Carter's Orchestra Musician Recalls History of Lehi
Darrell Carter
By Cathy Allred
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I am sitting across from the oldest man in Lehi. He will be turning 97 on February 28, but he looks more like a very young 70 year old. Darrell Carter taps on his cane, looks me in the eye, smiling and the inquires, " Did you get all that? Read it back to me, let's make sure you have it right.

The historian Richard Van Wagoner had suggested asking Carter about the origin of Bull River's name. The Lehi native knew that and more.

"They named it Bull River because they plowed the ditch with oxen. I don't remember who told me that, it has just been passed down that way, it was before my time," said Carter. "They brought the water down its seven mile length, it was originally six feet wide, you know."

Lee Smith, past president of North Bench Irrigation explained, "previous ditches like the Smith ditch had been dug with horses, a long 2X4 board and a spirit level. But Bull River was just a nickname, it was always registered as the North Bench Ditch."

A discovery by Carter's son Kenny backs up the story-an antique oxen shoe found in the bottom of Bull River, "...how it stayed preserved, I don't know."

He takes the pocked black slab of metal and turns it in the light, it is a semi-curve about four inches at its widest end and tapering off to a point. "They had split hooves, so they would have to shoe both the hooves that were on the same foot. They don't make these anymore.

Most people don't even realize that oxen were specially bred steers.

Carter was born about 20 years after the Bull River was dug. He is a valuable legacy that is just as rare as an oxen shoe is today. Stories on his honesty and fairness are abundant.

"Daddy bought a tractor from a lady who told him to pay her what he thought it was worth, that she trusted him," his daughter JoAnne Muse of Orem recalls in his family history(as penned by her sister Carmon Hampton of Lehi) "he gave her the money but when he got it home, he decided it was worth more than he had given her, so he went back with more money."

After driving the tractor for three months, he again decided that it was a better tractor than he thought and he went back a second time with more money. Carter grew up on hard work and honesty.

"Honesty seems to have gone out of style for people, "write Carter in his family autobiography. "People get all they can get, as long as it is within the law."

As a 12 year old in 1910, he started playing in the Family's Carter's Orchestra. his instrument was a large base fiddle,"sometimes he would get so tired (at all-night dances) that he would fall off his chair while playing," writes Hampton. He eventually expanded his talents to include the piccolo, drums, trumpet, saxophone, xylophones and bells.

"We all remember Daddy humming a tune while he worked," adds Hampton.

And work, he did. aT 16, one of his many jobs was to load a wagon drawn by a double team of horses (four horses) with 2500 pounds of coal and drive them to wherever a threshing job was. The wagon would have to be greased on the axles in order to take the heavy load to the harvest field.

“They use to have these Case tractors...a kind of steam engine on wheels. They would hook this big tractor up to a thresher,” explained Carter. A thresher was used at harvest time to separate the chaff or weeks from the crop in the field. It was used on wheat, beans, alfalfa, whatever they were growing.

When they were done unloading, the coal for the steam threshing machines, they would load the wagon with their grain and he would take it into the town for them, usually not getting home until after dark.

“It was the custom then to feed the threshers three meals a day. I believe that I had eaten at least one meal in most of the homes in Lehi at that time; they were very good meals,” writes Carter. “At Fairfield, most of our eating was done at the Carson Hotel.”

Hard work was always lightened by humor. “We slept in their barn back of the hotel at night, except there were chickens in there too. There was an old rooster that would start to crow before daybreak and one morning, Wilma Johnson grabbed a shoe and knocked him off his perch but he was back the next morning as loud as ever.”

Belonging to a different era, Carter gathered fast donations on a buckboard or sleigh and collected four, butter, and eggs.

“Most anything to help the needy, but very little money was given. Our sacrament was different too. We had a glass tumbler that was passed around from person to person until it was empty then refilled from a pitcher that was carried for that purpose.”

He was a dairy farmer for many years and his son Kenny can recall quiet moments interspersed between work. “I would go up, meet him at the milking barn and we would walk back the 1/2 mile and he would show me the stars.”

His father and mother, Fern Hansen Carter, had five children also, including

Carol Knapp of Orem and jerry Carter of Stockton, Utah. Fern, when asked how many descendents they have, turns to Carter and asks, “ I don’t know, how many do we have?”

“Oh, I can’t say, 24 grandchildren.” They just had a great, great grandchild and also have 15 great grandchildren. “That keeps us busy at Christmas time,” jokes Fern. Carter leans toward me and squints his eyes, “Thought you wanted to know about Bull River.”