

An interview between Kent Powell, interviewer, and Mr. Royal

(4-17-70)

Swasey, interviewee, at the home of Mr. Swasey in Ferron Utah. The purpose of the interview is to gather information about a cabin that was constructed at the head of Eagle Canyon on the San Rafael Desert in Emery County and also to learn of the activities of the men who ran horses in this area, Mr. Swasey being one of the most prominent men in this business.

K.P. The cabin as I understand it was built in 1928

R.S. Yes

K.P. Would you just give a little bit of the history of your activities and the activities of your father down in this area. When did he first come into the area and what was he doing there?

R.S. The cabin was built, he was going to take up a piece of ground down there. He built the cabin in order to take up this piece of ground. He found out that he couldn't take that, but he went ahead and built the cabin anyhow. And he would run horses in there for years and years. His name was carved, as I told you, in 1874 down here in Coal Wash, up in the ledge. So he was in here at that date. But back behind this old cabin, why, there's a big round rock sets up. And there's a big cave in it, oh, it's as big as from here to that wall. There's room in there for two or three beds and we put a floor in it, and we slept in there, had a fire, had a dirt floor on these poles, you know. And we had a fire in there, and it was quite comfortable. But that's the reason it was called the Cliff Dweller, I guess. The springs anyhow, Swasey Seep, and the Cliff Dweller and all that.

K.P. The first name was the Cliff Dweller?

R.S. The Cliff Dweller, yes. Back in behind on that rock. And then, of course, this cabin became the Swasey Cabin and that. It was five or six of us there when we built it. I and my brothers, two brothers, and Dave Nordell and Al Nordell and my dad and a fellow by the name of Simmons. He was a surveyor in here. He surveyed an oil site down here under the Reef. He went out there and that's how we got the picture.

K.P. He took there pictures that you have here?

R.S. Yes.

K.P. I see. But your father had been down there on the desert since 1874, that's what 40

R.S. Fifty some years ago.

K.P. Forty-five years before you built this cabin?

R.S. Forty-five years, yes.

K.P. What did they do down there before? Where did they live down there before?

R.S. They camped, as I say, in the Cliff Dweller and around in the rocks and all over like that. But this cabin was quite comfortable, a nice little place to live when they got it finished. They had two bunks on the north side, one here and one here. But anyhow somebody has torn all that stuff out. We had a nice little stove over in that corner, in the southeast corner. We had cupboards. They weren't no cupboards only just good boxes with shelves in you know, and we kept our stuff in that. And chairs and a table and everything, but somebody went in there sometime or another and destroyed it all or hauled it all out or something. I don't know whatever did become of it, and that's it.

K.P. Now, did you get the material for this cabin right down in that area?

R.S. Right. Now, I told you that we built this floor in the Cliff Dweller back behind there in the ledge. Well, we took that out for part of the timber. There was, I imagine, maybe enough for one wall in there. But we pulled the other timber from down in the North Fork of Eagle. I had a good old horse and I'd go down in there, and there's quite a bit of pine down in there. And there's one log I see the other day when we were down in there that I never did pull out. But anyhow that's where it all come from.

K.P. Now, you had a sod roof, I take it?

R.S. We had, he took and got big cedar posts and they split those posts, they split them down and put the bark and stuff on top of the roof and covered it with dirt. Oh, maybe that much dirt. It would shed most of the water that would ever come when we was in there to work.

K.P. How often were you down there? How much time did you spend down in this area?

R.S. We would spend maybe six or eight or ten days every month, or something like that. They went and tended their stock the same as anybody else nowadays does. They had horses to brand, and they kept them together. He had around 800 head of horses at one time, my dad did. Of course, he was the largest horse owner in the country. He had cattle in there besides that, too. Freddy Larsen, from Castle Dale, he had 150 or something like that. Then there was several others that camped right there to the Cliff Dweller and the camp. That spring back in there was where we watered our horses. Have you been to it?

K.P. No. I haven't.

R.S. Oh, my goodness.

K.P. I plan on going down there. I've just been down to Eagle Canyon and that area, not clear down off by the cabin.

R.S. Well, you should go down some day and take a peek around there.

K.P. I plan on doing it. If the weather had been a little better this time, maybe we would have made it.

