This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.
Lucile Speer: I think I’ll follow through on several lines of interest and classifications, so to speak. If you will interpose with questions, why that will be enough to bring it out. I think I said the other day that I was a little surprised at the style and quality, the characterization, I’d say, of the delegates. Somehow, I was expecting a group of really distinguished statesmen. They weren’t [laughs] for the most part, at all. In fact, I was the oldest, and I had not been in government, so certainly I was anything but a statesman. There were some in the convention who had been in the legislature and I suppose that was the closest you’d come to people in government. There were no former governors or any state officials, no former representatives to Congress, that sort of thing, which happens in some state constitutional convention. I don’t mean to disparage them, but the people in the convention really represented more of a cross-section than the 1889 [constitutional convention] I think.

Diann Wiesner: Did they take a survey of the backgrounds of the delegates, by any chance? Say, how many of them were retired businessmen or teachers or—

LS: We did file some information for the state library, and it’s there in the archives. I know some, quite of lot of what they were doing, and many of them were still [pauses]—it should be mentioned right at the beginning, I think, that the convention was that the delegates were all non-partisan. There was a question about that as the 1889 constitution, you see, provided for the election—the setting up of a constitutional convention and said that there should be the same number of delegates as there were members of the House of Representatives. That meant there were 100 delegates and they would be elected at the same places and the same way and so on. I had a vague recollection that either the court or the attorney general moved that that included they were to run on a party [ticket]. They could run non-partisan, yes, and there were some, but they had to do it the non-partisan way—to get so many signatures to get on the ballot.

I always recall that when we started after that caucus, Leo [Graybill] took the chair, he said, “We’re non-partisan from now on.” We had been partisan, yes, in getting our [convention] president elected [and running on a partisan ticket], but that was the end of it. The evidence of that was carried out by seating the delegates alphabetically. In the legislature, see, you have Republicans on one side and the Democrats on the other. We were just arranged alphabetically. I would say that I think this was true of all of them. I didn’t know what party a great many of them were. I certainly didn’t know in the beginning. I learned some of them, yes, but not all. We were a very informal and close group. I just thought of this yesterday. We did call each other by the first name. That was a common practice all the way through. There was good feeling among the delegates. Some disagreements, difference in points of view arose of
course, but it wasn't based on party lines. I think that was quite an achievement, and it helped us to move along. It expedited things, where you didn't have party fights.

There were 19 women, and that was a goodly number of delegates—divided among the two parties. I don't know but what the Republicans had as many as there were Democrats. There were five ministers, and several of them were active. I think one or two were retired. They were good delegates I'd say. There weren't many teachers, very few. George Heliker and I from the University [of Montana]. George had to take time, the quarter off, because he was not retired.

DW: What committee as he on, Lucile? Do you recall?

LS: He was on the Health and Welfare—chairman of that.

DW: Oh, he was? Were there any Bozeman people there?

LS: Yes. They had Richard Roeder in history [History Department, Montana State University]. He was a good delegate. Although, I can recall talking with a young man who was the executive secretary until he got into problems with Leo. We agreed that Dick Roeder didn't make the great contribution that we had expected from him. He was on the Executive Committee. He was a very good speaker. I can remember him giving a talk on the Executive article. We had hoped that we could arrive at a provision for a short ballot. That was to cut out the election of a lot of these officers. Many states were doing that, like Alaska and Hawaii. Maybe they'd elect the governor and the Secretary of State. But two was it. We didn't get anywhere on that.

I asked—I think he wanted to be called Rich, was it, instead of Dick. He had thought they could get rid of the elected Superintendent of Public [Instruction], but he said Montana was not ready for this. He didn't fight for it at all. He said there was just no use spending time on it. He had made the attempt when he campaigned, and he was convinced of that. So he didn't—

DW: Nobody on that committee, then, fought him on that?

