

Oral History Interview with ALVA F. LYONS, June 29, 1982, Durango, Colorado,
by Robert W. Delaney, for the Center of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College



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This is the transcript of the second interview with Alva Lyons by Robert Delaney, representing the Center of Southwest Studies, on June 29, 1982.

DELANEY: You remember now where we were, right?

LYONS: Yeah, we were talking about changing the rail in 1923 is what we were doing. You know about a week before they started changing the standard gauge to narrow gauge, they sent all the section men from all the section houses east of Durango on down to Farmington. They took out and changed all the side tracks. There wasn't very many side tracks because they were all built for just very few cars. Probably the longest one of them was at Aztec was 25 cars to start with, and Farmington had 27 cars. They changed all of those side tracks so that they were all through. When the last train left Farmington, they hired all the farmers and everybody else, and they changed the rails right straight through.

DELANEY: You mean they pulled up the rail right behind them.

LYONS: Pulled up the rail right behind the train and moved it. The next day after they did that, I was the conductor on the train. We had about 15 passenger cars and Mr. Bowen with his private car and his family were on the rear of it, we hauled all those section men back as far as Alamosa, unloaded a bunch of them at Antonito and they took the train from there to Santa Fe.

DELANEY: Was Mr. Bowen president of the company?

LYONS: No, he was the general superintendent in 1923. I think that Young was afterwards was first president then receiver. I think he's the one that brought Bowen and all those other gentlemen from the Northern Pacific down there. Those policies were practically followed through when J.S. Pyeatt come in in 1924.

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DELANEY: Now that Farmington branch hauled mainly fruit because it was a big orchard country down there.

LYONS: Yes, it wasn't until years later, in fact, I don't think there was very few stock cars. There were no refrigerators and there was not business except the fruit in the fall. It wasn't until later years until after we had the narrow gauge that we started shipping beans out of Aztec.

DELANEY: Pinto beans

LYONS: Pinto beans raised over in the Bloomfield area, so boxcar shipments of groceries and hardware materials. building materials all came in here and transferred, went down to Farmington. I notice in that one picture that was in the book, CINDERS AND SMOKE.

DELANEY: Yeah, Doris Osterwald's book.

LYONS: Well this is a Burley picture, well I've looked at that picture again and it shows the three rail track there yet.

DELANEY: Oh, it does

LYONS: There are standard gauge boxcars there, one on either side of a flat car.

DELANEY: And where is that photo supposed to be.

LYONS: It's in your collection up there.

DELANEY: Oh, it's in my collection, I'll look for it and make a special note of that, and it was a photo by Burley.

LYONS: Not Burley, but Baleu.

DELANEY: Yeah, we talked about him.

LYONS: They say in the early 1900s, but I don't think that ice house was built until 1910 or in that era.

DELANEY: That may be right, I don't know who told me early 1900s, I don't know how that got marked that way. Somebody had that idea, and it might have been Arthur Wyatt who had that idea about that ice house, but I'm not sure, but we can track it down.

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LYONS: Anyway the Farmington wasn't built until 1905.

DELANEY: It can't be earlier than that, that's for sure. Do you think, had that railroad done any good down in New Mexico and been able to expend itself, let's say on down south of Farmington that way. Do you think they would have hauled coal down that way and tied up with the Santa Fe down in Gallup or some place like that.

LYONS: If they could have got into that, they might have eventually handled the coal and the timber business.

DELANEY: And the Santa Fe and the Denver would have made some kind of an agreement.

LYONS: But there's other railroads, you see, the Wheel Road, do you remember that. That was built out of Bernalillo, it come up as far as Cuba.

DELANEY: Yes, I know that.

LYONS: Well, I think the money was furnished by the Santa Fe and wanted to come in here to connect.

DELANEY: Wanted to come in here to connect, through Bernalillo, up through Cuba. I know where some of those timbers are from a couple of the bridges that were on there. They are in that restaurant down in Albuquerque called the Hacienda, because Mr. Watson built that restaurant and he got his great big timbers from bridges on that railroad between Cuba and Bernalillo.

LYONS: Well they say the coal was very limited around Cuba, that's why they pulled it out, Wheel couldn't make any money on it. I always wondered about that, to go into a place, run right up against the reservation line of the Utes, the Apaches and the Navajos, and they wouldn't give them a right-of-way, so it stopped right there. That's another thing why they have no railroad south of here.

DELANEY: Part of that, it's a little bit strange because in the Navajo treaty of 1868, they agreed not to obstruct the building of railroads on the reservation, but then there's reservation land and then there's treaty land, and then there's executive order land and the two in law have a little bit different status. Tell me about derailments, wrecks, anything else unusual that happened on that Farmington branch that you remember.

