Oral History Number: 114-003
Interviewee: Fred Lehr
Interviewer: Stan Healy
Date of Interview: circa 1963
Project: Stan Healy Collection of Early Missoula History

Note: Throughout the interview, Lehr refers to places by pointing.

Stan Healy: Now tell us about the hanging of Burns. What did Burns do?

Fred Lehr: He shot John Higgins. That was the night of, night that West Front Street burned down. Big fire down Front Street.

SH: Where did the shooting take place?

FL: It took place, I suppose, down there.

SH: How about the hanging? Where was it?

FL: In the courtyard on the south side of the old jail. (unintelligible) hung here you know. In ’22 he was hung.

SH: When was Burns hung?

FL: It must have been about ’90...so I was about four years old. I think about [18]92. I was born in 1888. I think—

SH: Did you see it? Did you go down there?

FL: We lived just a block from there.

SH: What did you do then?

FL: Well, I was just a small kid. My mother was leading me around by the hand.

SH: You don’t remember very much. Was there a fence there? Later, do you remember where the jail was?

FL: Yes. They used to have a fence around the jail and around the courthouse, too. The jail sat in the yard of the courthouse, just like it does now. [The jail has been torn down.]

SH: Was the jail in the same location in the yard? Exactly the same?
FL: Yes, the county jail was right over where it is right now. That was built...I don't remember the year.

SH: 1889 was when the jail [was built].

FL: Seems it was built the year that I was born.

SH: I see. You remember the old jail then?

FL: Yes, I remember the old jail.

SH: What kind of building was it?

FL: The old one looked like a cement. The one that sat over there from that before they built the one they've got now there.

SH: Which direction do you mean when you said over? East or west?

FL: It's east. It sat in the courtyard, but they would never put nobody in it then because they had this one [new jail] when (unintelligible).

SH: This one was a wooden building, or what was it?

FL: No, it was like a cement. I think it was built of stone is what I think.

SH: How many stories?

FL: Just a little one. It was just a small place.

SH: That was right straight north of the courthouse?

FL: No, east of there. Yes, north of the courthouse, and east of this jail that's there now.

SH: I see, and what kind of courthouse was there?

FL: Wood. Built of wood, lumber. All lumber.

SH: What did they do with the one...Were you around when they built the courthouse they've got now?

FL: They built this one [the present courthouse] in 1908. Yes, they tore it down and built this one.
SH: They actually tore it down?

FL: Yes, they tore that down.

SH: Do you remember what that building looked like?

FL: Yes. That's 1908. My brother Bill done the plumbing in there.

SH: Is that right? How long did it take them to build it?

FL: They worked quite a while. John Brushbill (?). Did you remember ever hearing him?

SH: Yes.

FL: He was the overseer of that.

SH: Wasn't there quite a job about bringing in the bell or hauling the bell up to the top?

FL: I don't know. I'm not really sure about that. See, in 1908 I was working at the railroad in a blacksmith shop down there. I never got around that much, because you know, you worked in those day, you worked long hours and every Sunday and everything else.

SH: When you were a little kid, what was on Higgins Avenue?

FL: There wasn't very much.

SH: Can you tell some of the stores that were on Higgins Ave. when you were a little kid?

FL: MM [Missoula Mercantile] was there. I remember that. Western Montana National Bank [Higgins and Front], that's where the (unintelligible) Jewelry was—(unintelligible) there. There was Donohue's store—Higgins block [Higgins and Main, northwest corner]—it was there.

SH: Donohue's store is now a Montgomery Ward?

FL: Montgomery Ward, yes.

SH: That's a different building though?

FL: Yes, and then there was the Friesheimer's (?) drugstore.

SH: Where was that?
FL: That was right next to the MM. The alley. I guess MM finally got that part of it. The alley that goes in back of the MM—

SH: That's north of the MM, where McKay's is now.

FL: No. It was across the alley from McKay's [107 E. Main].

SH: Further?

FL: This way and south. Patrick Wright built the MM building at (unintelligible).

SH: Friesheimer’s (?) drugstore. What else was there?

FL: Oh, let’s see. There was...John R. Daly had a meat market there when he (unintelligible). Then Corbett (?) had a saloon, and then there was Western Montana National Bank. Then up where Lucy's [Wyckmans, N. Higgins] that was residence.