R.S. The road is good. I-70 goes through there with the exception of about four miles off to the south after you get into the Head of Sindhbad. There's an old, bad, rough, nasty, oh, its like any unimproved road, you know, but it's level country and all that.

K.P. Now, there were a lot of these other men down in this area with their horses and that. They slept

R.S. They lived there in the cabin and the Cliff Dweller.

K.P. So it was kind of a community cabin?

R.S. Yes. Practically everybody used it. A man had been there if we wasn't there they would go in and help themselves. It was never locked up. There was Chris Peterson, George Warham, Jim Warham, Vern Kofford, Clar Winters, Freddy Larsen, did I say Vern Kofford? George Mangeson. Oh, there was a lot of them. My brother, he had a bunch of horses. Sam Caldwell, there was eight or ten of them as far as that goes. Chris Peterson had horses and cattle and so did Warham's.

K.P. What were these horses used for that they kept down there?

R.S. They used them for, most of them were light horses, you know. There was thoroughbreds. My dad brought several right, well-bred horses, and they was used to-----saddle horses. There was one old fellow ^{one was} that come in at one time and got over two car loads of Gildens, see.

He took out these Gildens, they went back east someplace. A fellow by the name of Baker. So I don't know, there was some wonderful horses. Then they finally crossed them with some heavier stallions and they

got some mighty nice team horses. I don't know whether you can, I can't any more, there is one horse on this picture, a big horse stands out in there, a dark horse, he's got his head setting right up there.

K.P. Yes. This one?

R.S. Yes. I brought him out and broke him. I brought another out to mate him. It was about the same size. Now, they weighted about 1400 pounds. There was some wonderful, wonderful horses. And I had two or three different teams in my time out of that country.

K.P. Well, now with this cabin, you used it mostly, I take it, in the winter or fall?

R.S. All year, any time. There was times in the winter that we couldn't get in there too easy, but it was a welcome little place to stay in that kind of weather, you know.

K.P. It wasn't that you ranged your sheep, cattle and horses up here in the mountains in the summer?

R.S. Yes, they did. In the early days they grazed their stuff in Joe's Valley and I don't know where else. But they moved in here in early, oh, they must have been in here in 1880, 1860 maybe. I don't know just, my dad was 13 years old when he come in here. He was born in 1861, so he would have been about 13 years old when he wrote his name in that ledge down there. They had any amount of horses and cattle. The Swaseys was a big outfit when they first came into this country.

K.P. It sounds like it.

R.S. Well, it was. According to, I don't remember now, my grandfather I seen him once and that's the only time that I ever remember seeing him. And he had a bank in Provo, him and some guy. But he said, from

the story that I got from a guy that was down here not so many days ago, why this fellow, Granddad Swasey, my granddad, couldn't neither read nor write. But he was in the banking business, and this other fellow was too slick for him. And he'd get the books and he, some way they went broke and he beat him out of the bank. But they had this old Carl Wilberg over here, he told me once, he says, "you could tell the different seasons in this country by the way the Swaseys moved their stock." He says, "in the fall, they would move them down here in this lower country, Salt Wash, Sindbad and all across down through here. In the summer they would move them back to the mountains, to Joes Valley, and up in there." He said that was a natural thing. They gathered the outfit up and moved them that way. But they was all, there was several of them here.

K.P. This cabin that we talked about last time I was here, up in Joes Valley, now your father built this, I understand?

R.S. Well, there's a little confusion, and I don't know for sure about that cabin up there, but that's where they lived anyhow. But anyhow there was a little fellow over in, an Indian, they called him Little Joe, and he, some of them tell me, it was named after him. I always had it in my head that the cabin was named after my dad. But

K.P. In this it says that the William Higbee family arrived by horseback in 1878. They spent the first winter in Joe Swasey's cabin in Joes Valley.

R.S. Yes, he come by at one time, and he had a bunch of cows. And when he come by one of them went out and said, "well, come on in." He says we will take care of your horses foot, driving these things, you know. Anyhow, he came in and they took care of his stock and the

next morning he took off. Then him and his whole family came in later and on horseback. They was all riding these damn horses. So, they lived down here, Bill Higbee and his wife.

K.P. This cabin, that they say was built at least before 1878 is

R.S. That's up in Joes Valley.

K.P. And it's still up there?

