Stan Healy: This is Stan Healy recording. I am at the home of Claude Elder, one of Missoula’s longest residents. Mr. Elder, a businessman, has been in Missoula since 1891, making him a resident for 70 full years. Mr. Elder, you were here when the first Higgins Avenue bridge was built and the bridges before that.

Claude Elder: I wasn’t here when the first bridge was built. As you said, I came here in 1891. One day I met Will Cave on the bridge, and I said, "Bill, how the devil did people get by here when there was no bridge?"

"Well," he said, "They forded the east end of the island. Then they went the full length of the island, and forded on that end."

When I came in 1891, what we called the crooked bridge was there. The reason for the streets being crooked and the bridge being crooked was that all traffic in those days was to Fort Missoula. Naturally the streets, such as Stephens Avenue, was headed in that direction. Well, they started to build the new bridge in 1892, and in 1894 we had quite a flood that took out some of that. There was no business houses on the south side.

SH: Where was that bridge located?

CE: Where the present one is, is the location. Although, the first bridge that was there ended on the south end near the east end of the present Milwaukee depot. But as I said, in 1894 when we had quite high water, then the south side residents were forced to use the railroad bridge—the Bitter Root branch bridge. Then there was a sign on the first bridge, “25 dollars fine for driving faster than a walk.” Now, that applied to the spans, one span on the north end, two spans on the south end with a trestle work between. They could trot their horses on those. So when O. E. Peppard finished the second bridge, they asked him, "Well, how about trotting your horses?"

"Let 'em go," he said.

So, when the bridge was finished, the first horse over the bridge was driven by Frank Higgins, mayor of the town. Later down come our horse-drawn fire rig, and they run their horses across the bridge.
Then in 1908, the bridge they're now tearing down was started, and we had the big flood that year and it took out considerable of the old bridge and delayed the work on the new bridge by carrying away their materials in the flood. Then we were without a bridge for a while, of course, and E. C. Wright, proprietor of the business college, got the notion of building a temporary bridge. So he raised money enough. There was a low bridge built just over the water edge, and that was used for some time until the bridge was finished. What was left of the bridge was moved down to Van Buren Street and is now abandoned, of course, with the new bridge that's down there.

SH: During the flood of 1908, you witnessed the flood of 1908, did you not?

CE: Yes, I was working at that time for the Winston Brothers Contractors, building the Milwaukee railroad. They raised the level of the track two feet on account of that flood and that accounts for a little hump on the south side end of the bridge that will now, of course, be eliminated.

SH: How long did it take them to complete the old bridge, that is, the one that they are tearing down now?

CE: Well, they were at it about two years. The delay caused by the 1908 flood, of course, made them run something over the time limit.

SH: Did you say that they experienced some difficulties? Who was it that built the bridge, and how did he come out financially?

CE: Well, he come out pretty bad. It was the Burrough Bridge Company, and in later years when I was bank examiner, I found a 40,000-dollar note unpaid in one of the local banks which is now out of existence.

SH: The flood of 1908, when...at the crest of the flood, how high was the water? Do you recall how high the water was with regard to the Montana Power retaining wall? Or was the retaining wall there at that time?

CE: I don't believe that present wall was there, but it was up, I'd say, pretty near eight feet from the lower level mark. Of course the railroad line from Missoula to Garrison was largely wiped out.

SH: How far was the water over the Milwaukee area, where the Milwaukee railway station is?

CE: It was up on the bank there, but it didn't come high enough to do any particular damage. The idea was that they were afraid that later floods might do it so they raised the track level two feet.
SH: The bridge when it was first built, what kind of lights did the bridge have on it—the old Higgins?

CE: You mean the second bridge?

SH: I mean the one that is now being torn down.

CE: Well, they had lights. I guess they're still the ones that were in use in recent times.

SH: Do you recall any ceremony that was conducted when the bridge was completed?

CE: No, I don't. I really don't remember because when my work with the Milwaukee was done in 1909, then we went to the coast with the contractors to double track the Northern Pacific between Tenaimo (?) and Kalama.

SH: Mr. Elder will you describe Higgins Avenue, how it appeared when you first came to Missoula in 1891? Name some of the stores and livery stables and...as if a man were walking down Higgins Avenue in 1891, as much as you can recall.