LS: No, no one. He was probably the most liberal one on that—progressive—on the Executive Committee. Betty Babcock was on that committee. Well, she was a Republican. Her husband had been governor. She wasn't governor. Another almost, well, status quo, I should say—I wouldn't call her conservative—but Margaret Warden. She was a very active Democrat from Great Falls and Margaret did a good job. But she did not introduce, nor vote, for change very much. She made a real contribution to the convention on the Public Information Committee. She did more there, than I think, she did on the provisions of the Constitution. For instance, I recall that she was the one who, when they were talking about the qualifications of the governor, in the beginning, the first day, they had said anyone of the same qualifications as the voters [could run for governor]. In other words, 18-year-olds could run for governor. Well, she came back the next day and introduced an amendment to that, to age 25, I think it was. She said, “They'd think we were crazy when that went out over the wire in the news.” [laughs]
Probably, she was right on that. Actually, the general attitude—those of us who were supporting the 18-year-old—we didn't specify 18-year-old, we just said any voter was entitled to run and felt that you wouldn't find any 18-year-old who would try. There wasn't any danger.

DW: They didn't have to worry about it.

LS: There were lots of lawyers. I can't tell you how many. I don't think there were as many as in 1889. I don't think I ever saw a statement as to how many there were. In 1889, there were 23; I remember that. I don't think we had quite that many, but we had a goodly number. We had some big ranchers and stockmen. I'm here to talk more about Torrey Johnson. He was the most colorful character in the convention and really sort of a symbol of Montana's great frontier. [laughs] He really was a wonderful person, but extremely, extremely assertive. He was really sort of the leader of this group of Easterners—the ranchers and the stockmen.

DW: Where was he from?

LS: Busby. That's about 90 miles from—

DW: A cattle rancher?

LS: Yes. He owned—I don't remember figures, but it was between 30 [thousand] and 50,000 acres, and he leased another 35,000 acres. [laughs] As matter of fact, I might as well tell it here, but he and Magnus Aasheim, who was an Eastern Montana rancher—but not one of the great stockgrowers, just a modest thing, and he had been a prominent legislator. He was a leader of the Democrats in the Legislature. Torrey had never been in the Legislature so far as I know. They agreed to get together and invited the delegates, which organized that spring, into the Montana Constitutional Stock—. We never did figure out another name. [laughs] They invited us over to Torrey's ranch for our first reunion. Well, first of all, there were some objections. In the first place, there were some, like Miles Romney from Hamilton, said he'd never go there. [laughs] Torrey Johnson's ranch—he wouldn't go. Because he was, the Romneys were staunch Democrats, and they could never leave that out. Never! They were wonderful people. I loved them dearly, especially Miles. He was the next oldest delegate to me.

But it worked out. There were some others that worked on the committee. The business meeting was held at the Northern [Hotel] in Billings, and the banquet was held there. There were some who just went there and did not stay for the next day. But there was a big crowd of us who took the two buses which were provided and took the 90-mile trip to Busby, across those rolling hills—up and down. It was 90 miles to Torrey's ranch. He had promised a beef barbecue, when I had a letter from him, because I was president of the society the first two years, I guess it was. Then Catherine Pemberton, was not an officer, but she was—she and her husband lived on a ranch over there. She was on the committee [unintelligible]. She arranged these arrangements in Billings and was in charge of the banquet. We went, and she knew the
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Johnsons. Here was this great, rambling ranch house, elegant furnishings inside. You can’t imagine!

DW: Was it an older home?

LS: I guess so, but, oh, it was elegant inside! Looking at the outside, you wouldn't know. Then here off to one side, there was a place with a covering where they had the barbecue. Torrey had written me the last fall when they'd had a round up, they'd picked out the yearling that they would barbecue. I understood that they put it in the pit at four o'clock in the morning, so it would be ready. Such meat I have never eaten in my life! We sat around out there on bales of hay. [laughs] Well, there were some who had chairs, but very few. Mostly you sat on those bales of hay. Torrey booming around with his big hat—big cowboy hat.