R.S. Yes. That picture was taken not so many years, a couple of years ago. That fellow brought it to me.

K.P. Have you been up there in the past year?

R.S. No str. I have never been to it.

K.P. Besides the cabin there, which I take it, they spent, in the summer at least, they spent time up there. They had a home here.

R.S. Yes. Sid lived in Orangeville. Charles lived in Castle Dale. And dad lived here. Of course that was way after they first moved in here.

K.P. When did you first, how old were you when you first built this cabin down here on the desert?

R.S. I was 19, 21, when the cabin was built. I am 82 so if you can figure that out.

K.P. Well, OK, that put's you, 1890, 1889? Close to there. I'm not too much of a mathematician.

R.S. Well, I can't either without a pencil. But, anyhow, that's when it was built. Well, like I told you he was going to take up this ground. And for some reason they couldn't get it. They said that his original filing on a homestead here, was too far away from there. And they wouldn't let us have it. There was eight or ten of us that was going in there and take up that ground.

K.P. Would you have moved down there?

R.S. No. We would have never of moved there, but it was a grazing position. And at the time they built that cabin it was a good wet year. We had had several of them. They figured that they could dry farm and everything. They planted a little patch of lucerne right out east of the cabin there. It had come up, a good stand. They had radishs. We had onions, and stuff. We dug down there for four or five feet and never struck dry ground, you know. It was really, that year was nice and wet and it had been several years before that.

K.P. So, even though he knew that he couldn't get this ground as a home-
stead he

R.S. He went ahead anyhow. Yes.

K.P. Well, did he continue to farm down there, to plant lucerne, or just this one year?

R.S. No, they planted that and that was all. But, he finished the cabin and we used that cabin off and on all the while that we was in there.

K.P. When was the last time that you used the cabin or that you know of it being used?

R.S. Oh dear, I don't know just when that would be, but it was eight or ten years after it was built. It was used off and on, people went by they----you go back in there down to the water and look up on the ledge there and you will see initials carved all over there.

Any man that you might have mentioned. They carved their initials on that rock. And there is lots of them that's got the date on them.
The date

K.P. Do you remember any stories from down in that area as you spent time in the cabin? Of just that area? I take it that as you had your cattle and so on down there that what occurred at night was a lot of stories.

Well, there was a lot of stories like the deer hunters. They told how that horse got away and what a chase they had to get him, and all that, you know. My brother came in one night from on a chase and I don't know, he had been gone so long that we were getting kind of worried about him. He come and he had a little pinto pony and I asked him why he was so dammed late. "Why," he says, "the old horse quit on me." And I said, "You was riding him when you came in." "Yes, but I had humored him along and rested him I got on him just out here a ways and rode him in." My brother, Joe, he was quite a rider. And he had a little black pinto horse and right out in front of the cabin off to the left or the north, is a nice flat and he always took this pony out there to get on him. And he rode this horse and he bucked and bucked and bucked and carried on, and when he got through bucking he got off kind of natural or something to feel in his pocket and he didn't have his knife. The dammed pony had bucked him around untill it had worked up his overalls and he lost his knife. He went out in there and looked around and found his knife.

There's a story or two that used to be told about Ireland. I don't know whether you would like to hear any of them or not. But it pertains to the Swasey boys. This old Ireland, this is out here south of Emery and at the head of Salina Canyon. He had a big spread in here and he always had a bottle of liquor but not one of the boys never got any of it. So, Charlie Swasey and Oscar Bebee they decided to try a scheme and see if they couldn't get a drink of that whiskey. So Charlie says, "well, I'll take a fit." He was riding along with them. He always kind of went in a little single buggy. He says, "I'll take a fit, and you tell him or ask him if he's got any liquor and tell him that's about all or that will bring me out of

it quicker than anything I know of." He rides out, tumbles off of his horse spin around, rolled his eyes and that you know, and Bebee says have you got any liquor? "Yes, I got a bottle here." And he says, "well, that will straighten him out if you got some." So he took it over to Charlie laying down there on his back in this fit, you know. And when he come to him, why he just grabbed the dammed bottle and he drank it all. So they went along and they got up and rode off. "Well," Charlie says, "That worked alright. We got a taste of that whiskey." Old Bebee says, "Damn you, if you ever take a fit again I'll let you die in it before I help you."