LYONS: I can remember long before I went to work here, they had a heavy snow and that blocked them from going to Farmington for one. They had a hard time getting down through

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because of the ice on the tracks south of Durango. They didn't have no snowplow, no flanges on the engines, so it made it a pretty difficult job, they were several days getting through. That also brings to mind all of the wash-ins that we've had to contend with over the years.

DELANEY: Wash-ins or washouts?

LYONS: Both, I was going into Farmington one day and down below Flora Vista, Hood Spur, that river was up almost the track in through there and it washed out a little bit of a bridge from an irrigation ditch or drainage ditch, and we had to shore up that bridge so we could get to Farmington, little things like that. We pulled trees and rocks off of the Bondad area that rolled down off of the hill, big rocks, probably one of the hardest rain storms I ever was in was just on the Florida river bridge, south, the train was stuck there on account of a rock, before we could get out of there, Jimmy Holland was the conductor, he walked down to the section house to get the section crew to come back and blow the rock, it was too big, and that train was butted in right up above the boxes on the trucks. We had to have it all shoveled out before we could ever move the train.

DELANEY: You didn't have a little thing that went ahead of the regular train.

LYONS: We never used those, they only use that where they have no communications.

DELANEY: I see

LYONS: Motor car, that's on the Silverton branch, that's the only place they've ever use it.

DELANEY: No telegraph lines, anything like that.

LYONS: Yes, telegraph lines and that was all.

DELANEY: You can't get telegraph on the train.

LYONS: You couldn't get it unless you had the equipment.

DELANEY: You didn't have any equipment?

LYONS: We didn't have any equipment.

DELANEY: Could you operate the telegraph key.

LYONS: No, I tried it but I never finished learning how to do the job.

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DELANEY: Where did you get this key that you donated to the Center of Southwest Studies that's out there in that case.

LYONS: From Riggin who was the lineman for the telegraph company.

DELANEY: If you would put a battery on that, you could use that in the next five minutes.

LYONS: I typed a letter to a friend of mine in Chicago, the fellow that built the engine, well, of course, his grandfather was a telegrapher on the B&O. Well I used this same set and I had the operator down here telegraph him a message, so he sent one back the same way on tape.

DELANEY: Anything else beside the snow and the washouts and the wash-ins and things like that, any trains just run amuck between here and Farmington.

LYONS: No, I don't believe there were. The grade wasn't sufficient to be running real wild.

DELANEY: Once you got past Bondad, you really had it made, didn't you as far as grade.

LYONS: I don't know whether you want to talk about the big trains we hauled during the pipe haul or not.

DELANEY: Yes, as long as we are on that Farmington branch, tell me about, the oil was discovered at Aneth and also at Hogback, I guess that was the main one.

LYONS: That started the hauling of oil that come out of Farmington, and for awhile it went to Alamosa and then they diverted to the Rio Grande Southern, and the loaded it in standard gauge cars at Montrose.

DELANEY: It went all the way up there, huh.

LYONS: It went all the way to Salt Lake, that was the standard.

DELANEY: What other impact did that discovery of oil at Hogback have on that Farmington branch.

LYONS: Well, they finally built a refinery at Farmington, and we supplied all the narrow gauge with gasoline from the Conoco refinery at Farmington. So that made a considerable increase in business over the years. After we were able to run the narrow gauge, then the sheep

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trains out of there in the fall, about 25, 28 cars of sheep, that's what the engine would handle. For about ten days, we would have one every other day.

DELANEY: My goodness, then the pipe that you brought in and all the oil field equipment, that was pretty enormous wasn't it.

LYONS: Pretty enormous, I had one train out of Carbon Junction of 85 cars.

DELANEY: How many engines did you have pulling this?

LYONS: One engine

DELANEY: Eighty-five cars loaded with pipe.

LYONS: Of course, we had an idler between each car because the pipe extended over the ends on each car.

DELANEY: What's an idler?

LYONS: Well an idler is a flat car. It could be a coal car with the sides removed that we used in there to keep the pipe from clashing together, but can you imagine going down to Farmington with a train of that type when there wasn't a side track between Carbon Junction. To hold we started settling out cars at Bondad, we had 10 or 15, some at Posta, some at Cedar Hill, we still had too many cars for Aztec because the main track there was full of cars.

DELANEY: You could put 27 cars on the siding at Farmington.

LYONS: Well, that was on the house track, that was before they extended it when the pipe rush started. When they started all the building mud, that is the mud for the wells, drilling mud, then they had to have cars build more tracks. They had to have a special track where they unloaded all the pipe there between Durango and Farmington at the top of the hill, do you remember up there where the light plant is. We had one long side track that would hold about 75 cars.

DELANEY: I see.

LYONS: They would exchange the loads with the empties.

DELANEY: Sure, you have to have some place to get around. That business was all gone by the time they abandoned that Farmington branch.

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LYONS: It wasn't all gone.

DELANEY: Why did they abandon that?