DW: Oh, yes. How old a man is he?

LS: His early 60s, and his wife was a beautiful woman. Just really a beautiful woman to preside over a great domain like that.

DW: Did you stay the night, or did you go back to Billings then?

LS: No, no. We took a ride back that night. I was going to say, the dinner then was the traditional barbecue dinner. You had roast or barbecued meat on a roll, and baked beans. That always went with it, I was told. Baked beans and coleslaw. And that was it. I guess there was an ice cream cone or a little cup of ice cream, and all you wanted of that. There were soft drinks, but I don't think that there—no hard liquor provided. Probably some of them brought it, but I don't know. It was a very nice party, and the families were invited so we had lots of all ages. After the dinner, Torrey played, and his two daughters played, I think it was, banjo. They played those cowboy songs and sang them. [laughs] As we left to go out to the road—it was off the road quite a ways, the house—as we left, they stopped at the corral, guess it was, where they were branding. Those who wanted to, which did not include me, went over to see this. You could've seen the whole operation.

Another thing that I might mention was, the man—the helper cutting the meat and helping to serve—there were tables under this cover where we picked up our plate—he was black. Some mentioned this—there weren't any around there—they thought Torrey probably got him from Sheridan because they were very far. Rosebud County is—and they were very far from the border and might have. But when we were invited to go into the house, and I did, and it was a beautiful furnished home. This lovely—I can’t remember her name. [Adrienne] There was a directory that had the wives’ names too, but I didn’t find that. But it was like the name of an opera singer or something. [laughs] I think she must have come from the South. She had a black cook in the kitchen.

DW: It must have been a big place.
LS: Yeah, it was. So that was a great event.

DW: Was the ranch in Torrey's family before?

LS: I don't know about that. I don't know. I wonder how many of those places—I think that there were some others, although probably, Torrey's was the best. You couldn't have picked another in Montana now any more representative of the great period of the cattleman in Montana. Archie Wilson, a delegate, and he was an older man—older than Torrey. He apparently lived not too far. I remember him there, and his wife was a lovely person too. Torrey [she means Archie] was a—he was really a leader of the—more of a political leader in the convention than Torrey. Torrey didn't do much arguing or debating. I shouldn't call it arguing. It was debating. You expected to have both sides presented.

DW: That was Wilson?


DW: What committee was Torrey on?

LS: Torrey was on the Legislative Committee. I have no recollection of his speeches. He was not one whose vote we watched. I could tell you how Torrey voted, that he would have voted against annual sessions, for instance. Archie was on the Executive Committee. He certainly would have been for keeping the long ballot. That was the key thing, because we had already, by amendment, made a great change in the number of departments. Forrest Anderson, as governor, had sponsored this amendment, which reduced the number of department heads to 20. There were to be no more than 20. You could have subdivisions, but 20 permanent departments. I don't know how many there had been before, reporting directly to the governor, and now there were to be no more than 20. Now, you see, that had already been done.

DW: Did proponents of the short ballot want to see that come about for efficiency, or for a shift in power, or what was it for?

LS: It all was to concentrate power where you can get at it, to know who is responsible. If they're all elected—all of these heads, 50 heads—or if the government appoints them, you lose track. You don't know who is responsible. It pinpoints responsibility. That's the point. If you read one of the studies by the Legislative Council, they quote what [Joseph] Dixon said during his administration way back in the early...well, around 1919: “Elect a strong governor, give him the authority, and then hold him responsible, and you know where the authority lies.” That's what we wanted to do. That's the theory.
DW: Was the makeup of the Executive Committee—what shall I say—was it objective? Do you think was it balanced?

LS: I don’t know too much about it. I quoted—the only person I talked with about that was Rick Roeder, Rich Roeder.