K.P. when did this Ireland live out there? When?

R.S. Oh, he was out in there in 1900 or something like that, I guess. Early.

K.P. This was probably while you were still, or before you were born?

R.S. Well, no. He was here after I was born. I don't think it has been that long ago. But this old Charlie Swasey, and what's his name, Dick Keel, at Emery. Old Ireland had a mean dog and ever time anybody would come around that dog would nip them. And they had been tryin and a figuring some way of getting---to get something done with this dog.

Anyhow, the old dog run up against a porcupine and got his face full of quills. And Ireland, old Ireland says, "Oh, what can you do? Can you get them out?" "Yes, we'll have to have a little liquor to give the dog to deaden the pain." So alright. They took him into the shed and proceeded to work on him with this old bullwhip and they had the liquor. One of them whipped the dog while the other one sampled the liquor. And the other one would take it and he'd whip the dog and they went by that and the old dog was screamin and you know, and Ireland thought it was the pain they was a causin to pull these quills out. So when they got ready to they just grabbed the damn dog

and a pair of pliers and pulled them quills out. They pulled all kinds of stunts on the old feller.

K.P. I take it you were out then, when you went down to the cabin, you were out from the first thing in the morning until sundown?

R.S. Off, generally early, early, early in the morning, and late at night. The hardest days ride I ever put in in my life was with Chris Peterson. He had the cattle and we had a few cattle and we started out in the morning. And I had an old horse, he couldn't walk but just jog, jog, jog all day long. So we covered practically, I thought the whole of Sindbad. We came back in at night and we watered our horses there at the Cliffdweller spring. But lots and lots of times there wouldn't be enough water there to water them. If somebody got in there first and beat us to it, their horses got a drink and we had to go down Eagle. That's just what happened that night. We rode all that day and then in order to give our horses a drink we went down Eagle to the spring at what they call Deer Canyon and watered our horses. I'll never forget that day.

K.P. So, these Jackass Corrals have been down there when they first started running horses.

R.S. Yes. They had to have a place to hold them and brand them and tend to them and all that.

K.P. About how far was this from the cabin?

R.S. Just around the, a quarter of a mile under the ledge. .

K.P. Well, it really sounds like a fascinating life.

R.S. Well, it really was. The first time I was ever in there I was 13 years old. They didn't have too many corrals then. They had a corral down in Kane Wash. That's down off towards the river. You go out towards the San Rafael River and down this canyon. They took their

horses down there to work them. And you could go out, a lots and lots of times when we'd go out a ridding you'd see a dust over here and one here, and that's a bunch of horses a movin. They'd gather the damn horses, oh, in big bunches. One stallion could have 15 or 20 head of mares. He'd fight for that bunch and he'd keep them, and that's the way it was. But anytime that there was a rainstorm, them horses knew where to go to get this water where it fell into some hole. And they would go.

K.P. When you talk about working the horses what do you mean by that?

R.S. Branding them and tending to them. you know, and male horses and that.

K.P. Were most of these wild, or did you have to break them down there?

R.S. They was wild horses, but they were domesticated so that we could handle them like they do a bunch of cows nowadays. Eventually they got mean. And you couldn't catch them. That little story there will tell you what, a little bit of what happened. But we'd go down, out the North Fork of Eagle, that was a place to hold them, that was a pasture. We'd shove them down there. And there was a fence across down in there, and we could keep them from coming back out when we got them below this fence. And lots of times, in later years, when I used to do quite a bit of riding, why we'd wait for them to come in at night and there was a little place back in there that we could hide up, you know, and wait for these horses to come in to water and then just give them a good boo and kept them down in there. And when we didn't want them to get out of there we'd put up the fence and they stayed in there. We even went in there with an airplane and tried to get them. In later years, and I think the old trip, I don't

remember who the--some fellow over here at Price had a little plane and he wanted to try it. So we went in there and I think out of that four or five days we got two horses with this plane.

K.P. How did you work this How would you try to catch them?

R.S. He'd fly around and find a bunch of horses and circle them, and get down. He flew quite low and the shadow a lots of times would turn the horses, but it didn't work out successfully.

R.S. So, you were on the horses?

K.P. Yes. We had the horses and he was up there in the plane.