LYONS: Well the first reason, the people wouldn't make a complaint to the PUC. They made a complaint to the railroads. They would haul it down in trucks, the drilling mud. The reason for that was all of these mud companies were national companies with a manager and the manager just wouldn't go along with the communities, so the fact they didn't file any complaints, it was a cinch that we were going to lost the railroad, not enough other people would become involved.

DELANEY: I see, so the railroad put in for abandonment and they abandoned it.

LYONS: That's right

DELANEY: They pulled the track up very quickly didn't they.

LYONS: It took them two years. A year after I retired they had it set that they could go, they had the abandonment. That was the last hearing they had, that was it. They would out the Silverton except for the fact when the got rid of the passenger business in 51, the stipulation was as long as the passenger business increased on the Silverton and as long as Silverton and Durango would protest any abandonment, that railroad would keep running. That's why it ran so many years without any other passenger business down here.

DELANEY: So, when they cut the Farmington branch off, there still was connection to Alamosa.

LYONS: They abandoned that at the same time.

DELANEY: Then they abandoned that, was it the year after?

LYONS: Same time.

DELANEY: Oh, the same time. I had an idea it was a year after.

LYONS: You see that was a hard winter, and they just wouldn't run any trains in that weather. When you don't run any trains, you have to run snow trains to open it up. They didn't want to do that, so they just hauled it down by motorway and that was it, just closed up the railroad.

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DELANEY: Again more by default than anything else.

LYONS: More by default than anything else.

DELANEY: Because people didn't protest that. They could have protested PUC.

LYONS: PUC and ICC generated the business in New Mexico. It was interstate then.

DELANEY: All right, can you think of anything else about the Farmington branch or in those years we are talking about right now that is significant as far as the railroad is concerned?

LYONS: One thing that I think we ought to remember is the amount of difficult switching that was on the Farmington branch. Due to the small side tracks and the large trains, I know one problem that we had in Farmington. I was breaking at the time and we were an extra crew, in fact, and we went in there with ten oil tanks empty to trade for ten loaded oil tanks, we had ten empty stock cars to spot on the main line and the stockyards was east of the main line or east of the wee on the main line, and we had 27 cars to go in on the house track. It was the only other track that was there at that time outside of a little spur at the Farmington Lumber and Hardware. Well, to get around that, trade the empties out of the house track for the loads that we had in the train, go down and get the ten cars of oil, the ten stock cars behind the coach that we had, and then leave town so we could spot those ten stock cars in the stockyards, I guess we took the engine around the wee about three or four times before we could get out of it.

DELANEY: I would expect, yeah, that would be hard. If they had a great big long track, that wouldn't have been so difficult. Alva, lets talk about the period 1925 to 1935. What stands out in your mind as far as the railroad is concerned?

LYONS: Well, a continual improvement in equipment and the roadway, bridges, including extending the side tracks and we had new engines already ordered.

DELANEY: Tell me about those engines, what's the improvement?

LYONS: The 470s come in '23, but by 1927 they ordered the 480.

DELANEY: What's the difference between the 470 and 480?

LYONS: The difference in the weight of the engine and the pull on the draw head, they can haul more cars.

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DELANEY: Just a bigger engine.

LYONS: A bigger engine

DELANEY: What other rolling stock?

LYONS: Well, then they converted ten of those little 10,000s they had on the standard gauge to the 490s.

DELANEY: That's better yet.

LYONS: Yeah, that's better yet, so that gave us 30 engines to use here and over out of Salida.

DELANEY: Salida was a division point.

LYONS: A division point there for the Gunnison.

DELANEY: Salida was also the place where you creosoted ties and timbers and all of this? Did you ever go in and out of Salida.

LYONS: I had one trip over to Salida from Alamosa, and that was because of transferman's strike in Alamosa, and we had 30 cars a piece to go east, and we had to get them to Salida so they could be moved. It took us an awful long time to get over there. We had too many cars for the power, we had to run 20 miles for water because it just exhausted your water. It was quite a trip.

DELANEY: What did you do, unhook, take the engine up and come back and then go up to the water and load it up again.

LYONS: That's right.

DELANEY: What about the roadbed, you mentioned the roadbed when you improve it?

LYONS: We had new ties then they started laying ballast out of Durango, we had a gravel pit here. We had one at Pagosa Junction or Gota.

DELANEY: Where was the gravel pit here?

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LYONS: Down at the end of Fifth Avenue, First Street and Fifth Avenue would be about the place.

DELANEY: Yeah, there on the other side of Basin Petroleum.

LYONS: Well that was the Conoco, that was their bulk plant.

DELANEY: All right, and what do you do, just put better gravel and new ties? Are the rails any heavier because of this heavier equipment.

LYONS: We did bring in 100 miles of new rail off of the, I think it was 200 miles of 70 pound rail they bought off the Union Pacific, and they put that in between Durango and Chama, some over on the other side of Cumbres and, I think some of it they used on the railroad out of Salida over there.

