

PORTRAIT OF A PIONEER CITY I. A TOWN IS BORN

© Clarice Whittenburg 1968

"PORTRAIT OF A PIONEER CITY" is the title of a series of radio broadcasts commemorating the 100th anniversary of Laramie, Wyoming.

The series is sponsored by the First National Bank of this city; produced through the broadcasting facilities of the University of Wyoming's Department of Speech and Drama and KUWR-FM; presented over Station KOWB.

"A TOWN IS BORN" is the first in this series of 13 fifteen-minute broadcasts.

OPEN:

MUSIC: QUARTET SINGS FIRST THREE LINES OF "FROM THE TETONS IN THE ROCKIES" — THEN HOLDS UNDER AUDIBLY.

ANNOUNCER: Portrait of a Pioneer City

VOICES: ROUGH, HUSKY VOICES OF TWO IRISHMEN HEARD ABOVE BACKGROUND OF HURDY-GURDY MUSIC.

PATRICK: What's got into yuh, Mike? Yuh'll never quench that thirst of yore's a-goin' in that direction. Turn around. The Big Tent and the Belle of the West are behind yuh.

MIKE: It ain't no saloon I'm huntin'. Listen, Patrick, jest listen! Hear that sound?

SOUND: FADE IN STREAM-ENGINE WHISTLE FROM DISTANCE.

MIKE: Faith, and there ain't no sweeter music than the whistle of the Old U-Pay! It's glad I am we finished layin' them rails through here yestiddy.

PATRICK: R-r-right yuh are! This is a gr-r-rand day for the Ir-r-rish! Jest look at all them people a-waitin' on that station platform. Come on, Mike, let's go and join 'em!

MUSIC: QUARTET STARTS HUMMING-FADES UNDER, AND HOLDS.

ANNOUNCER: To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Laramie, Wyoming, the First National Bank presents "Portrait of a Pioneer City" — stories that highlight people and events which created Laramie, "Gem City of the Plains" — written by Clarice Whittenburg and featuring Louise Smith as narrator.

MUSIC: HUMMING UP-THEN UNDER IMMEDIATELY.

ANNOUNCER: Towns at temporary "ends of track" sprang up like mushrooms when the Union Pacific Railway marched across Wyoming. Many towns were doomed to die soon after birth. Even the ghosts of some have vanished. But Laramie was here to stay! Today — our first story, "A Town Is Born," following this message from the First National Bank — :

MUSIC: UP-UNDER-OUT.

COMMERCIAL: INSERT.

MUSIC: HUMMING-ESTABLISH MOMENTARILY-AND UNDER.

ANNOUNCER: Now, here is Louise Smith with our first story, "A Town Is Born!"

MUSIC: HUMMING UP-THEN UNDER-OUT AS NARRATOR SPEAKS.

NARRATOR: Hello, there! It was indeed a gr-r-rand day for the Ir-r-rish when Laramie was born — May the 10th, 1868.

It was roughly 1800 miles from Council Bluffs to Sacramento, final span on the first transcontinental railway. Contracts to lay the rails across this area were granted to two companies — the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific. U.P. laborers, mostly Irish, worked west from Iowa. C.P. laborers, chiefly Chinese, headed east from California. A contest sprang up between the rivals to see which could lay a longer track before the two groups met each other.

On that day, May the 10th, 1868, the Irish could proudly boast 577 miles of track lay behind them. (PAUSE).

SOUND: WHISTLE OF STEAM ENGINE GETS LOUDER, BELL RINGS, APPROACHING TRAIN GRINDS TO HALT, BRAKES SCREECH.

SOUND: EXPECTANT CROWD NOISE FROM PERSONS ON PLATFORM.

NARRATOR: That first train was a mixed one, bearing both passengers and freight. Passenger coaches, just a few; freight cars, quite a number.

Passengers who could afford it rode inside the coaches. Box-cars held plows and scrapers, iron rails and wooden crossties for the railroad; tents, cookstoves, crockery, tinware and groceries for the new merchants; a variety of wine and liquor for the saloonkeepers. Flat-cars carried swarthy peddlers, with packs stuffed full of trinkets, and eager home-seekers who perched themselves upon their household goods, their sole possessions.