CE: Well, Higgins Avenue was a rather muddy street. There was no paving, the sidewalks at the crossing were raised so that the horses had to slow up and lift their vehicles over the sidewalk, and there was considerable joking about the amount of mud on Higgins Avenue. Stone who was later Dean of Journalism at the University [of Montana], had his office in the back of the Donahue Building, and some joker put over one of the ponds there a sign that read "Stone's fish pond." Then there was another sign, "Ferry every half hour." Then they tried to put some shale rock on the street to eliminate some of the mud, but that probably went into mud and didn't help them much.

Of course Front Street was the big street in those days on account of the Missoula Mercantile Company facing that and other businesses, and Higgins Avenue almost ended at Main Street. Of course there was the present Higgins Avenue building there, and the Daly Block where the Montgomery Ward store is now and the Chicago Bee Hive where the drug store is on the corner of Main and Higgins run by Zablosky at that time. Further down the street, there was quite a vacancy, quite a number of vacant lots, and what's now the Priess Hotel was then the Realty Block and that was completely beyond the business district. On the corner where Yandt's is now [Higgins and Pine], Judge Woody had his residence.

Across the street where the Lucy store is was another residence. The circus lot was there where the caterpillar tractor and the Missoulian office is now [Higgins Avenue between Spruce and Alder Streets]. Across the street was also vacant—vacant enough so Bill Simon's Great Buffalo and Wild West Show pitched their canvas there in 1902.
Transportation in those days were the streetcar, horse drawn streetcars, that run from the depot down by the Florence Hotel—fare five cents—and the hacks. A hack in most any part of town was 25 cents. Hotels had their busses that run from the trains to the Rankin House, Missoula Hotel, and the Florence Hotel, and the fare there was 25 cents.

Probably the biggest and most exciting event in Missoula was 1892 when we had the big fire on West Front Street that burnt down some 13 buildings. That was the night that Maurice Higgins was killed. Now, the fellow shooting wasn’t aiming at Maurice, he was aiming at another fellow, but Maurice stuck his head out just in time to catch the bullet. In the present time, why, that would probably be not classed as a murder, but anything you did to a Higgins in those days was dangerous. For instance, a policeman hit George on the head one night with a gun, and he had to go and hide.

It [the fire] destroyed old Chinese laundries, the old Eclipse Livery barn where the Star Garage now is, and the Rogers House—a hotel where the Texaco gas station is located—and all along the line there up to the present brick building. My dad was working in a blacksmith shop there, and that was destroyed.

One of the amusing things was we had quite a large Chinese population in those days, and I saw there was a gully back of the old fire hall over to the Chinese store. I saw a Chinaman go underneath the hose, and he was dressed in the fashion of Chinese in those days with baggy pants and baggy sleeves and round-soled shoes and the big black hat. I saw these two firemen, I was pretty sure one was Arthur Higgins although in asking him later on he did not remember. They were wetting down the Capital Beer Hall to keep that from burning and I saw these two fellows talking, and I figured what was going to happen. Sure enough, they took the hose off the building and wet this poor Chinaman from head to foot. I can see him yet going across there with the water dripping off him, and the other Chinamen laughing at him.

SH: In that era when the fire burned Missoula was it...how big a city was Missoula, can you estimate the population?

CE: They claimed the population of 10,000, but as a matter of fact it wasn’t much over 2500.

SH: Was there any other great fires in history that you recall in the past? Do you remember any great other fires?

CE: Well, of course, the Florence Hotel fire. We made national news then because the Minnesota football team was in there. They come chasing down the fire escape and lost their clothes and things.

SH: Back on the fire in 18...what’s the date for that fire?

CE: 1892.
SH: On the fire of 1892, was there quite a Chinatown in Missoula? Where was Chinatown located?

CE: Chinatown was on Front Street, West Front Street, and started at the head of Stephens and run west, and there were some over on Main Street. In fact, the joss house (?) was there on Main Street and the Chinese store and opium joint that wasn't generally advertised but we knew that opium was smoked down below there by the Chinese and some of the white residents indulged in hitting the pipe occasionally. There were four Chinese stores, numerous laundries, and restaurants. My old friend Hop Kee (?) had a restaurant down there.

SH: Can you remember how much it cost to have the laundry done at a Chinese place in those days?