DELANEY: What had been used before, what pound rail?

LYONS: Sixty-five pound was the heaviest we had at that time. That was usually on Cumbres. We had 52 pound in between Durango and Chama at that time.

DELANEY: Fifty-two pound, and that just wouldn't stand too much, that heavy engine and all that. What other improvements did they do?

LYONS: Well the coaches were improved too.

DELANEY: Where were they improved, at Alamosa?

LYONS: At Alamosa and that was starting about 35. They got rid of quite a number of branch lines, and then they started improving the....

DELANEY: They brought coaches in or refurbished them. Did you do any of that because of your war experience?

LYONS: No, I didn't do any of that, but they had enough coaches to make three trains to Durango. You would have one each way and one spare. Then they had enough to do almost the same thing out of Salida to Gunnison, so that kept things going pretty good for having a vestibule train, what few passengers they were handling. It was a great improvement to have steam heated cars rather than stoves.

DELANEY: I would think so, yes.

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LYONS: They had better air brakes on them.

DELANEY: That came in in the 30s, right.

LYONS: Yeah, in 37 they brought those trains out.

DELANEY: And air brakes....

LYONS: Better air brakes because....

DELANEY: Westinghouse

LYONS: I think all of it was Westinghouse, they just put them out so they worked a little better. Then we had air signals with the engine. We didn't have to wave out the window at him to get him to look around.

DELANEY: How did you....

LYONS: Through the rope that goes down through the train, through the engineer. When you pulled that, it would blow the air whistle in the engine cab.

DELANEY: Okay

LYONS: More like a standard gauge....

DELANEY: If you pulled it three times, it meant stop or something.

LYONS: Stop at the next station.

DELANEY: If you pulled it once, what did it mean.

LYONS: That was usually an emergency.

DELANEY: Emergency, okay, you had a whole set of signals..

LYONS: Oh, yes, if you were standing, three meant backup or two, go ahead, if you couldn't see the engineer.

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DELANEY: Okay, what else in the early 1930s do you remember, the Depression, how did that affect the road?

LYONS: Well, the depression affected the road quite a bit because it forced the railroad into receivership again. Pyeatt lost out because of the friction between the two the bankers and the Western Pacific and the Missouri Pacific. Well, finally he owned it. Well fortunately in this next receivership, they appointed Judge Simms, now it was a different kind of a setup because he appointed the two receivers, one from the Salt Lake area, that was Judge McCarthy and one from Denver, who was Henry Swan, a banker. They handled the railroad then and....

DELANEY: You mentioned Judge Simms, where was he?

LYONS: He was in Denver.

DELANEY: That would be the federal district court for Colorado.

LYONS: Yeah, a lot of the policies then that were being formulated were being carried out by Al Pearlman during this period of time. He was the general manager.

DELANEY: Of the railroad.

LYONS: Railroad, and that was eventually what they were trying to do, was to cut the passenger train business out all together because it wasn't paying off there too well, so around this time, the railroad started buying truck lines to move freight by truck or bus line, so they could move the passengers by bus if were going to Farmington, or the mail, take the mail off the train and move it by bus, so that started the employees, we had a club then, that's where this club business came in because we were trying to get business for the railroad.

DELANEY: Yeah, we talked about it.

LYONS: Well, we had many ideas to boost the business, and one of the things with Mr. Camp and myself on the Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee, the fact that we should find out just what they were doing through the federal court, so I made a trip, W. L. Bruce and myself made a trip to Denver, and we tried to find out from the court records in Denver, we couldn't get to first base. The clerk of the court wouldn't let us have it, so I asked him if I could use the phone and call Durango, I wanted to talk to Mr. Camp because he was desirous of the information as well as we were because after all we were working for the same people.

DELANEY: Yes

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LYONS: So the clerk said well, in that case, here it is, so then we found out just what their plans were, and we every hearing we went into like in 1935 when they pulled the Pagosa Springs branch off, why Pearlman brought up, we are going to get rid of all of this passenger business, so we watched that all the way through, that gave us an idea of what they were going to do.

DELANEY: You mentioned that Pagosa Springs branch, that went from Pagosa Springs to Pagosa Junction, and that's why it was Pagosa Junction. What were you hauling on there, timber?

Alva: We hauled company ties and stock, all the supplies that went in on everything till they finished Wolf Creek Pass and then, of course, they started trucking it.

DELANEY: That's why that was abandoned more than anything.

LYONS: That's why that was abandoned.

DELANEY: What they were getting out of there were mainly timbers and ties, things like that for the railroad itself and livestock and that was about it. There wasn't much business in Pagosa Springs was there?

LYONS: There wasn't too much business, no. The freight business actually didn't amount to a carload a month.

DELANEY: And then you would take those ties, things like that up to Salida.