SOUND: BRING IN HURDY-GURDY SOUNDS AGAIN, UNDER CROWD-GRADUALLY RIDE HURDY-GURDY OVER CROWD, BUT UNDER NARRATION, (WHICH DOESN'T PAUSE).

NARRATOR: Completely fascinated, the passengers listened to the hurdy-gurdy tunes tumbling out of nearby saloons whose doors stood open day and night. They gazed in wonder at the canvas tents and half-built shacks lining the east bank of the Laramie River. Some shanties were made from logs; others from discarded railway ties set up on end. A few had canvas roofs, but most were open toward the sky. Saw and hammer mingled with the other sounds of welcome. (NO PAUSE).

SOUND: BLENDING OF HURDY-GURDY WITH SAW AND HAMMER, IN AND UNDER.

NARRATOR: It was a motley group of passengers who rode that first train. But so were the members of the waiting crowd that faced them from the crude board platform.

SOUND: OUT.

NARRATOR: There stood men — family men — who had come ahead of the rails, as far back as April, or even February, to seek lots for home and business. There stood men, and also women — dive owners and dance-hall girls, thieves and cut-throats, — the riffraff recently pushed westward by the vigilantes out of Cheyenne and Dale City. Among the passengers stepping down from one coach were two men whose

names have long been famous in Laramie history. The first — M.C. Brown, a bachelor lawyer — was chosen, just two days later, to be the first mayor of our town. No one knew then, of course, that Edward Ivinson would become Laramie's first banker; nor that later he would leave his name on several public buildings.

When Mr. Ivinson turned to give a helping hand to his wife, Jane, and to Margaret, their young daughter, Mr. Brown stepped aside. Then he doffed his hat and bowed.

SOUND: CONFUSION OF VOICES IN CROWD, LOW AND UNDER.

MR. BROWN: It was a pleasure, sir, to ride over the hill with you and your family. Your husband was wise indeed, ma'am, to leave you and your daughter in Cheyenne while he was here, buying lots and setting up his grocery business.

MR. IVINSON: Thank you, M.C! Durant's restaurant was supposed to be open by the time I got back from Cheyenne. I wonder —

MR. BROWN: There's just the man to tell you.

NARRATOR: The man who stepped up briskly was Laramie's first baker. His name was A.T. Williams.

MR. IVINSON: How about it, A.T.? Is Durant's restaurant open yet?

MRO WILLIAMS: Sorry, not till tomorrow morning. As for now, why not come over to my bakery tent? Afraid I can give you only ham sandwiches and coffee, and you'll have to sit on wooden boxes, but you're very welcome!

MRS. IVINSON: Why, thank you, Mr. Williams! My husband has often boasted about your delicious bread.

NARRATOR: As the group moved down the platform, they were jostled by several other

families, still lingering to express their joy at being reunited. Many descendants of those same families live in Laramie today.

The peddlers and other flat-car passengers had scattered in various directions.

SOUND: VOICES OF CROWD OUT.

NARRATOR: Laramie's original town site ran east from Front (or First) Street to Eleventh; west from North C (now known as Lewis) to South G (which we call Park). Fabulous tales are told of how fast Laramie grew that first summer. Claims are made from 300 to 400 lots were sold quite early. But records prove only 80 lots were recorded during all of 1868.

Even in December, Laramie could still be called a tent town. True, some houses had pretentious fronts built of frame but often their backs were made of canvas. "Queen Anne" fronts and "Mary Anne" backs, someone laughingly called them.

Wisconsin-born, 26-year-old Noah Wallis (nicknamed "Jim") didn't arrive on that first train; he was one of those who met it.

Wallis was quick to see that the Laramie River would yield good drinking water. He contracted with housewives to deliver fresh water, when needed, at 25 cents a barrel.

The city springs were located to the east, on a higher level than the town. This allowed both bath and cooking water to be carried here in ditches.

