

## **Life in The Broomfield Depot**

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**Sent:** Tuesday, April 29, 2014 2:49 PM

**To:** Jacqui Ainlay-Conley

**Cc:** Virginia Hermes

**Subject:** Broomfield RR depot

Good morning, Jainlay-Conley.

My sister, Virginia Hermes, has forwarded your recent message about the old C&S railway depot at Broomfield, Colorado.

Alas, I do not have any photographs that I could share with you (my sister may have already sent the attached photo). However, if you wish, I could scribble some notes relating some of the stories buried in my memory banks and send them to you.

Kind regards,

Bert D. Ward

On 30.04.2014 08:58, Jacqui Ainlay-Conley wrote:

Dear Mr. Ward,

We would love to have some written accounts of any memories you might have. What you ate? How you cooked? What did you do for baths? How often the trains stopped? What did you do for fun?

In addition, I would love to know what school you went to. Do you remember? And what was your brother's name?

The depot has the waiting room/station side and living quarters on one side. Did you live in the depot's living quarters? I just want to clarify what you mean by "the adjacent house" as I know some agents lived in a small house across the street.

Thanks you so much for emailing. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jacqui Ainlay-Conley

Museum Administrator

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Dear Jacqui,

I have been able to recall some anecdotal stories from my memory, which I can use to answer some of your questions, plus provide some unsolicited information. These are sketchy at best but, on balance, they depict a reasonably accurate rendition of an adventurous life in "The Broomfield Depot".

For the first half of the year 1952 my older brother, (John Jr, who was three years senior to me) and I lived in the adjacent living quarters with our father, John C. Ward, who was the C&S agent at that time. Our beloved mother and three dear older sisters remained in southeast Kansas. Although we missed Mom dearly, we seemed to understand the situation – i.e, two rambunctious boys were too much of a handful for such a gentle woman to handle at that time.

Of course, the Broomfield township was rather different from what it is now. Although I was only 9-10 years old at that time, I have many fond memories of our time there....memories of (mostly) humorous incidents that are all the more tender and touching viewed now from the distance of time and space. The adjacent living quarters where we three fellows stayed were very primitive even for those days - outdoor toilet and no running water except for a pump. As I recall, the quarters comprised four rooms – two bedrooms upstairs, which we did not use, plus a living room and a kitchen on the ground floor. The living room was truly "lived in" due to it also serving as the bedroom for the three of us. John and I shared a rather makeshift, but sufficient, mattress that Dad had obtained from a Salvation Army shop in Denver, whereas he slept (without complaint) on a bed put together from old automobile seats. The kitchen had a wood burning stove, sink with a pump, and an old table with chairs, which John and I used to complete our homework assignments.

Our cuisine consisted mostly of hotdogs, spam, canned beans, eggs, fried chicken and milk gravy over potatoes. Dad cooked it all on an electric hotplate also purchased from the Sallies shop. Each Sunday we had a genuine treat as Dad took us to a local diner (aka "greasy spoon") where we had either chicken fried steak or hamburger steak (whichever was on special) and pie ala mode. Not to impugn Dad's culinary skills, but John and I looked forward to Sundays with great enthusiasm!

As for bathing... well, what can I say? We used a large wash tub filled with water heated on top of the wood burning stove, and bathed regularly once a week...whether we needed it or not!

During the winter months the unit was unimaginably cold, especially at night because the fire in the pot bellied stove in the living/bedroom was allowed to go out. Each morning John and I alternated the task of jumping out of bed to build up the fire again, then leaping back under the covers. The floor was covered with an old linoleum rug, the edges of which curled up significantly from the freezing air at night. We knew it was warm enough to arise for the morning when the edges uncurled and lay flat. Dad would then fix breakfast, consisting of "sidemeat" bacon, with eggs fried in the copious amount of drippings from the bacon. The "lucky" brother (the one who didn't have to start the fire in the morning) had the task of taking the vile chamber pot from the stairwell out to the outdoor toilet. According to Dad, these tasks were designed to "build character" in us. Each morning Dad would call out "Come on, I've made a breakfast that will stick to your ribs!" After breakfast John would yell out "Hurry up, you little s\*\*t, we have to get started off to school!" I usually replied that I wanted to finish reading the chapter of the book I was on.