[Break in audio]

LS: I said that he—he, I’m sure, had campaigned widely and [unintelligible], and had made an effort to find out what would be the possibility. His conclusion was that there was no reason to spend time on it, because Montana was not ready. That was true, that was very evident in the Education Article, where some of us wanted to remove the Superintendent of Public Instruction from the elected office. There was another problem there—that the constitution of 1889 didn’t make clear where the responsibility for higher education lay. It left it very confusing, because it gave the authority for all education in the state to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and then in another paragraph, it said the Board of Education had this authority. Well, who did? And they squabbled. We wanted get that out. I wanted to get rid of that, and I asked to be heard and question the chairman of the Education Committee, who was presenting the provision for the election. I said, “Will [Richard] Champoux yield?”

He said, “No.” He hated to say no to a lady, but... [laughs]

I wasn’t accustomed to—so I didn’t know—I should have jumped in and gotten up on the—gotten recognized again.

DW: Who would not yield?

LS: Champoux wouldn't yield to me. When I asked, “Will you yield, Delegate Champoux?” He said no. [laughs] I had to sit down.

DW: Was he speaking at the time on the education business?

LS: On this elected [superintendent]. He knew what I was up to, because he had heard me at a public meeting.

DW: So was he on the Executive Committee?

LS: No, he was chairman of the Education Committee, and he wanted to keep—he wasn’t so much for keeping it, but he thought—he agreed, like Roeder, that you couldn’t get rid of the elected Superintendent of Public Instruction in Montana.

DW: The time just hadn't come?
LS: The time hadn't come. I wouldn't have gotten anywhere, but I was always mad at him. I never forgave him or so I've always told him. You see, I'd like to put in, just mention here, that when you wanted to speak, you stood up. The president, then, recognized you if he saw you, and said, “Delegate so-and-so” or “Madam” or “Miss,” whatever you might be, and then you could proceed. You couldn't just get up. He was supposed to be able to see from his point of view on the rostrum. I was in the back row. We were arranged alphabetically. I was the shortest person at the convention [laughs], and I was the furthest from the platform. The background behind me was a marble pillar. [laughs] I guess my grey hair sort of merged into that. Anyway, he said he couldn't see me half the time when I did get up. I had a terrible time getting recognized. Sometimes, there were times when other delegates then, who were taller than I, further up, would get up and say, “Delegate Speer wants to talk.” [laughs] Marshall Murray was chairman of the Rules Committee, and he had a telephone from, to back to the platform—to the President's desk. He'd telephone him and say, “Miss Speer wants to talk,” and then they would recognize me. Finally, one day, Tom Ask's wife—Tom was extremely tall and on the front row. His wife was sitting on the back, on the bench at the back of the room behind me, and she saw my problem, so she came in the next day with a little flag for me to wave. [laughs]

DW: That's great. How tall are you, Lucile?

LS: I was 5 feet 2 something, but I'm under 5 now.

DW: I was going to say you were about 5 feet.

LS: No, I'm not quite 5 feet now.

I just wanted to add one—I think I did say it, didn't I, that Torrey was not—in the convention—a leader of the easterner, Eastern Montana, the cattle industry and those big ranchers. In the 1889 convention, that was a definite split in the convention between the Eastern—the cattlemen and the rancher—and the Western, the mining interests. Well, we didn't have that. We didn't have any miners, and we didn't have much wealth. If there was any wealth, it was the cattlemen rather than preachers or school teachers.

DW: He was a leader outside of the—off the floor?

LS: Yes. They all look up to him. Archie Wilson, I think, as far as policy was concerned, was more of the leader of that movement. You take now, Mark Etchart, who was the chairman of one committee. He was at the convention and he's been in the Legislature, and he's the one who introduced that sagebrush business. Well, that's the sort of thing—I didn't realize at the time that he was quite as reactionary as he was. If he did fight against environmental legislation, I have no recollection of him talking. I'm sure of how he'd vote, but he didn't do much talking. Archie was the spokesman.
DW: He was? More for that group.

