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# I. Index

## EDWARD SWENSON

Park; b. 1883

farmer, carpenter

.5 hour

minute page

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with Sam Schrage -  
July 5, 1974

## II. Transcript

Ed Swenson tells about a foolish miner from the Park country, about early mail service to the settlement, about the first alfalfa grown there, and about an accident that could have killed his father and its funny aftermath.

SAM SCHRAGER: Now, first is about the miner. I did want to get down what you remember about him, because a couple of people in Troy have mentioned him, this guy whose name was probably Nilson.<sup>1</sup> So what did you know about him from when he mined?

EDWARD SWENSON: Well he was a very modest, quiet man, and stayed by himself pretty much. He came to our place a few times and talked about his mining and his work down there. But he was not very clear in his ideas about things, so we didn't get very much of it. But he did do some drilling and blasting. He would sink a shaft instead of tunneling, and drill down a little ways, and then put in a small charge of dynamite and blast that loose and then clean that out and then drill down a little further. He never did go to any depth at all. If he didn't find gold where he was drilling, he'd shift over to some other place and start another little shaft there, sort of work around. But he finally gave it up, he began to get older and he gave it up. He'd come around and visit and talk about his place down there. He didn't do any plowing or clearing of land because his house was partway down the canyon. He built his house on a spot of level land and cleared a little for a few fruit trees and a garden, and that was about it. Then in later years we didn't hear more about him because we moved away from there, so I really don't know what happened.

SAM: What was the story that they told about him almost having an accident one time?

E S: Oh yes, at one time he was working in his mine and was down a few feet. And he didn't have much money to spend for dynamite and fuses so he cut his fuse pretty short, and he set the charge and he climbed out, but he fell back in again and almost didn't make it. He just got out in time to be saved on that. And that kind of frightened him so that he didn't go very deep with his work, and he finally quit it altogether.

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<sup>1</sup>According to Ed Swenson, this is the man Carl Olson refers to as the foolish miner from Park. See transcript of first Olson interview, Side B, minute 30.

SAM: And you also said that he was religious, he had some ideas about...

E S: Yes, he claimed that he would have revelations from God at times about how to live and how to do. And one day a strong wind came and the trees bent with the wind, and he said that God revealed to him there that we should be humble and bow our heads in reverence to God. (Pause.) At one time he came to my brother's place, and my brother asked him to stay overnight. He stayed into the evening so he decided to stay overnight. And then he told my brother that he was going to die that night. God had revealed to him that he was going to die. So he said goodbye to my brother before he went to bed. Next morning my brother looked into the bedroom and he was sleeping soundly. So my brother made a noise to kind of wake him up, and then he rushed over to the bed as though he was gonna carry him out of there. Nilson said, "Good morning," and my brother said he was surprised, he says, "I am surprised that you're still living..." (A truck roars by.)

SAM: He said what?

E S: He said, "I am surprised that you're still living, because you said that God was going to take you last night." So the man kind of smiled sheepishly and said that he wasn't going to go that time (laughs).

SAM: Oh that's a good story. So I guess he didn't take him too seriously.

E S: No, of course not. Often he'd make remarks, you know, that didn't have any meaning. But he was harmless. He had you might say friendship with all people, because he meant well and he never argued on a point to cause any hard feelings. So whenever he came to our place we'd ask him to stay awhile and have dinner with us and talk awhile, and he seemed to enjoy that. But he didn't mix into conversation about anything except just what he was doing and he felt.

SAM: Well I wanted to ask you too about how the alfalfa started getting grown in the country.

E S: Yeah. At first the farmers at Park didn't think alfalfa would grow there because the season was shorter. They knew that alfalfa did well down in the Lewiston valley. So one day one of my neighbors brought home a handful of seed, and he planted a little row in the garden there in the spring, and the alfalfa did very well. So then people began to buy seed and seed the land down to alfalfa for haying instead of oats. And after that they had alfalfa on the farms there.

SAM: So that was the beginning of it, just this little...

E S: Yeah, just a little bit of a row of alfalfa. I can remember he was so proud, he was the first man that had alfalfa on his farm.