CE: Well the Chinese had a family rate of one dollar. A Chinamen would come and pick up your basket or your clothes wrapped up in a sheet, take them down, and bring them back all for one dollar.

SH: In those days there was very little business activity or very few residences on the south side of river. Now if you were, say in 1891, about to walk from the south end of Higgins bridge toward the University, was there a lot of vacant fields and so on?

CE: Practically the whole country was vacant. The Spotswood house [on Gerald behind Hellgate High School] was built in 1892, that's the one that is torn down now. There was no business houses whatever except Fisher's South Missoula Bridge Saloon, which was the last chance to get a drink before going to Fort Missoula. I'd seen many a rig stop in front there, and the fellow come out with a tray and a couple of whiskeys and these drivers would throw down and away they'd go.

SH: Can you give us the location of that enterprise, please?

CE: Well it stood at the southeast end of the bridge, as I said before, the bridge ended about where the east end of the Milwaukee passenger station now stands.

SH: Where you say that hacks and horse drawn cars went from there to the fort?

CE: Yes, yes. There wasn't any regular bus service. The soldiers were the colored boys, the 25th infantry under Colonel Andy Burt, and of course, they were pretty good walkers. But they had what we called the ambulance for the purpose of bringing the children from the fort into school in Missoula or for officers and their wives to do their shopping.

SH: Could you list the livery stables that were in Missoula in those days? Do you recall those livery stables?
CE: Well the biggest barn was the Eclipse Livery Stable, Johnson and Daily proprietors, located where the Star Garage now is. Incidentally when the fire of 1892 took out the barn, they were aware it was coming their direction, and they got the horses and the buggies out and they were saved.

SH: Mr. Elder, tell us about some of the celebrations of the past?

CE: Well 1892, Fourth of July at that time was quite an affair. We had quite a celebration, including a race between a man-drawn, two hose reels of the fire department. One thing that always stands out in my memory, there’s one race for boys, and the prize was a suit of clothes. There was one boy in that race that needed that suit of clothes. He was about 30 feet ahead of the others at the end of the race, and he wasn’t looking back to see how close they were. He needed that suit of clothes, and he needed it badly. Now that fellow is a man of considerable wealth now and lives in Yakima, Washington.

Of course, Chinese New Year’s was a big celebration too. Strings of firecrackers, Chinamen giving away drinks to the men and candy to the kids. In 1908, I think it was, that we had a bicycle parade which was quite a thing. They’d take four bicycles and build battleships and all kinds of things on top. The one that got the prize was really a big affair, and on top was a small boy dressed in sailor uniform, carrying a spy glass, turning the wheel, and that was Fred Angevine (?) who was later our county attorney.

SH: In those days what type of lighting was on Higgins Avenue, and how late did the stores and the beer joints stay open?

CE: Well the saloons had a 24-hour shift. Bartenders worked 12 hours in those days. The stores, at first, were open until 10:00 and then they finally cut it down to 8:00 and then to 6:00.

SH: I suppose firecrackers and fireworks were sold rather freely, is that right?

CE: Yes, and the favorite with us kids were the Chinese firecrackers. We bought those for five cents a package, while the American-made were ten cents.

SH: I recall some stories that beer was sold for five cents a bucket, is there anything to that?

CE: Well, not exactly a bucket, it was a great big 20-ounce glass for a nickel. But most of the working people had a can somewhere around their premises, and they’d hand somebody a dime and say, go get us a can of beer. Most anytime you’d look out you’d see somebody packing one of those ten-cent cans to his place of business.

[Break in audio]
It's so seldom now that you hear a foreign language spoken on the streets of Missoula. I must comment that when I came here there was French, German, Swedish, and several other places of business or saloons...and, as a matter of fact, each general store had to have one girl that could speak French. Some of the older French people just wouldn't be bothered with English, and when the girls graduated from the academy, the French girls always had a job waiting for them down in the mercantile stores.

SH: In those old days, transportation was much slower than it is now Can you give us an estimate on how long it took a Missoula resident to get to Hamilton?

CE: Well, I remember my father and mother making the trip by horse and buggy to Hamilton, and they took two days to it. Then when bicycles come into use what they called a "century run" was riding to Hamilton and back. There was very little traffic east except to Bonner and some, of course, to Clinton and Bonita. The highways west didn't amount to much; although, there was the road over the hill to the Flathead country.