LYONS: Take them to Salida

DELANEY: Where was the sawmill?

LYONS: Well, we had a number of sawmills, Yamaguchi had one about four or five miles out of Pagosa Junction.

DELANEY: Which way, towards Pagosa Springs.

LYONS: Towards Pagosa Springs.

DELANEY: Yes, okay

LYONS: Then Pounds had one at Dyke and Bunch had one at....[end of side one] had a big mill in Pagosa Springs at one time, That was the Sullenberger just south of Pagosa Springs.

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DELANEY: Yes, who owned that?

LYONS: Sullenberger, then there was little mills away from the track where they hauled material into the track. There was lots of timber up there, they cleaned it all out.

DELANEY: Was there at one time a special railroad there at Pagosa Springs, Boggs or Biggs, something like that, because I have a photo that shows an engine.

LYONS: That was from Edith, those are all timber roads up in through there, and the sawmill was at Edith, a few miles out of Lumberton, but there was other railroads that come up into that area. One went up into the San Juan from Juanita, it almost come into Pagosa Springs, we had several other spurs, but the Pounds lumber company up in Navajo and around this side of what called (?) spur. We hauled a lot of lumber out of there at one time, they finally moved over to Dulce and worked and worked out of there for a long time. Of course, there were two mills at Dulce. I think the Sullenberger outfit, I forget what they called the name of that company at that time. They were there first then Pounds moved in after.

DELANEY: Did you take on many passengers at Dulce? Did the Indians use it much.

LYONS: Oh, yes, the Indians always were riding some place, to Durango, or to Chama to go down the Espanola.

DELANEY: Santa Fe

LYONS: The roads were getting improved so much that it was easier for people to travel by car. That's a big detriment to the railroad. On the Silverton branch before we ever had the highway up through there, we used to travel, load the automobiles in coal cars, and we would have six or seven coal cars going to Silverton every day, with two cars in each car.

DELANEY: How did you get them on, just drove them on there.

LYONS: Drove them right on.

DELANEY: From a platform.

LYONS: The we would do the same thing in Silverton, pull up to the depot platform on the side track there, spur track and they would drive their cars right off. We'd hook them up together and load another bunch of cars and go to Durango.

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DELANEY: And that lasted how long, until they got a good road over Molas.

LYONS: 26, 27, 28 somewhere in there.

DELANEY: Because they were a long time getting that road not only graveled and then later on paved, but they were a long time getting the road done.

LYONS: That's right, there just was no road there.

DELANEY: Went down through Lime Creek and up that way. It was a windy tortuous thing, hard to get over.

LYONS: Well, it was a little narrow at times, people sure hated to drive it, I'll tell you.

DELANEY: Can you think of anything else in the early Depression that affected the railroad tremendously. Was there any help from the federal government or anything for the railroads. Were you still carrying the mail getting paid for it.

LYONS: We were carrying the mail up until they abandoned passenger service all together, ran a mail car with the regular mail post office.

DELANEY: Railway post office, yes.

LYONS: When they abandoned the rail service in 51, why that was it, took everything off.

DELANEY: Was there any lowering of freight rates or anything like that in the early 1930s?

LYONS: I really don't know much about the freight rates. I never come involved too much although I run a lot of trains, I probably run more....

DELANEY: That wasn't your business. Okay, Alva, in the period 1935 to 1945, that's going to bring in the war, what do you remember mainly about the road, were there any bankruptcies, receiverships in the last part of the Depression and before the war, let's say 35-41?

LYONS: Well, the railroad was still in receivership under Wilson McCarthy and Henry Swan.

DELANEY: Yes, okay

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LYONS: I think the same program that they did (?) was still in effect because during the war years, the government wanted to requisition all of the engines that we had at that time, and some of them the Rio Grande Southern, the Chamber was involved in this at that time. In fact, the city council and county commissioners were after me very much during that period of time to see what we could do, get the brotherhoods interested in this too because they would be involved.

DELANEY: Okay, I want to ask you one question before we get off some of that war business. We'll get back to the way they took engines and sent them to Alaska or wherever, I don't know. How much uranium and ore, the products of the smelter did you haul out of here do you think during the war.

LYONS: We hauled no uranium. It was all trucked, the uranium was processed in Durango, and then it was hauled by truck to Grand Junction, very little of it went by rail. There was a few shipments, but I would say it wasn't very many.

DELANEY: Okay, now, getting back to the war years and the way they wanted to take engines, locomotives off of the Denver and Rio Grande, what really happened there.

LYONS: Well, we sent, when I say we, I'm talking about the railroad, all the people here, that were against the government and railroad doing this. They sent Judge O'Rourke to Washington to see that they didn't do this, so they did leave three of the 470s here which are still here. They took one engine off of the Silverton Northern and two off the Rio Grande Southern. Then they removed 10 pounds of 90 pound rail from the Silverton branch that hadn't been replaced and moved it to build a spur into Fort Carson on the main line. Of course, the draftees business come in there and we had them on the train for awhile, but before the war ended, the railroad company was removing both passengers and the government people off of the train on to their bus.