LS: Yes. I was going to tell just one other thing about Torrey. Every other week, we had a dinner at the Montana Club, and some of the wives would come over. [There was] just one that we could invite guests. It was just the delegates. The Montana Club had a good room, but it didn't have any large room where you could have unlimited numbers of people, like some of our hotels—the Colonial Hotel, for instance. There was always an entertainment committee, and some of the stunts put on those nights were really fun. [laughs] Clever as could be. I don't remember—I think Rick Champoux was probably responsible for some, and Jerry Cate and Bob Campbell from Missoula. I don't know who else. One of the entertainment features was usually Torrey and his banjo, singing those songs, and we could go on listening to him for indefinite length of time. He entertained us often at those things. As an example of those stunts, when we were—I suppose it was suffrage and elections—the article on suffrage and elections. They wanted to get the voter registration at the booth so that you could register, and I think it was (unintelligible) who had just passed that. That was one of the hottest subjects! I remember Grace Bates' was so absolutely—she was a prominent Democrat. She was positive that a person, if they wanted, could go around and vote four or five times! There was a severe penalty attached to voting twice. According to some of the states where they've done it, they've never had any problem. Anyway, they put on a stunt about that time at the dinner. Here was the voting booth, and people like Grace staggered up, you know, half drunk and wanted to register. All of these questionable characters came up. So it made it seem utterly ridiculous. It was really very funny. They'd take off on that sort of thing. Something from—that related to some of the debates that had been going on.

DW: I see. That would be the theme for that night.

LS: Yes. Of the stunt. Maybe they'd be three or four stunts, but they were really quite hilarious. I'd never been in a group thing where there was any wit that excelled like that. Oh, it was really fun.

DW: Oh, that's marvelous. I thought of one question that we've touched on a couple of times, Lucile, and there may not be more to add, but just checking. Did we talk about the hottest debates?

LS: Yes. May I start right here?

Well, the hottest debate—it's a little hard to narrow it down. I'd probably say that the one that went on the longest—for the length of that article—was the Environmental and Natural Resources. Louise Cross was the chairman of that. She came from a big ranch over in the eastern part of the state. She was very well-informed. She had a committee that was—it seemed as though most of her committee was not in sympathy with her stand—improving the environment. We had put in the Bill of Rights that we had the right to make a clean and healthful environment, and then in the environmental article, the state was to maintain a
healthful environment—clean environment. Land disturbed shall be restored to its original—well, I guess we had it first, to its original state. They debated that—the impossibility of carrying that out. It finally wound up we just said that it shall be restored. I think that was one of the hotly debated [issues]. It went on and on and on. I don't remember so many members of the committee. Louise was the chairman. She did an excellent job against terrific odds.

DW: She did quite a bit of the debating then?

LS: Yes! The majority. The vice chairman of the committee was Charley McNeil, a lawyer in Polson. He was just constantly trying to take over her job, and she had really a hard time dealing with her committee, because he would interfere. I know that she asked us to come to a meeting. We met at the—I can't remember what hotel it was, a room, and discussed it—those she knew were sympathetic to it. I will say that I didn't know much about the environmental, these environmental questions when I went there. There was no committee research work done on that, so that we didn't have any material to study. It was just what we, as individuals, information we had and our concern. We hadn't spent time, therefore, in our campaign on this matter.

Mae Nan [Robinson, later Ellingson] did excellent work on that. She was one of the very best debaters on that. The other person, I would say, was Arlene Reichert, who's been in our Senate for the last two years. Arlene Reichert was the best delegate. She was not as persuasive a debater as Mae Nan, but so far as her knowledge was concerned—her ability to speak on every subject—she was extremely well-informed. She knew procedure, and she was a person who went around getting signatures, support. Her particular enthusiasm was the unicameral legislature. She worked very hard on that, and she had at least 50 signatures on that. Actually, we did get that—there was so much support for it, that when the final decision on the ballot came, we put that—the bicameral and unicameral—on as alternative issues, and voters could choose whether they wanted to vote for unicameral and bicameral. We had, I have a sample of the ballot here. We had three voting—unicameral or bicameral, and the death penalty (for or against), and gambling (for or against).