SH: I suppose in those days a horse was standard equipment for everyone?

CE: Yes. Like the kids nowadays have automobiles, we kids had ponies, mostly the Indian variety which you could buy for most any price according to how much the Indian needed the money. Of course, there were some people that were not so good about the law and would trade a bottle of whiskey to an Indian for a pony.

SH: Mr. Elder, you were present when they dedicated the University [of Montana], is that right?

CE: Yes, in 1895 we kids—some 12 to 15 in number in the Missoula Boys Band—played on the grounds out there when it was dedicated. There was nothing on it except the speaker's stand. There's three of us left, yet, that were there present. All the others are gone.

SH: Who are the two others?

CE: Hugh Kennedy and Bill Dickinson.

SH: How large a crowd was present at the dedication?

CE: There must have been a couple of hundred. I remember one girl had written a poem, a Miss Grey, and she recited it...something about it. It was on what they call Arbor Day that the grounds were dedicated. You know Arbor Day meant plant a tree in those days, and that is what they were doing out there.

SH: Now were they planting the trees around the Oval or some other place?
CE: Yes I think that's when the Oval came into existence, was when they planted those trees around there.

SH: How many buildings were around at that time?

CE: There were no [buildings].

[Break in audio]

CE: Well, of course, Mickey was kind of a hero at that time to bring that train out through fire, and he admitted he was pretty badly scared.

SH: You're referring to the fire of 1910 [in Wallace, Idaho], is that right?

CE: Yes, biggest fire that this section ever had, and the locomotive is now the one on display down by the NP [Northern Pacific] depot.

SH: The train that Mickey MacCann brought out, was that a passenger train? Could you tell us a little about that, please?

CE: Well, I, of course, was not here and didn't see the train, but I know it was boxcars and stuff like that, not passenger equipped. One of the stories is how the little nun in the hospital at Wallace got her patients on the train but was left behind herself, and the fire burned right up to that statue that stands in front of the hospital there with its arms outstretched.

SH: How does the weather nowadays compare with the weather in the old days?

CE: Well, I think some of it we're missing now. We used to have three-day storms then, when the wind would blow and the temperature would go down below zero. That seems to have disappeared. Another thing was the chinooks. There'd be sleighing, of course, usually from early in December until the end of February, except for these chinooks. The old French farmers in the Frenchtown district would come in with their sleds, and then they couldn't go home with the sled because in a few hours the chinook would take the snow off.

SH: Mr. Elder, you've always been enthusiast on circuses. That's your hobby, is that right?

CE: Yes, that started when I was a very small boy because the band leader lived in the same building with us in Michigan. We, of course, followed his shows which, in those day, were wagon shows. When I came out here, why, the first circus I saw was Richard's Three Big Shows, which was on three cars. All the shows coming West in those days traveled by rail, where back in Michigan they traveled by wagon.
Then I became friendly with a good many circus people, largely through the Circus Fan Association, a national affair with some 2,500 members scattered all over the United States. That started with a remark that John Ringling made—if he only had a friend in every town that they were making, it would be easier for them to go to him for advice or help. I remember Ringling's contractor coming here, and I had all his people lined up that he wanted to see in my store. He said, "Gosh! You got my work all done for me."

Particularly, I remember helping Tom Mix get through this state when he was in something of trouble. I've had numerous visits with various shows in many parts of the country. One of the things that stands out in my mind was going back and seeing Hagenbeck-Wallace at Dekalb Avenue in Brooklyn [New York] and finding there a Missoula man in charge of publicity. Then driving over to Jackson Heights to visit the south (?) and have the man on the front door stick out his hand and call me by name, go inside and have the band leader run over and call me by name, and then going up to Poughkeepsie [New York] to see the Ringling Show.

SH: Can you describe the arrival of a circus in Missoula? The small boys going out real early to water the elephants and the train coming in and the subsequent parade?

CE: Well, in the old days the circus was not merely a performance. It was a whole day's entertainment for us kids. We stay with the show from the time it arrived until it left at night. Usually, they came from Helena over here by rail. I particularly remember one of the larger shows coming in on 40 cars, four parcels (?) in 1896, got in here at 8:30, and busy getting up the cook house, the tents, and the parade which was usually held right at 12:00. They'd always be three or four bands and mounted men, animals, cages—each wild animal cage with a man inside, and, of course, wind up with a steam calliope on the tail end of the parade. Then the big side show opening and later on the big show performance. The band in those days really worked. They played the parade, they played an outside concert, they played an inside concert, they'd play the performance, and then after that they played for the concert or the after show. Then repeat the thing at night. The first time the Ringlings were here the musicians' pay was eight dollars a week.