SH: There was houses in there?

FL: Houses in there, yes. Of course, right across from that was that big block that Higgins owned. It was a fence, kind of a rail fence, around it. The passenger depot used to be another freight depot—the one that they tore down and build this one [old depot on Railroad and Woody].

SH: There was the one that burned up too, wasn’t there?

FL: They built one, see? Where this one is sitting now, and this was going to have a clock up in the tower like someplace in Milwaukee had. Built on that order. It burnt down before they even had it done.

SH: Yes, I remember that. I heard something about that. Where was that located?

FL: It was located just about where this one is. It might have a little one way together, but it was about pretty close.

SH: But the one before that was down on Woody Street?

FL: Yes. Woody Street practically run into it because the old horse streetcars would run from that depot and go down Woody Street. Everybody that got off the train came down Woody Street. Higgins Avenue was a dead, practically a dead, street for traffic. The horse streetcars went down, then they come down to Main Street. Then on Main St. to Higgins Ave. Then they went down Higgins Ave. across the old wooden bridge that went out...the ‘90s [1890s]. I don’t
know just when it was. Then they’d go out as far as the old flour mill with the horse (unintelligible).

SH: What was the main street then? Higgins Ave.? I mean, Front St.?

FL: Well, Front (unintelligible). Woody Street was, well, traffic on it.

SH: The main street then mostly?

FL: Yes. Then after (unintelligible) that street did not amount to much anymore because everything went down...when they changed the depot.

SH: That made the difference?

FL: Yes, that made the difference.

SH: About when was that?

FL: About 1902.

SH: About 1902. Over in this end of town here there wasn’t so much over here then?

FL: No. There was the old Rust House (?), that was a (unintelligible) building. All wood, big buildings, then they were on First St., North First St. Right across the street where that big (unintelligible) is. There’s some houses in there. The Kelley House (?)

SH: Was it on the north side?

FL: North side.

SH: Was it a rooming house or something?

FL: Yes. But I don't know whether they called it the Rust House the American House. There was two of them there. They were all sleeping in, and one summer afternoon they caught on fire but there were a lot of Japanese living there. They just were putting Japanese on the railroads here, and they were at the place. Except one (unintelligible) it’s a pretty good size, and that was owned...Well, now I don’t know what their name was. The man that had it, but he was married twice. And his wife married a fellow by the name of...(unintelligible). What’s her name? He was a boilermaker? (Unintelligible sentence)

SH: How about the roundhouse? When did they build it? Was that built when you came here?
FL: Yes, the first roundhouse was, yes. Of course they then built that other on, and when they built that one, there was some houses in there where that roundhouse moved (unintelligible) and that was moved. From there where Haig (?) moved it out of there.

SH: Oh I see. The one Haig had moved.

FL: The one Haig had, and that was where the roundhouse used to be. They tore that out when they built this new roundhouse and the one that they just tore down a year or two ago.

SH: Do you remember the old steam engines around here then? Do you remember?

FL: Yes. I fired from the yard.

SH: During the days when the steam engines were really being used, about how many did they have around here?

FL: Oh, I don't know. They had quite a few. They had maybe four or five. Switching and then all of these trains. Now you take that engine sitting in front of the depot, that 1356. They wouldn't take about 35 or 40 cars. The cars was as big as they are now.

SH: So in other words, they had more trains, a lot more trains?

FL: More trains, yes.

SH: Now this neighborhood here where we are now. There some other famous houses in down here?

FL: Well, there’s one down there—the Christianson house (?). That was a real old-timer. That was old Joseph Booth (?). I don't know. He was kind of a game warden, and then he worked at the post office over in Butte. That's where he lived when he died, and he had quite a family. He had five girls and three boys.

SH: That’s the old Christianson house?

FL: Yes, that's the old Christianson house. See it was a log house.

SH: Did they move that, didn’t they?

FL: What?

SH: They moved that, didn’t they?
FL: Yes, they moved the house. Christianson tore it down, and they built that house that he had there.

SH: They tore down the log house then?

FL: Yes. They tore the log house down. Otherwise, there wasn't very much. Of course Haladine (?) lived there. That Frank is as old as I am, and he was born in that house and he had a sister two years older than him that was born in it. Frank is 87, so they got (unintelligible) 80 years since they built that house. Then the one this side, you know, that they took down the hill. (unintelligible) used to own that.