DELANEY: Where did they do that?

LYONS: They evidently did that in Denver, told them there was no bus service west of Alamosa. I was very friendly with Senator Johnson, and so I wrote him

DELANEY: Senator Ed Johnson, Big Ed, former governor, yes, okay.

LYONS: I wrote him a letter and told him that these draftees should be going out on the railroad rather than on the bus, and I said, the railroad is using that propaganda to discount the railroad here as not being important. His answer was, we got the inductees back on the railroad. They went out of here by rail.

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DELANEY: Good, went out of here by rail, did it affect Denver or any place like that too.

LYONS: No, it didn't affect any place but here.

DELANEY: It was part of a ploy of the railroad to cut down passenger service, looking toward abandonment of passenger service some day, okay, and Senator Johnson could see that as you could, okay, and Judge O'Rourke that you mentioned, he was the district court judge here in Durango.

LYONS: Was

DELANEY: Yes, okay, and also during the war, those locomotives, they were taken and put on the Alaska Railroad, is that correct.

LYONS: Yes, that's where they were to go to but they only received six of them, one of them they dropped in the bay at Seattle.

DELANEY: Loading it on a ship

LYONS: Loading it on a ship.

DELANEY: Is it still there?

LYONS: I suppose, I don't know how deep the bay is there. Some of the other equipment, they didn't use it very long.

DELANEY: Did any of it ever get back to the D&RG?

LYONS: I don't think any of it ever got back. They had an opportunity to buy it at one time, buy those engines back.

DELANEY: The government had recompensed them for it, to begin with, had bought it, okay, and they had a chance to buy it back, I expect pretty cheap.

LYONS: Yeah, pretty cheap, but they wouldn't take it up.

DELANEY: Again, the railroad was looking a little toward abandonment, don't you imagine, even then. Can you think of anything during the war, many wrecks, things like that. Was it hard to get personnel, what was it like running a railroad during the war?

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LYONS: Well, not much different than it was any other time.

DELANEY: It was never taken over by the government as it was in 1918?

LYONS: No, we ought to mention how all of this passenger was used to bring in these boys from the Depression years to the CC camps.

DELANEY: Tell me about that. Let's go back a little bit and tell me about the CCC camp. That was part of the Depression.

LYONS: Just prior to '35, we hauled train after train load here, several trains over on the Rio Grande Southern, Dolores, we had one into Durango, and I think there was several carloads we took into Pagosa Springs and they worked on the forest.

DELANEY: There was a CCC camp right up here where the college is, right where we are sitting almost.

LYONS: Yes, sir, I cleared the ground right here and built a golf course right here for the golf club. Because it was clear and nice, the government wanted this ground for the CCC camp, and they got it, so the CC camp made a golf course to the east of the library building.

DELANEY: Tell me something, they planted a lot of trees up here didn't they? Why did they plant trees up here on this mesa and what kind of trees?

LYONS: Well they were cedars and pinon, the edge of the hill was all trees. The other part was sagebrush.

DELANEY: Up here on the mesa was sagebrush.

LYONS: I've hunted rabbits in the country right up here.

DELANEY: During the war there was an airport up here. Before the war, this was a homestead of the Weihi or wasn't it one the early homesteaders, Weihi?

LYONS: There were several people who claimed that they were involved in homesteads up here. I think Conrad claims his father was around the Goeglein gulch area, which involved part of this area.

DELANEY: All right, can you think of anything else about the CCC or any of those programs.

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LYONS: Well we had the airport before the CC camps started up and I was the one, we had a gravel pit right at the base of the hill right on Eighth Street, and I graveled this airport. I was running the crew. I got smart eventually and got out of my hand labor and started using my brain a little.

DELANEY: Right, you were the boss.

LYONS: I was the boss.

DELANEY: Now, going back to the war years, and what they were hauling, did you have any problem with the army or was this railroad considered essential in any way that you had guards any special place or anything like that.

LYONS: No, we never had any guards here, but in 1941, of course, we were very low here, business was way down. I went and worked on the Santa Fe out of Gallup for a couple or three months until the business picked up here in the fall. After that, the ore out of the Telluride area and from the Silverton area commenced to come in here and we had lots of business. We didn't have any smelter, so the ore had to go to Leadville, it went to Amarillo, Salt Lake.

DELANEY: This ore came on the Rio Grande Southern, but there was such an interlocking directorate and so much of the stock of the Rio Grande Southern was owned by the D&RG, it didn't make any difference. It was all one railroad really.

LYONS: Practically, in fact, the Rio Grande Southern was under receivership from the Denver & Rio Grande.