SH: The circus parade generally started at the circus grounds and then came all the way to Higgins and then down Higgins, is that right?

CE: Well, the usual route was down Stevens [now Ryman] to Front, down Front to Higgins Avenue, and then down Higgins Avenue back to the show grounds.

SH: With the calliope playing all the way and with the bands playing, and the children following, I suppose?

CE: Yes, there was the usual announcements by the spielers [grinders], one of which was, "There will be a grand free outside exhibition at the show grounds immediately following the parade." Then there was a man on horseback, "Hold your horses the elephants are coming."

Claude Elder Interview, OH 114-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
SH: Of course, this was on Higgins in the days before it was paved, is that right? Was there a lot of dust?

CE: Well, yes, there was some dust. Of course, we had sprinkling carts that kept the streets wet down so there wouldn’t be much dust flying.

SH: How about the small boys, did they get ready quite a while in advance to go to the circus? Was it quite an occasion when the circus arrived?

CE: Circus was everything for the kids in the [18]90s for the simple reason that there was no theatrical performances in the summer time. There was no such thing as a picture show—it had been unheard of—and carnivals had not yet started to arrive. In fact, our first carnival was in Missoula in the year 1900.

SH: There was the Harnois Theater though?

CE: No, the Harnois Theater [East Main Street] didn’t come until about 1908. The first theater that I attended was over what has been the Wagner Furniture Store [109 E. Front]. There was a saloon downstairs in those days. It was known as the Bennett Theater. The first show I attended was *Katy Putnam in the Old Lamb Kill*. Katy came out on the stage, and she got a lot of applause. The boy sitting next to me said, "Yes, Katy used to come here before the railroad."

I talked to Mrs. Tara Thompson about it. She said, "Yes, I used to super for Katy, and the shows would be held in the old courthouse."

SH: Regarding theaters, can you name some of the old theaters in Missoula?

CE: Well, of course, there was the variety show, the Gem Theatre, also the Mascot. The performances run until 3:00 in the morning. They had a good orchestra, seven pieces. Beer on the first floor was five cents. Boxes above, if you bought the girl up there a bottle of beer, you paid a dollar for it. If you were particularly flush with money, why, she probably got you for a bottle of champagne out of which she got a check for commission, which she stuck in her sock, and some of the girls’ socks were quite bulging towards the end of the evening.

SH: Can you give us the location of these old theaters for the record?

CE: The Mascot was about where the Daily Company is now [115-119 W. Front]. It burned up in 1892. The Gem, of course, is close to where the present garage of the Florence Hotel is. One of the amusing stories about the old Gem Theater is a young fellow arrived here from the East, and he heard that Tom Carter—the silver-tongued orator of Montana, Senator Carter—was to make a speech. He thought he’d like to hear it, so he asked the clerk where the theater was. Well, the clerk naturally supposed he meant the Gem Theater, so he pointed in that direction...
and this young fellow went down there expecting to see Tom Carter. He saw the beer tables and all that stuff—he hadn't seen those in the East—but he thought that's the way they probably did it in this part of the West. So he went in and sat down at one of the tables, and finally he fell in with one of the girls and they had a few drinks. He waited until midnight to see Tom Carter. Well, meanwhile, Tom Carter had made his speech at the Bennett Theater and had gone.

SH: Do you recall the old Blue Bird Theater? And some of those others?

CE: Well, the Blue Bird is where the Buttery store has been on [220 N.] Higgins Avenue. The man who ran the picture machine is now a big producer of cartoons in Hollywood, and we'll see his name after practically every cartoon shown at our theater here. Of course, the organist was Blind Melvin Buck, and the man operating the picture machine would announce, "You'll now be entertained by Melvin Buck, our blind organist." That's the way the show started always, followed by the usual silent films.

SH: In the Harnois Theater, no motion pictures were ever showed in the Harnois Theater, that was strictly a legitimate stage?