SH: Which was that? Now where was that located?

FL: That was just away from the Christianson's, right across the street.

SH: What street was that on?

FL: Arthur. (unintelligible) was on that street that goes down the hill.

SH: Fifth?

FL: No, it was on Sixth St. But it didn’t face Sixth. It faced, what is that? Grand? Wolf or Grand or one of them. It faced that. Well, they tore it down when they pulled (unintelligible) over here. They pulled it all. (Unintelligible) that was first built by a doctor. Now, I don’t know what his name was. Frank (unintelligible) might know some of them names, because Frank lived right over here.

SH: You remember these old houses I had across the street—Danielson's houses?

FL: Yes, they were old timers.

SH: Did Danielson (?) build those?

FL: I don't know if he built that or not.

SH: You don't remember when those were built?

FL: No, but did he own the both of them?

SH: He owned both of them, yes. We bought both of them from him. Now, whether he owned them or not. I don’t know whether he built both of them.

FL: I didn’t know (unintelligible). Seen him out. Know where he lives.
SH: You don't know much about these old houses over there?

FL: No. I don't know (unintelligible). Now, the one on the corner—that corner of this block here—that big house and Colby White (?) lived there. I don't know who has that now. He built that, and that's the last house built (unintelligible) Spokane and then he built there. (Unintelligible sentence). Then when he died, they said he had about 40,000 dollars. His daughter (unintelligible) and give the rest to crippled children. He was crippled himself, and he knew what that was. They said he left about 30,000 dollars to crippled children.

SH: Do you remember anything else about the north side here?

FL: I know we used to run it down! (laughs)

SH: I think we're just about at the end of the tape. Just a minute.

[Break in audio]

SH: Tell us about old man Erling (?). Who was he?

FL: I remember him, but he died and I think it was from a tooth. Toothache.

SH: What was his first name?

FL: I don't remember. John? He had a boy named John. I don't remember John (unintelligible).

SH: They'd call him “Old Daddy” around, did they?

FL: We never called him Daddy. He had a name though.

SH: He owned a lot of land around—

FL: He had three boys. Clay and John and Charlie and two girls. One girl, Ruth, and Olive.

SH: Did he have a house around here?

FL: Oh yes, he lived down there where Goslin (?) lived.

SH: Goslin, where was that? What street?

FL: That was up on Fifth St. right here.

SH: That would be Rose Ave.?
FL: No. You know the one that runs east and west.

SH: Third Street?

FL: Yes, Third St. West

SH: Down there by...How far from here?

FL: Just a block, ain't it? About a block.

SH: I see. Right down by where King's place is?

FL: Yes, well, just west of (unintelligible) house. They faced this street. Fourth Street [north side].

SH: It faced up Third Street up here.

FL: Yes.

SH: Which way? Was it faced north?

FL: It faced north. Mr. Goslin (?) lived there. He was an engineer on the road here. He’s one...the road took him out. Two great tall houses sitting there yet, they moved back. And it’s setting there yet. They had a basement dug for it, and I don’t know if they were—

SH: (unintelligible) supposed to live.

FL: Yes, in that house.

SH: He had an orchard here too, didn’t he?

FL: The orchard was over here [points].

SH: Where was that? Down by the—

FL: Just across the...this way you came...North of King. Had them little cabins, you know? That’s where the orchard was.

SH: That’s where (unintelligible) orchard used to be?

FL: Yes.
SH: Who else used to live down here? Did you say Walling (?)?

FL: Walling lived in that house. It was right close to this house, and I thought that set about here.

SH: Well, maybe that was (unintelligible) Mrs. Lewis's house?

FL: Might have been, yes.

SH: Old Mrs. Walling—

FL: Who were the people lived down there?

SH: That was (unintelligible).

FL: That was old Lannie Walling. Yes, and he (unintelligible) the car shop. He worked the (unintelligible) room there.

SH: Who were some of the other old-timers over here?

FL: Oh, Christian’s used to be here. He was a bricklayer.

SH: Wasn’t there a house over in here that was—

FL: Booth. Booth lived down here—old Joseph Booth. He was an old rounder here. He had quite a family. He had five girls and three boys.

SH: How about old Callahan—Pat Callahan? He lived right down the corner.