DELANEY: Okay, can you think of anything else during the war years that might be interesting to anybody researching this, any other attempts of abandonment.

LYONS: There were no attempts of abandonment except in 1941, let's see, the Santa Fe branch, that's where our first trouble come in with the abandonment of the railroad and the war years, in 1942, we got rid of the Santa Fe branch.

DELANEY: Where did it go from?

LYONS: It went from Antonito to Santa Fe.

DELANEY: Okay, and that was called what?

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LYONS: The Chile Line.

DELANEY: It was narrow gauge.

LYONS: It was narrow gauge, we had no indication that they were going to build a big town down there out of Espanola.

DELANEY: Yeah, Los Alamos

LYONS: We had no indication, except that they weren't hauling any grain out of the valley, the hay and stuff, car after car, they probably had 100 some odd cars just on the railroad that they weren't delivering in Santa Fe. I don't know what the reason was but we had information, we gathered it from farmers in the valley and I had a big file of stuff here for Laverne McKelvey, who was the secretary for the Chamber of Commerce, and I don't know who actually asked Senator Ed Johnson, but a lot of people in New Mexico was after Senator Chavez to have a hearing.

DELANEY: Senator Dennis Chavez

LYONS: And between the two of them,, we had three senatorial hearings here, a senator from Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico, and we brought out all of the failures of the railroad, refusal to handle the equipment. At that time we were handling freight on passenger which was a violation of the railroad contract with the trainmen and engine men because it was two separate services and two different classes of pay. We were very interested in running more freight trains with the stuff into Santa Fe so that we would have freight business instead of trying to handle it in baggage cars which they were doing on passenger trains. As far as I can understand, it was a very good meeting, it brought to light just exactly what the Rio Grande was trying to do, but do to the fact that we didn't have the information from Durango was Pilford and we went over with a bunch of newspapers in a file, nobody knows that but Laverne McKelvey and I and Jim Feeney, why we just couldn't testify.

DELANEY: Your material was gone.

LYONS: Material was gone

DELANEY: And it had been taken here in Durango some place. So that line was abandoned?

LYONS: In 1942

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DELANEY: You see that was a line that could have linked up this whole area with Santa Fe and the Santa Fe Railroad. Is this not correct, this is the importance of it, because the spur ran right up to where the Chile Line ended down there, the Santa Fe spur now.

LYONS: We were parallel.

DELANEY: It could have been an outlet for coal, it could have been an outlet for an awful lot of things.

LYONS: One of the things that bothered me at that time was the New Mexico Central could not handle the business, get it transferred fast enough or couldn't get the cars. See that come in there too, so many little things that you would ever think about that keep pushing things under the cover, under the rug or....

DELANEY: Things that aren't apparent because of some policy set in Denver or some place like that. Okay, so they abandoned that whole line then between Antonito and Santa Fe, in 1942. Nobody missed it because of the war or anything like that.

LYONS: I guess not, they never said anything. It was a boon to the Silverton branch.

DELANEY: Why

LYONS: Well we commenced to get, after they got Fort Carson going, probably in 43, we commenced to get all of the railroaders that were inducted and were in Fort Carson to come down and ride the Silverton, so we would have one or two coaches full of passengers, plus the caboose, and we learned a lot about what railroads were doing all over the country, just letting things go, and how they performed their duties and reporting to the ICC or the PUCs or the public commission, whatever it happened to be.

DELANEY: Where did they train soldiers to run locomotives as they had to do in Europe once they got there, a few of them.

LYONS: I really don't know, most of them were supposed to be engineers before they got there.

DELANEY: So they were already trained. During the war, what went out of Durango, was there much increase.

LYONS: We had a big increase in the stop shipments, beans, lumber, ore. At one period of time, we had over 200 cars of ore on the road between Silverton and Alamosa because there was

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too much business to be handled that fall. The price dropped, I think Charley Chase, the manager of the Shenandoah, lost about \$20,000 just in one crack, the price of ore dropped, price of metal.

DELANEY: Tell me about your public relations when you were running these trains back and forth.

Alva: It was always customary, we would have stockmen on the caboose going out with their cattle or sheep, to give them coffee.

DELANEY: Nothing else, no food, you didn't have any food there.

LYONS: Well, if we had any, we divided it up with the passenger if they didn't bring a lunch. Many times they brought great big hampers of food and throw them off in Alamosa, we picked up on their return, but here in Silverton, we weren't actually building up the business, we were just taking care of the present business, so we decided we would let them all come into the caboose and have a cup of coffee. They liked it. That kept on until finally we got down to the (?) cars, we couldn't get them in the caboose, so before they took the caboose off, I poured coffee for I don't know how many years that I was on there, in little cups, never spilled a drop, and that made several Roto Grade sections all over the country.

DELANEY: Yes, I've seen them, what did you have to heat this coffee on?