CE: Motion pictures were shown then only in connection with the vaudeville show. They didn't usually have enough in the way of acts to fill in an hour and a half performance, so you had an hour performance of various kinds of vaudeville acts and then wound-up with a half hour of pictures. A reel in those days ran 15 minutes, so they'd have a couple of reels. (Unintelligible sentence).

SH: Mr. Elder, you have been remarking that you have been here since 1891, and now in the days when we see so many Westerns on television and hear so much about the cowboys, how about the cowboys back in the 1890s in Western Montana? How many were there?

CE: Well, as a matter of fact, I don't think I ever saw a cowboy. We all had horses, but we didn't call ourselves cowboys. I remember one night when a bunch of us got together and riding around, there were some 30 kids mounted on these horses. Of course, Indians had large amount of livestock in the way of horses. I remember after they moved from the Bitterroot to the Flathead, I saw an old buck coming along followed by 30 horses and the squaw behind herding them. Every Indian had, usually, quite a band of horses. I didn't know the significance of it then but in 1891, when Charlo moved from the Bitterroot, I came from home at noon to the school house, and here it was almost surrounded by squaw and papooses, traveling in the style of Indians of those days, with the grown ones riding horse and the papooses on their mothers backs in the cradle board and the next of age riding on the travois cross bars between the tipi poles pulled on each side of the ponies. Then the little larger boys were riding behind some of the older members of the family on horseback, and then the older kids, of course, had their own pony. But the Indians had plenty of horses in those days.
Another thing, in the early days on the south side when we grew lots of bitterroots, in the bitterroot season, there'd be tipis all over the flat. I remember when I was in the sixth grade, there came a rap on the door, and the teacher turned to us kids and she said, "They want you children to vote on the state flower."

Without any hesitation practically every kid in the room yelled, "The bitterroot!" That's how the bitter root become the state flower of Montana.

SH: Do you recall what the Indians did with the bitterroot? Or know anything about whether they ate them or made dinners or so on?

CE: Well, outside of digging the roots of the bitterroot and pounding them up for some purpose, I don’t know whether it was medicine or food or what it was, but bitter root seemed to be some part of their diet.

SH: You say that during the spring when the bitterroot was growing, that a large number of Indians would come to Missoula?

CE: Yes, there’d be lots of Indians out on the south side. In fact there would be tipis most every place.

SH: Could you give the location with regards to some modern day building, like the shopping center or Stephens Avenue? Where did they have their tipis and dig the bitterroots?

CE: Well, that’s about the location. Any place after South 6th West. Beyond that was open country, and there would be tipis scattered all the way around there.

SH: The Indians, did they wear the regular customary feather headdress? How did they dress in those days?

CE: Well, so far as the Flatheads, except on parade, they didn’t wear any feathers at all. One of the amusing things some people won’t believe me when I tell them, that when an Indian got a new pair of pants he immediately cut the seat out because he never took the pants off and he wore a blanket over that.

SH: In the old days when you saw Chief Charlo go through, was it a long time that the Indians were going through Missoula?

CE: Well, the Indians didn't all go at the one time. Of course, there was the big band that went with Charlo at the head, when he carried the American flag, but during the next few months they were gradually moving their effects and going by.

SH: You say that Chief Charlo carried an American flag on his passage through here?

Claude Elder Interview, OH 114-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
CE: Yes, he went ahead, as the bucks always did, the chief ahead, carried the American flag and he made that statement when he finally decided that he would move, "I only want room for my grave."

SH: Were you there when Charlo and his group went through themselves? What did it look like?

CE: Well, nowadays in the wild west shows it would make quite a hit to see those Indians moving as they were moving then and which they don't do now. You know, the Indians were very fond of the circus. So in 1901, Camel Brothers Circus came here, and the whole side of the tent was blanket Indians. The press agent wrote it up for an eastern paper how they had showed Missoula, Montana, and they said, "Even though the elephant climbed the center pole, Indians wouldn't do more than grunt."

SH: Can you give us a list of prices in those old days?

CE: Well, of course, our leading hotel was the Florence, and all the hotels in those days were run American plan. That meant you got not only a room but three meals. The Florence rate was three dollars, and some of the others were considerably less, starting at a dollar. Meals in most any of the restaurants were 25 cents.

SH: Can you remember the fabulous bricklayer that was inserviced [?] and putting in the bricks in Higgins Avenue?