FL: Yes, Pat lived on the corner. Pat lived there as long as I remembered and his wife. I can’t think of what his wife’s name was. It was an Irish name.

SH: He finally was killed, was he?

FL: Pat? No, he died a natural death.

SH: He died of a natural death. How about this (unintelligible) used to be Haig's over here?

FL: Lloyd Haig. See, he came here, he wasn’t what you call real...He come here before the strike. He was working in the shop that was during the [railroad] strike. The roundhouse. He was a (unintelligible) inspector.
SH: What about this old house up on the hill here? This old house that was on the corner? Some old woman had it?

FL: Old Mattie had it last.

SH: What was her last—

FL: Mattie Hutter (?)

SH: That was the old Hutter house?

FL: Hutter’s, yes. Their son and Fred Bluge (?) run around together.

SH: What was the Hutters’ names—first names? Do you remember?

FL: Charlie Hutter.

SH: Charlie Hutter.

FL: No, he had a boy named Charlie. Now I can’t remember—

SH: What was this old house up on the corner here?

FL: I think Hutter had it, and then after that another German guy. His name was Segal (?). Otto Segal. He had it.

SH: That was the old house right up here on the corner?

FL: Yes.

SH: Right here by the cliff.

FL: A woman had it, old Mattie, that had all those old men there.

SH: Was that Fitzgibbon of Fitzpatrick or something?

FL: I don’t know what her name...No, I think she was...Her name was...Johnny Fraser (?), he married a sister of hers.

SH: You were telling something about the fire that burned down the—

FL: West Front Street?
SH: Yes. You were there?

FL: Yes. We lived close there.

SH: Where did you live?

FL: Right across the street from the courthouse where the Chrysler Garage is now. That's where our house was, and that's where I was born. City Hall borders that lot that my father had there [since demolished].

SH: Your father had that lot? That vacant lot there then?

FL: No, he lived east. Where the City Hall is, that lot was vacant with the corner.

SH: I see, and your house was there where—

FL: Where the sidewalk was...they were high because there was kind of a low place there. When the train would come in, Woody Street was the main street then.

SH: Then where was the train station down there?

FL: What?

SH: The train station?

FL: No, it was where the freight house is now.

SH: That's where the train station—

FL: That's where the old depot used to be.

SH: You’re getting away from the microphone here.

The fire—how did the fire break out?

FL: They don’t know what broke out...that was the red light district and a pretty tough part of town there.

SH: Did all the businesses burn out?

FL: Yes, the whole works. Jim Corbett, he used to...he lived in that house right across the Catholic Church [St. Francis Xavier]. He built that, and that Hart (?) has got it now. They just
built in that tire outfit, both the lots on the corner. That house is still there. That's the Corbett place.

SH: The one across the street?

FL: No, it's right next to the Bakke’s Tires.

SH: I see. Then what was this old house that they tore down? Whose house was that?

FL: That’s Piquette's (?)

SH: That was the old Piquette house?


SH: That one they tore down there?

FL: Yes. It was a kind of an apartment house.

SH: That's the one they built.

FL: That’s been there a long time. (unintelligible) happened along in the [18]90s, see? I was born in ’88.

SH: Was the fire at night or in the daytime?

FL: Night. In the evening. My mother and an old (unintelligible) lived close, and she sold her property to Marsh (?)—to Charlie Marsh. Up near there where the Paxson’s lived there. Just west of that and, of course, we were practically neighbors.

SH: I see. Then the fire was in the evening then?

FL: In the evening, yes.

SH: How long did it burn?

FL: Quite a while (unintelligible). I was about four years old then, but I can remember that we were going down there. I can see these fellows (unintelligible). Then the horse streetcars ran from the old depot and went down Woody Street. Woody Street was practically the main part of town, because the upper end of Higgins Avenue where the Missoulian is, that was a rail fence there. Higgins owned that.

SH: Is that right?
FL: They used to have their horses or cows in there. Then Higgins lived in where the telephone building is. That was his home on that corner.

SH: Where the telephone building is?

FL: Yes. That place on Broadway—when you walk past that building—down there was quite a low place and they used to have their cows and they always had a bunch of cows. I went to school with the youngest Higgins boy. That was Gerald.

SH: You said what about the fence where the Missoulian is?

FL: It was just kind of a place to put horses in or something.

SH: But was the fence straight across Higgins Avenue?