John and I attended a two-room country school located about 1-2 miles outside Broomfield. My teacher's name was Mrs Wong (a wonderful, caring person), and John's teacher was Mrs Musclemann (spelling?). We usually took a shortcut by walking a mile or so across a farmer's field regardless of the weather. No doubt this was another element of Dad's "character building" regime for us. Although I never saw Mrs Wong after we moved away, John visited Mrs Musclemann many years later, who clearly remembered us, telling him that we boys were "a pair of unforgettable characters".

As regards our entertainment, during the cold, snowy winter months we built snowmen and snow forts, and engaged in numerous snowball fights with other local lads, most of whom lived on farms in the surrounding area. In the warmer months we and our friends would all go swimming in the many shallow

ponds that dotted the countryside. The water was always muddy and filled with frogs and snakes, making the adventure even grander.

We also had a game that we would all play in the barn of one of our friends whereby we would jump from the loft down onto a pile of hay, pretending we were paratroopers fighting in the Korean war – as our friend's older brother was actually doing, but without any boyish humour I'm sure. One day I landed on a board that had a rusty nail sticking upward, which pierced my foot such that the nail protruded from the top of my foot, hurting enormously. Brother John calmly removed the nail from my foot and carried me back to The Depot for Dad to tend to the foot that I had so valiantly wounded in battle. Fortunately, The Depot contained a first aid kit. As a reward for my courage under fire, Dad treated us to an unexpected pie ala mode at the diner! Even after all these years I've never forgotten the genuine care and concern that Dad and John showed me that day.

Although there was a clock in the business side of The Depot, we relied mostly on Dad's pocket watch to keep track of the time. One day in the middle of March (around the time of my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday), during one of our excursions to Denver with Dad, my brother and I were looking at some watches in a display case at Walgreen's drugstore. I saw what must have been the most beautiful pocket watch in the world – just like Dad's, or so I thought. But this one had luminous numerals on the face and a genuine pseudo-leather fob. My heart ached, knowing that we could never afford to pay the outrageous price of \$2 for it. Back at The Depot the next day we were eating lunch of hotdogs or spam with canned beans and fried potatoes (surprise!), and John casually asked Dad what time it was. I expected Dad to take out his pocket watch, but instead, wonder of wonders, he took out *The Watch*! When Dad put it into my pocket he said "Now that you have two digits in your age, you're becoming a man and a man needs his own watch; how else can he check that the trains are running on time"? Thereafter, at every opportunity I stood on the Depot platform and, as each train went by, with the whistle blowing and the wheels singing their clickety clack, clickety clack song to me, I did indeed check if it was running on time. The train crew would always wave to me, their faces displaying with kindly grins, clearly acknowledging my help in keeping them running to schedule. Obviously, an immeasurable amount of character was built on that birthday....in The Depot.

There are many, many more stories of incidents associated with life in The Depot, but all tales, just as all adventures, must come to an end. In the middle of that year (1952) John and I were sent back to Kansas for our eldest sister's wedding – where, in general, we caused havoc, of course. Later that summer Dad moved the entire family to another railroad camp high in the Rocky Mountains, complete with a railroad house – with only marginally better facilities, but still no running water or indoor toilet but at least the family was together. Needless to say, another set of grand adventures awaited us there, but that's another story for another day.

More than 60 years have now passed and other families will have lived in The Depot, each family having its own adventures. I have never forgotten the all-too-brief adventurous time that I spent with my dad and my brother in The Broomfield Depot so many years ago. Dad and John are gone now, no doubt off on a different sort of Grand Adventure, waiting for me to join them.

I have now reached the age whereby I am much closer to the end of my life than to its beginning, but I can still hear Dad and John calling out "come on ... hurry up". Although I still hear their voices - clearly, distinctly, frequently – I no longer reply because I have my own adventures to finish, with my own two sons, before I catch up with Dad and John. Until that time I'll cherish the memories of that adventurous life so long ago when Dad, John and I were truly "a happy few, a band of brothers".... at The Broomfield Depot.