CE: Well, I remember when the bricks were laid all right, but I don't remember much about the details of the laying. I remember that they started at the NP [Northern Pacific] depot, and Jim Rhoades, the mayor, laid the first brick.

One of the amusing things of Jim Rhoades was in 1908 during the flood. The (unintelligible) car got stuck here, and Doc Waddell, the press agent, was a young fellow at that time and full of mischief. There'd been a couple fellows going to start a circus here, and they had their tent pitched down near the NP Depot. Emma Goldman, the anarchist lecturer, was in town. So Doc went to Emma, and he said, "Now there's a tent that'll seat 3,000 people. Get in and give these Missoula people a good Red talk."

Emma said, "I think I'll do it." So Doc went down to Mayor Jim Rhoades then, and he said, "Jim, do you know that woman Emma Goldman has got that tent and is going to give your Missoula people an anarchist talk?" So Jim—

[Break in audio]

SH: In the old days, the roundhouse whistle used to run the town, you say, Mr. Elder, can you tell us about it?
CE: Well, yes. Everybody set their watches by the roundhouse whistle, the whistle blew at six o’clock in the morning to wake everybody up. It blew again at 12:00 and it blew again at a quarter to one and at one o’clock and then at six in the evening. If there was a fire alarm in the neighborhood there, the roundhouse whistle sounded the alarm. One of the amusing things was that a box car got on fire down in the yard, and the round house sounded as usual. The fire department were called, and the hose wagon rushed down to where they thought the fire was. Meanwhile, a switch crew had got the notion to try to extinguish the fire themselves so they hooked on to the blazing boxcar and hauled it down to the water spout. So the fire department was chasing a moving fire.

SH: What happened to the roundhouse whistle? Where is it now?

CE: Well, when most of the repair shop in the roundhouse was abandoned, why, the whistle was taken down.

SH: In your opinion has anything ever taken the place of the roundhouse whistle?

CE: No, a few little weak whistles around town that blow, but they don’t seem to be very accurate as to time. The roundhouse whistle was absolutely on time because the time was gotten by wire from St. Paul every day at ten o’clock in the morning. So that everybody knew they could depend on it so far as setting their watches or any dates they had.

SH: Who was it who blew the roundhouse whistle?

CE: The engineer at the roundhouse, but he was very careful to get on the right time.

[End of Interview]

SH: That concludes the tape of Claude Elder. You’ll notice in the listening to this tape that some parts of it stopped rather suddenly. Well, what we did is sometimes he would stop talking and look at me, and then we would get ready and we would talk with each other with the recorder turned off, we would arrange for the next question, so sometimes the question isn’t in there. But we would talk over what we wanted to talk about next.

This tape was made by Stan Healy at Elder’s house during 1963. I don’t remember what day it was. It was made on an old fashioned recorder, and that’s why some of this has got a hum on it. The recorder in those days weren’t as good as they are now, and so possibly we could improve this by working on it but for this tape we have to put up with the noise. The recorder was quite old at that time.

The remarks that he made were ones that he had given to me when I was with the Missoulian, and also Jim Falls. Many years ago the great Jim Falls, who was the most fabulous reporter the
Missoulian ever had—Jim Falls, also the state editor—he would on Tuesday or Wednesday afternoons go down to the Palace Hotel and down around the street and he would meet Claude Elder. He always would come back with an old-time story from Claude Elder, whom he refer to as Missoula's own historian. Unfortunately, soon after that time, why, Jim Falls had a heart attack in Los Angeles, and I was given his job. So following up old Jim's tradition, I would call upon Claude Elder, and I was fascinated by the stories he told. So I thought that these stories should be kept for history. I made arrangements that I would borrow this recorder—I worked for KGVO by that time—and I borrowed a recorder from KGVO. We didn't have the modern transistor recorders we got now, and there are hums in these old ones. But anyways, we went over to Elder's house, and I did record these tapes. Even now, in 1972, these tapes are being transcribed, November 29, 1972 [transcribed for University of Montana on November 15, 1990]. Even now some of the gas stations and so on, that Elder referred to in 1963, are gone. I noticed that just now as I was transcribing these tapes. At any rate these are getting to be very valuable tapes, and this is Stan Healy, signing and logging this off. The tapes from Claude Elder recorded in 1963 in Missoula, Montana.

[End of audio]