FL: No, just in where the Missoulian—

SH: That was a sort of vacant lot in there?

FL: Yes.

SH: I can remember that was a baseball diamond.

FL: Baseball diamond, and Higgins owned the diamond. See, them boys went through with the (unintelligible). They died, I don’t think any of them got very old. I remember when they went and had rough riders. Enlisted in the Spanish-American War. Frank Higgins was a captain and Charlie Hall, he was a...well, I got them papers. (unintelligible) that great big paper—

SH: The Centennial Edition?

FL: Yes. I got that at home.

SH: Do you remember this old house over here they’re tearing down? Dr. Jennings lived there. Is that right?

FL: Yes. He did build that for him, but (unintelligible) hospital. (unintelligible) it was a wooden hospital, and it used to come here. I remember I went in and watch them operate on a fellow.

SH: The wooden hospital was here first?

FL: Yes.
SH: It was on the north corner then?

FL: Then it had a basement on it, there. Then they went to work and they built that house when they tore that down when they built this in 1917.

SH: They built this hospital in 1917 [Missoula General]?

FL: 1917, yes.

SH: They tore the other hospital down then?

FL: Yes, they tore the other one down.

SH: You don't remember when the other one was built?

FL: No. There was one...I saw a picture one time of the old empty hospital. They had it in (unintelligible).

SH: This house was here...this house that they are tearing down now was that before that [hospital] or after?

FL: This was built quite a while after. This was built when they tore that part of the hospital down. That’s why they built this, see?

SH: They built this hospital in 1917. The house was built before that or after it?

FL: Just about that time. I saw a picture over there of the empty hospital, and it said it burnt down in 1888. That's the year I was born. They had one before that, it must have burned down. Charlie Erling (?) told me this the last time I talked to him. He’s dead now. He died since I saw him, but I saw Charlie about three years ago. He come over to visit me.

SH: How many was there in the Erling family?

FL: There was three boys, Charlie, Keith and John. That’s three boys, and two girls.

FL: (unintelligible) and Olive were the two girls.

SH: They homesteaded here?

FL: I don’t know whether...he come (unintelligible). (unintelligible sentence)

SH: But Old Erling had this whole business then.
FL: He had all the business down here.

SH: Did he get rich then, or whatever happened to him?

FL: Oh no. He had nothing but family, and she got caught tax poor. The taxes ate up the rest of it, and the poor old lady she finally died. She had two good daughters. The boys didn’t amount to much. Charlie was a brakeman on the railroad here for a while. Charlie told me that when the first hospital burned down, they were going to take and not build no hospital here. They were going to build it over in Helena. Charlie's father says, “All right. If you do that, I'll take my gift [of a city block] back.” So they built it here. They didn't want to lose the block.

SH: I see. Just a minute.

[Break in audio]

SH: Any other old-timers here? Now—

FL: I don’t remember, let’s see.

SH: Come up a little closer, you’re getting away from the mic here.

Do you remember when they dug this cliff (?)? Was that cliff here when you came?

FL: Yes, it was. I think they broke into that and started that when the built that big house that Hutter had built. Hutter was one of the first ones that I knew that lived in there because her mother came up one time and a storm blew in and she stayed overnight. I was four years old then.

SH: That Hutter, that house (unintelligible) real strong basement, you know.

FL: Yes. That was fixed after quite a while after the house. I think Segal, a fellow named Otto Segal. He used to—

SH: Wasn’t he a butcher?

FL: He ran the Montana Hotel. You know where she is—the old Montana building by the underpass. He used to have that.

SH: Old man Doughle (?) had that one time, too.

FL: Yes, Doughle. He had it quite a long, long time after Segal had it.

SH: Otto Segal? He was the hotel keeper then?
FL: Yes. He was in the ice business. He used to own Missoula Ice Company

SH: What did Hutter do?

FL: Old Hutter was a miller.

SH: He was a German miller?

FL: A miller? No. A Miller, you know what a miller is? He works over at the flour mill (unintelligible) grain up. He worked for Higgins and Worden. They had a flour mill right there where the First National Bank is now.

SH: He was an old timer here, wasn’t he then?

FL: Yes. He was here [laughter] before I was born. My folks come to Missoula in [18]82.

SH: Is that right?

FL: In ’82.

[End of Interview]