind the backstop where the score keepers and broadcasters were. There were some restrooms there. There was a little room there where they'd open up and sell some concessions. I know the Lions Club built that for that ball diamond. Ball was quite a big thing there for quite a while.

(274) We felt like growth was going to come to our city, but we wanted it to be somewhat monitored and just not open the door and let what happens, happens and have a little bit of control, yet allow people to do with their property what they wanted to. I think for the most part, it's been fairly successful that way.

(280) What have some of the big changes you've seen in Providence?

Business has changed. There's just so much more business in town. Because of that Providence has had the luxury of doing some things money-wise that they haven't done before. As a result, the growth has come. A lot of the growth has come because of the sewer. Our neighbors to the south, Nibley, with the growth they've had, they've had to do the same thing. They've now put in a sewer down there.

The growth has just been phenomenal in recent years. I think we're having a lot more impact from outside people and outside thinking than when we moved here. When we moved here it was still pretty much a cluster of families and family names that were the hub of the City: the Zollingers, and the Mathews, and the Theurer's. These were old time residents, their Swiss ancestry, this is a Swiss town. I remember one lady came up to me after I was put in as mayor and she got right in my face and she said, "I guess you know you're the first mayor we've had that's not homegrown." I think I was. If you look up there on the wall, you see that the Alders and the Theurers and all of those pictures up there at the city office building, they were pretty much life-long residents of the City. So, here I was, the new kid on the block. I think that that is even more so now. You look at our city council, our mayor now certainly has long roots here, Randy Simmons. He was raised here in the community. Most of the city council is transplants. I think that is one of the things that has been changed. We've gotten away from the hometown and it's more of a larger spectrum that way as far as outside thinking, which I don't take a stand on whether it's good or bad, it's just the way it is because of those that have moved in.

Some of the things that we used to do that were part of our community, we don't do anymore. I mentioned the softball. Softball now, we just don't have it. Church softball used to be big with the different wards in the area. They don't even have a team as far as I know. They might have. It's just not big.

Farming, that was all that there was, was farming, really. We used to have quite a few dairy farms. Mink farming was big. Grant Mathews had a big mink farm that's all houses now here down Third South, down past Second West. Chester Zollinger had a dairy farm and later turned it into a mink farm. A lot of grain, a lot of alfalfa.

We used to have a lot of orchards up here on the East Bench. They're not here any more. Mel Bitters had large orchards out here, and Floyd Newbold out there on the Bench had large orchards. For a while, we even ran their orchards for them. My family had five, six, seven hundred trees that were up there: apples, pears. One of the big things that was up here was pie cherries. This area that I live in right now is called Cherry Wood. And the reason why it is is because this was all cherry orchard. We used to have the remnants of the cherry orchards in our yards. Here in my front yard I had cherry trees, and in the back yard I had cherry trees. We had a lot of orchards and that was part of the farming that took place out there on the Third East on the road going to River Heights. On the east side of the road, there were orchards out there. Zollingers out there now, that's the last of the orchards. He's kind of maintained that.

I think a lot is because of this outside influence that has come into the valley. If a farmer can look at a piece of ground and say, "Well, I'm working here night and day and I'm getting older and I can make \$20,000 a year, or I can sell five acres and make \$50,000." As a result, the developer has come in and says, "I've got demands for property in Providence." Providence has a lot of demand for property here, a lot of development house-wise and probably some of the nicer developments are here. Property values here are probably a little higher than they are in Millville or Nibley or even North Logan. So, Providence has kind of had the reputation of being a neat community.

One of the things that has happened over the years is that Providence has maintained a good water supply. As a result, development has increased. It's just like in my back yard right now, we've got six homes going there. For 35 years I've been able to look south and it's been that open vista. But, if you can get \$50,000 for a quarter of an acre, that's enticing to let happen. I remember when we first moved here, I was talking to a friend, Grant Mathews, the mink farmer, and he had some property in Millville there. I was, at the time, thinking I would like a little more ground than I had because I have five children and wanted a place for them to run. He said, "Yeah, I'll sell you some for my farm in Millville and will probably have to ask \$500 an acre." \$500 an acre, and I wanted five acres, that's \$2500 for five acres of ground. Now these lots behind me sell for \$50,000 for a quarter of an acre. That's a different mindset than it is now. It was a different kind of community. It was farming, it was a slower pace.

We used to have things that we did for senior citizens that we don't do now. We used to have a senior citizens dinner every year where we'd invite seniors from the whole city to come and we'd have a special dinner and do things to remember the old times. I don't know if they've had a senior citizens dinner for years, at least I'm not aware of it. Things have changed that way.

Life's gotten hectic. It's just part of today's world, I think. I think, when we first moved here, we used to spend more time as neighbors, "C'mon over, let's roast some hot dogs or some marshmallows." I'm sure that still happens, but I don't think it happens like it used to happen.

(447) We used to make homemade root beer. We would have the root beer extract and mix it with water and add yeast to it. Then we'd have to store it in bottles. We'd seal the bottles, we had little cappers, we'd cap it and store it down in the dark root cellars and basements until it got to where it was good and then we'd open it up. It took a couple of

months. Sometimes the bottles would explode. We used to make homemade root beer all the time. These things took time, but we didn't have as many demands on our time. Personally, I liked it better that way. Now we're so busy that all we do is hit and miss and go from one to another and one to another. Everybody is just really, really busy.

(469) What did you do at Theurer's Market?

Scott Theurer had two stores. He was the meat cutter of both stores, this one and the one in Lewiston. When I was in the grocery business, I had been transferred to Layton. Scott said, "Well, here, I've got a situation where you could come work for me." He was the owner and the overall manager, but I kind of managed this store and someone else managed the Lewiston store. Scott would go back and forth and cut meat in both of them. But I was there just a short period of time and then I gained employment at the University. Theurer's Market was a regular hub. They had the little drive-in at the same time which was a little hamburger joint. The grocery store eventually closed up. We used to have an ice cream store in town too, over across the street where Watkins Printing was. It wasn't made there, it was just an ice cream parlor. That was all the business we had in town, that was the hub.

(502) I do remember when most of the streets were not black-topped, when I was a younger boy living here. There's been a lot of change.

Our police were just a couple of deputies that the town hired. They'd kind of keep track of things. I think we had two of them. Norm Leonhardt was one of them and I forget who the other one was. For years and years and years, that was it, that was our police protection.

There have been changes, but Providence is still a lovely place to live. It's a wonderful community. You can't stop growth, you just make sure that it's done right. You maintain a good community which I really believe we have here.

(527) Who was on the City Council with you?

There was Bob Campbell, Brent Speth, Pat Braegger, Clint Thompson. He just passed away recently. In our last mayoral election, he ran against Randy Simmons. It was a very hotly contested race and sometimes became very political. It's interesting nowadays when new people run for office, there's a lot of money spent. I remember when I ran for office, I made one flyer and I had the boy scouts take it around to the doors. That was my whole campaign. The other candidate did the same thing and that was it. They had a meeting or two and we'd go and tell them what we thought. The political situation now is totally different from what it used to be. I don't know if I think it's better, but it doesn't change the fact that it's that way.

I appreciate those who have done what they've done to make our little town as nice as it is. I think it's still important that citizens stay involved and keep involved with things.

End of interview.

There is nothing on Side B of the tape.