Mae Nan was witty, quick, a sense of humor, and just as sharp as could be on the retort. [laughs] She could answer any of the delegates—experienced like Marshall Murray, or not. There wasn't anyone like her. There were lots of people in that convention who never got up to speak at all. The only time they spoke was when they had to present one section of their article, and never again did they speak. I spoke quite a bit, but I was not experienced in debate and I didn't know all the tricks. I had to prepare for it. Arlene was always turning around, saying, “Get up! Get up! You’re respected! They’ll listen to you.” [laughs] I wouldn't have anything new; it was just repeating. Leo had told us not to get up unless we had something new to say. I didn't like to, but I’d try to get something new. I think there were people who kind of watched how others voted, and so on the environmental, I did get up some, even though I had nothing new to add. I was glad to assert myself.
DW: Sure you would perhaps want to rely on another delegate's judgment on issues that you didn't know as much about, and they probably looked to each other occasionally in doing this.

LS: I think I could say that I did. I spoke quite frequently, or a good many times. To explain something. That didn't bother me because I could plan that. But be ready to debate back and forth, I had no experience in that. My brothers were never good at that.

DW: This wasn't a talent you developed.

LS: No.

DW: Did you have some notes that you wanted to cover, Lucile? Did we get through—

LS: I'd wanted to speak about some others—outstanding delegates. I mentioned some of the fine speeches. I suppose Wade Dahood, probably gave—was the finest orator of the convention.

DW: What was his name?

LS: Wade Dahood was a lawyer from Anaconda, and he was chairman of the Bill of Rights committee. The different members of the committee presented the different sections to them, but Wade stepped in and talked more often than many of the chairmen. For instance, Otto—Art Anderson, or Oscar, never said anything, and that was true of a lot of them. Wade did do it a great deal. I'm not sure on which section he made this famous [speech] when he really waxed eloquent. He just moved the whole crowd. I think it was either the Right to Know or the Right to Privacy—one of those new rights. I can remember how we cheered for him. When he came down, when the session closed and he came past George Heliker—and George was not very far from him—he said, “Well, even though you are a Republican, we'll support you for governor.” [laughs] We were so impressed by him. He really was a nice fellow.

Then there was the speech by Bob Kelleher, and he was a real character. Bob was from Billings, a lawyer, whose main interest was in getting the parliamentary form of government. He participated in the convention a good deal, but he gave his long speech on the parliamentary form of government. He gave a very eloquent speech. I don't know how long Leo let him talk, but it was a long, long time. I remember that Rich Roeder said he was the Demosthenes of the convention. Well, he was not the best orator. He was really not too good a speaker ordinarily, but he was really fired [up] for that. He spoke with passionate concern over that. He had taken a trip up to Alberta or one of the provinces over one of the long weekends. He introduced it and they took a vote on it, and he really scolded me for not supporting it. George Heliker did. I was not inclined to waste my vote. I should have really voted [for it], because I believe in it. I really do firmly believe in it. I don't know—I hadn't thought that far. You see, that was fairly early they came in [with] the legislative article.
The longest speech, I think, as given by Ralph Studer, who was from Billings, and he sat beside me. Probably was one of the most conservative men there, although, he was not generally interested in the issues of the convention—not very much. I wonder why he ran. He was a road contractor and pretty well-to-do, I guess. He wanted to get through, he wanted to get in the constitution, the Right to Work. So he finally got—I don't remember which article—Labor and Public Welfare, I think, or Public Health and Welfare, [Public Health, Welfare and Labor] I think, that he made the speech. He had behaved very well during the convention, and so Leo let him talk. He talked, and he talked, and he talked, and he talked interminably. Finally, Leo said, “Are you about through, Ralph?”

He said, “Well, I'll wind down, and I just have a little bit more.”

[End of tape]