LYONS: I made it just on the caboose stove.

DELANEY: Just on that big round stove there.

LYONS: I had two great big coffee pots, but that was one of the things, we were working for public relations, to get the people to ride to Silverton.

DELANEY: And that did make the rotogravure section of quite a few newspapers. I think they are in there in the files. Can you think of anything else that you engineered during that period of time that helped the railroad or hurt the railroad? Were there any times during the war that the snow kept you from going up to Silverton or anything like that?

LYONS: No, we actually didn't stay locked on the Silverton branch during the war years for some reason or other. I don't remember any thing. The last time that we didn't go up there was in 1952, and the road was blocked for about a month or two before they started to open it up to bring the ore out.

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DELANEY: Okay, and that was because of snow slides. What was the main snow slide do you remember in 1952.

LYONS: They were all down. The Needleton area all the way to Silverton.

DELANEY: The Needleton area, north of area to Silverton.

LYONS: In the 30s we had snow up there, one time I left Durango, I wasn't on the work train that went up there. Oscar House was the conductor, he stayed until he got to test spur and then he gave it up. He would rather go brake than run a train, so I caught it and I stayed on it until we got to Elk Park. The snow at Elk Park, if I stood in between the rails was to the top of my head.

DELANEY: This had been plowed by rotary plow?

LYONS: No, you couldn't use a rotary, too many rocks and too much timber. The only time they ever used it they broke it down the first time they went into a slide, but they finally had to bring down all the general managers and everybody else up there to keep everybody happy. That's when they hauled the mail and everything else by burro up above Needleton into Silverton.

DELANEY: All right, no other plans for abandonment or anything like that during those war years, huh?

LYONS: We never hear of any, they were very quiet. However, after the war years, they were hauling this freight on passenger, which was a violation, and

DELANEY: Violation of the brotherhood rules.

LYONS: And I think you will have to look in my suitcase because I have a letter in there that I wrote to everyone of the employees who were involved in this thing to get them to change their mind, so we could negotiate a contract.

DELANEY: Yes

LYONS: And I got a very good response. They all agreed, so we before we could proceed any further, I took Jay Channel who was the secretary to the chamber of commerce, he also had the Dodge agency here, and Elmer Decker, a stock man, we were supposed to have another business man, but he couldn't make it. We met with Judge McCarthy, in fact this was after they went out of receivership. We met with Judge McCarthy, and he told those two men the railroad

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story, so I have to disagree with him, and I told him that was wrong, and I proved my point by Mr. Rae, who was vice president in charge of contracts., and Mr. Rae, sided with me and said said, yeah, Mr. Lyons was right. So we got the freight back on passenger again. We were running four baggage cars a day into Durango.

DELANEY: All right

LYONS: And it wasn't but about six months later, maybe a year later, I don't know the exact time, but they decided that they didn't want it that way, so they would load it into trailer trucks and they would haul those trailers on the flat cars. They hauled them out of Pueblo on a night passenger train with a little engine. Well, they didn't have very good luck and eventually the ICC ruled against them that that was another violation of the contract, so they had to pay another sum of money, 30 or 40 thousand dollars was paid.

DELANEY: You were an official in the brotherhood.

LYONS: I was legislative chairman and not until later did I become local chairman.

DELANEY: Okay, can you think of anything else that happened in those year, lets say 1945, 46?

LYONS: I don't know very much at that time because I was pretty busy on the ration board at that time.

DELANEY: On the ration board, tell me about that during the war, see, young college kids, they don't know about coupons and things like that, coupons for shoes and sugar and things like that. Tell me about it.

LYONS: If they want to think that's the way to distribute gasoline so they can run over the country, it's a very poor way to do it. They had some difficulty in Durango with the original ration board. I don't know just what they were supposed to be doing, but it was wrong. Anyway, they were ousted, and a new group was put in, and then the new group then elected me chairman of the ration board, and I stayed chairman during the war, finished the war years, and several years afterwards as war price chairman, where we collected overcharging of certain businesses to the public. We had a lot of people....

DELANEY: You didn't get paid for that.

LYONS: No, no

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DELANEY: Not a bit.

LYONS: The use of gasoline by people

DELANEY: Go ahead and tell me why this doesn't work as far as a way to save gasoline.

LYONS: Well, my first big trouble started with the vanadium corporation.

DELANEY: Who was head of it at that time.

LYONS: I don't remember at that time who was over here.

DELANEY: Page Edwards

LYONS: Anyway, the Army...

[end of interview]

[end of tape]

[Note: This audiotaped interview was transcribed by Catherine Conrad, Administrative Assistant for the Center of Southwest Studies on March 26, 1996, and was formatted and partially edited by Center Archivist Todd Ellison on March 13, 1997, and further on February 7, 2008, including conversion to PDF file format for online access on the Center of Southwest Studies website.]

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