

Newsletter116

Keith's Corner/McGill News

August 6, 2021

Gandy Dancers-1952

School was finally out for the summer and a bunch of us McGill heathens, were at the Nevada Northern depot, hoping to get on for the summer. We were 16 years old and too young to get on at KCC, but we heard that it was possible to work for N.N. at 16. We slowly made it into the office and filled out the necessary forms. We had to fill out a special form for a Social Security card and mail it. Two weeks later, to my surprise, I got two letters from the SS. Each one had a SS card. I called SS and was told that once a number was assigned it could not be revoked, and I was warned to only use one of them. About every 10 years I get a letter telling me the same thing. I still have the other card, but never used it. The clerk at the NN office, that gave me the card to send into the SS, had also sent in one for me.

After getting signed up at the office, we went out onto the tracks to meet the big boss. We were to lay a new section of track to be used as an inspection siding. Ore cars would be held there before going into the repair shop.

I think the boss was Mr. Mationi (sp) and our lead man was Gene Tognetti. We were told to report for work before 7 a.m. the next day, with gloves, hat and a lunch.

I left the next morning at 6 a.m. in my trusty 1941 Chevy coupe and picked up David Robb and Leonard Morrow. We were excited to be working as "gandy dancers".

Work started at the exact second the whistle blew and stopped at the second the whistle blew again, with a 10 minute break in the morning. That first day was a rough one, but most of us were used to hard work. I had worked on a ranch the previous summer and my buddies had done similar hard work. We had a lot to learn about laying new track.

The area for the new spur had been leveled and we started the process by dragging railroad ties onto the grade. We learned how to stick the edge of our small shovels into the tie, to pull it into position. The bosses made sure the ties were lined up correctly. We then dropped two tie plates at each tie.

The next step was to lay the rails on the ties. The rails were on a nearby flatcar. We rolled them off into the dirt, one at a time. I can still remember the sound they made. Kind of a twang. The older guys would spoof us to go and get a skyhook to lift the rails, but we knew better. The skyhook was two of us on a pair of tongs. With two men on each pair of tongs and 3 such pairs on each end of the rail, we carried the rail to the right spot and laid it on the ties. Then tie plates were placed under the rails, by using a spike puller to raise the rail. Then using the tongs again, we slid the rails until a small gap was between the ends of the rails. That gap is what makes the click-click sound of a moving train. The rails were then joined together by a steel plate on both sides of the rails and secured with heavy bolts.

Then, a gauge device was used to space the rails apart from each other. Next came the men to drive in the spikes with a spike maul.

The last step was to tamp the ties and level the rails. The boss would get down and sight along the rail and have us tamp the ties to raise the track up to level. It was hot, hard work, but we were young and adapted to it quickly.

One day, someone suggested that we have some fun. He had heard that the police were stopping cars at the west end of Ely for a spot safety check. We decided to have a safety check ourselves. The overpass was right above us. The plot thickened. There was a wooden sawhorse close by that had the words-"car inspection" on it. It was for the new siding we were putting in. We took it up on the overpass and proceeded to stop cars. Gene had an official looking white hard hat and a clipboard, so things did look official. The rest of us, asked the drivers to turn on lights etc, and then Gene would let them pass.

This sham only lasted about 15 minutes. Soon we heard several sirens coming our way and so we high tailed it down under the overpass with our inspection sign. A local cop came down and asked us if we had seen anybody stopping cars and of course we all played dumb.

The work was very hard and some of the older kids would play pranks on the younger ones, like asking them to go get a rail stretcher or a rail bender. There is such a thing as a bender, but no rail stretcher. A rail bender is a device that one puts on the last two feet of a rail and then with a large wrench you tighten a set of bolts that slowly bend the rail. These rails are used in crossings. Another gag, was to go find a left handed monkey wrench. However, there is just such a contraption. It is a wrench that has left handed threads so that a left handed person can use it comfortably. All in all it was an exciting summer of work and the pay was good. It was such a great feeling to work hard and see the result of that work. I still bring up those memories whenever I use the road to the dump by the golf course. The spur is still there and has lots of old railroad cars sitting on it.

The experience came into good use, two years later, when we went to work at KCC, starting on the bull gang and then moving up to the track gang.

It felt good to be qualified for a real man's job.

McGill News

Nothing happening in the old town. The fire department was cleaning up some kind of spill. Will find out and let you know.

I got a peek at the annual quilt show put on by the Sagebrush Quilters. Some very beautiful quilts of dazzling colors. A must see. Will be open at the old WPHS gym this Friday, Sat. and Sunday. A tremendous amount of hours and skill go into the making of these quilts.



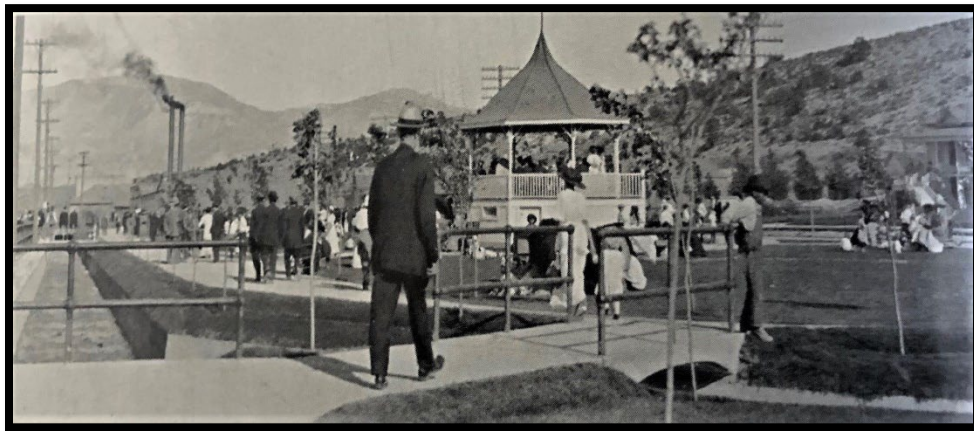
Sagebrush Quilters show 2019

Oldies

1910—June 9th—McGill schools reports total of 329 students attended classes.

1928—June 21—Stella Welde was a nurse at the Steptoe Hospital.

Old Photo



Gazebo and park across from the old WPHS, the smoke stacks are from the original Ely Light and Power Co. by the duck pond. Early 1900s