U.S HISTORY PROJECT
ROCK SPRINGS

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Lillian Johnson is 76 years old; she has spent all but three years of her life in Rock Springs. She was born in Frontier, Wyoming on January 10, 1905. Her father died before she was three years old. Lillian's aunt kept care of her until her mother brought her to Rock Springs where her family had lived for many years. When her mother brought her to Rock Springs, she also remarried. Since that time she has lived in Number Six, now known as Springs Drive.

Since Lillian possesses more knowledge on old Number Six than she does on Rock Springs as a whole, the majority of this paper will be concerned with the area of the town.

Lilliane came from a large family. Her mother had four children by her first husband, and five more by her second. Not to mention the fact that her second husband already had three children of his own when they were married. Lillian and her youngest sister Emma are the only ones still surviving.

Although there was a doctor involved, a midwife was used during childbirth. Lilliane said that her mother had all of her children at home and was never in a hospital till she died. She was assisted in her many deliveries by Lillian's Grandmother, who acted as a midwife.

In Lillian's memory Rock Springs wasn't much of a town, when she was a girl. All the streets were gravel. There were no sidewalks. A creek ran right through the middle of town near what is now K Street. The area was called Battle Alley. She recalls
that there weren't many houses or stores. Chip's Candy Store is where all of the children of her time used to gather. Other memorable spots were the Chicago Bizarre and the Grand, and Rialto Theatres, all which are now gone.

Lillian's first years of school were spent at the Number Six school. This school later became the home of a family of immigrants from family (my grandfather's family). In the fifth grade, Lillian moved to the North Side School, which is now the Washington Elementary School. In the seventh grade, she went to the Junior high, which at that time was by the Post Office.

Lilliane remembers World War I more vividly than World War II, because her grandmother used to knit for the soldiers. Lillian admits that she herself did no knitting for the soldiers, because she didn't like the khaki colored yarn they had to use to match the uniforms.

According to Mrs. Johnson, the "Roaring Twenties" weren't anything out of the ordinary in Rock Springs. She said that they weren't exciting to her since she never ran around.

Lillian didn't think Rock Springs had too much trouble with gambling and "wild living" in the past, although she was in little contact with that sort of thing. She has never tasted alcohol before. She does remember the saloons with swinging doors, which she was afraid to walk by.

Little girls played games that are familiar to little girls today; they played jacks and skipped rope.

Life in Rock Springs was not easy during this time. Lillian recalls that her neighborhood did not have electricity for many years.
They used kerosene lamps and either wood or coal burning stoves.

Housework consisted of mainly the same activities such as washing dishes and scrubbing floors. Washing clothes was quite a hard task. The women first had to boil the water, then they scrubbed them on a washboard. Next, they wrung them through a manual wringer. Lillian recalls that the first item bought after electricity was brought in was an electric washing machine.

To keep food from spoiling, they stored it in the well house down the well. They had two wells.

Lillian's family got their first car when she was sixteen. It was an old Ford. When they would go up hills, everyone would have to get out and push.

Although her stepfather worked in a carpentry shop, she noted that most men worked at the mines, including her brothers. The mines were dangerous at times; one of her brothers was killed in a mine accident at the age of nineteen.

Before unions were organized men worked for about $2.05 a day. She recalls incidences of striking for higher pay.

Although her family was usually quite healthy, they were once quarantined for scarlet fever. Five children had the disease at once, and one died.

The majority of people were working class people. They all worked hard for a living, and most people had a lot of children, with a small income to support them on. The people, according to Mrs. Johnson, all got along together really well.
Number six was a friendly neighborhood. The children of the neighborhood would gather at their home. Her brother had a Magic Lantern (a slide project lighted by a kerosene lamp) with eight or nine slides. They would put up a sheet and show these, later they all sang songs.

Since they had no electricity, they didn't listen to the radio. Her family had an Edison Graphophone, which they enjoyed listening to. Manuel Romane was Lilliane's favorite singer.

Mrs. Johnson also enjoyed playing the piano as another form of entertainment. She used to play piano for many of the ladies lodges such as; the Eagles, the Moose, and the Woodcraft lodge.

Christmases were a lot different than they are today. One Christmas Lilliane received a dish of candy that cost $38. One other of her memories of Christmas concerns the Sagebrush Christmas Tree they had one year and trimmed with popcorn and cranberries.

Lillian recalled for me one of the stories of old Rock Springs that her mother had told her. This story takes place in Number six, when Lillian's mother was a girl. The dynamite used in the mines was stored in a powder house in that area. One day, drunk men rode across the flats in a buggy; they had a gun. They shot into the Powder House, and it exploded and shook the whole neighborhood. The men working at the powder house were killed along with one horse. The roof was blown off Lillian's grandmother's house. Several days later, Lillian's mother and cousin were walking by the creek. They saw something they thought was a ghost and ran home.
The next day the mother went to look and found the skull of one of the men from the Powder House. They called the Undertaker; he came and took the skull away in a little box.

Two neighborhood girls were lost after the explosion. They were later found alive. They had been in the outhouse. It had been turned on its front, and they were unable to get out.

Another childhood memory of Lilliane's concerns the Chinese people who lived in the area. As a child, she and her friends would follow the Chinese funeral processions. The Chinese people used to bury their dead up in a canyon, which was also used as the junk yard. Zueck's Express Wagon would carry the body up the canyon to the funeral. A person could hear them coming clear from town, because they played an instrument which sounded like a Bagpipe.

At certain times of the year, the Chinese would feed the dead. They would prepare a feast of stuffed roast pork. They would light punks and tallow candles and take them up the canyon. She recalls that they always brought the food back, since they had none to spare, since they worked for almost nothing.

Several years later all of the bones were removed, scraped, and sent to China.

Lilliane had a good relationship with her mother. Her mother spent as much time as she could with her children. For extra money she cleaned the school house for ten dollars a month. Lilliane, herself, went to work at the age of eighteen for the Telephone Company.

Lilliane married Howard Johnson, when she was 24. She had
known him for one year. They dated every once in awhile, but not often. When they did date they went to a movie or a dance. The dances were held at the Masonic Temple and Jim Setorries Band or Orchestra always played. Her husband was a member of the band.

They had no children, although their niece lived with them until she graduated from high school and married. They had been married forty years, when her husband died.

Lillian lives on the spot for which Rock Spring is named. The Pony Express Station used to be there. It later became a house. When Lilliane moved to Rock Springs, only one wall was still standing. The spring used to flow and water overflowed onto the road. This was before Lilliane was born. After the pump house, which pumped water to the mines was built the spring went dry.

Lilliane doesn't like the change in Rock Spring over the years. When she was a girl number six was somewhat of a rural area with livestock and dairies, there are now many people, and the hill which she used to roam as a girl is covered with houses, trailers, and apartments.