After Luther Fillmore of Pennsylvania became the second superintendent of the U.P. Railway, he moved his family west in 1870. Laramie proved to be a thoroughly fascinating place to 16-year-old Nancy Fillmore (later Mrs. M.C. Brown).

Even 50 years later, she remembered those ditches — :

MRS. BROWN: Clear water ran along both sides of our street. It had a merry ripple that sounded like the beautiful brooks back home. Many of the residents sank barrels inside the ditches so they could get water whenever they pleased.

But, believe me, those ditches could be very treacherous on a dark, dark night! One time my sister-in-law stepped down from a carriage, lost her footing, and landed right inside a barrel! Her mother in Philadelphia had just sent her a lovely new gown. Of course it was completely ruined!

NARRATOR: Our town was called "Laramie City" then. First, because it was common practice to add "City" to the name of any frontier town; second, so Laramie City wouldn't be confused with old Fort Laramie on the Oregon Trail. Both were named for the same man — Jacques LaRamee — a French-Canadian who trapped Wyoming streams in search of beaver about 150 years ago.

LaRamee was truly a man of mystery. No one knows exactly where he was born, what he looked like, when he came here, where he did his trapping, or just why and how he died.

"Voyageurs," those early French-Canadian mountain men were called. We often picture them as jaunty, joyous, carefree men, who lustily sang songs in their native tongue while paddling their canoes on rivers deep enough for travel. Those canoes were known as "dugouts" because they actually were dug out of trunks of cottonwood trees. (PAUSE VERY BRIEFLY)

Listen! Perhaps, by some magic spell, a Wyoming breeze will waft to us a favorite voyageur song of long, long ago — :

SOUND: BLEND SWISH OF PADDLES IN WATER WITH THE SOLO "ALLOUETTE"-BOTH FADE IN SOFTLY-RISE AND FALL IN CADENCE-FADE UNDER SOFTLY.

NARRATOR: Was Jacques LaRamee the voyageur type? We wish we knew!

Legend says he served first as a hired trapper, employed by the Northwest Fur Company. Later, as a free trapper, he sold his beaver pelts to the highest bidder.

When bloody rivalry broke out between the Northwest and Hudson's Bay Companies, LaRamee— a peaceable man — is said to have moved southward with several kindred souls. They settled in the area where we now live.

Claims are made he left his companions in the Fall of 1820 to trap alone on the Laramie River, which also bears his name. When Jacques failed to keep a promised rendezvous next Spring, his friends went north to hunt him. They were told he had been killed by a band of Arapaho Indians, but they could find no proof.

CLOSE:

NARRATOR: Perhaps sometime, somewhere, someone may stumble upon documentary proof of what really happened. (PAUSE BRIEFLY).

MUSIC: QUARTET STARTS TO SNEAK FIRST THREE LINES OF SECOND STANZA UNDER.

NARRATOR: Until then, we must rely on the mysterious legend of this man named LaRamee, who sleeps somewhere beneath our vast Wyoming sky. (STOP)

MUSIC: QUARTET SINGS REMAINDER OF SECOND STANZA—THEN GOES INTO HUMMING—DOWN AND OUT FOR

COMMERCIAL: INSERT

MUSIC: ESTABLISH HUMMING AGAIN—THEN UNDER.

ANNOUNCER: "Portrait of a Pioneer City" — the stories, the people, the events which created Laramie, "Gem City of the Plains" — has been brought to you by the First National Bank. Both the script (written by Clarice Whittenburg) and the theme song lyric (by Dickie Devine) are copyrighted. Our program was narrated by Louise Smith and directed by

Members of today's cast were:
Our soloist: Lester Roberts.
The technical director: PAUSE.

MUSIC: HUMMING UP MOMENTARILY, THEN UNDER.

ANNOUNCER: "Portrait of a Pioneer City" was produced through the broadcasting facilities of the University of Wyoming's Department of Speech and Drama and KUWR-FM.

Join us next week when our story will be "Lynch Law in Laramie."
Your announcer is

MUSIC: HUMMING UP FULL-CLOSE WITH LAST TWO LINES OF REFRAIN

FADE OUT