SAM: Who was he?

E S: Steiner Hellerud. He was an uncle to Helmer and Steiner.

SAM: Another thing that you mentioned to me once before was about the beginnings of the post office in Park, how that came about. Could you tell me that?

E S: Yes, at first we got our mail over on Texas Ridge at a place called Anderson post office. There was a little grocery store there. And eventually then after the valley began to get settled and people wanted a way to get the mail a little closer, so they called a meeting in the schoolhouse and discussed this matter, and then they applied to the government to get a post office. And they submitted the name Park post office because the valley looked so much like a park. And this was accepted and a Park post office was established then. So then twice a week somebody would volunteer to go over to Anderson to pick up the mail and bring it over to Park valley. And one of the neighbors was appointed to distribute the mail, so those days when the mail was brought in we would go over there and get our mail. At that time there was no parcel post system, so it was just the first class mail and a few newspapers and things like that. So the mail could be brought on one horse.

SAM: This man then became the postmaster?



E S: A man name Andrew Hellerud was the postmaster. And this carried on until eventually a little store was built up there and then the post office was moved over to there. So they had the mail there. And then the route was changed over to Southwick, Idaho, so our address was to Southwick, Idaho, and the mail was brought and a rural route was established. So that part of that route between Park and Southwick was where a little post office was established at the farm site on Cedar Creek. And the Park mail was brought over that far, and then a rider would go over to that place to get the mail and bring it to Park. And boxes was put up along the route so that he would deliver the mail on that end of the route, between there and Park post office. The name of that little place was Linden post office. And the mail was opened there and the Park mail was put in a separate mailbag to be sent to Park.

SAM: When was that switch made about, do you know?

E S: That would be along about 1907 or along in there.

SAM: Was much trading ever done with Kendrick from Park?

E S: Well the people living in that part of the valley closer to Kendrick would go there to do their shopping, but most of it went to Troy.

SAM: Well I have one more thing to ask you about, and that is I'd like you to tell me a little about why you are so interested in history and how you happen to remember so much of the old days.

E S: Well I was the youngest boy in our family, and I stayed with my parents as I grew up and spent so much more time at Park and in the district surrounding there, so that I can remember how the environment changed from time to time. And I often think back to those times so that it kept fresh in my memory. Until we moved away in the fall of 1910; after that time there has been many changes made so that the valley really doesn't look like it was at first there.

SAM: But you have spent quite a bit of time thinking about it in later years.

E S: Yes. After my wife died in the year 1955 I was more lonesome, and when I

had idle time I would begin to think back more about the early days and up to that time, and that is how I can remember it.

SAM: Do you feel that before you left Park that these changes in the environment were small changes?

E S: Yes, things didn't change very much during those years. The original homesteaders were almost all there, and the work carried on didn't change much from year to year. But after the Potlatch Company had taken the timber out and times began to get better, then some of the oldtimers moved to other places. They sold their land because other people came that wanted to settle in there, and brought in more machinery and livestock. And some of the oldtimers had died, so the neighborhood began to change hands there from year to year.

SAM: Can you remember the names of the first homesteading families that were in Park when you arrived?

E S: Yes, you mean the ones that were living there when we came? There were two brothers, Andrew Hellerud and Steiner Hellerud, and their sister married my oldest brother, and he came West just about a year after the Helleruds settled there. Then the other homesteaders there at that time was Ole Torgeson and Mr. Jelleberg and family and Pete Enger, he was a bachelor or single man at that time, and Henry Jurgensen, a bachelor, and Mr. Goldstrom, I do not remember his given name. Mr. Goldstrom and Mr. Jurgensen were the first two men that ever came to Park. They were miners, or did I mention that?

SAM: You told me about them. I'd also like to know if you can remember who the families were that came soon after you came.

E S: After we came there, that would be Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Bohn and family, and Mr. Requa, I can't remember his first name...And Mr. and Mrs. Lars Cohn, before that they farmed out that Genesee Valley, and Tom Elingson, a bachelor, Mr. and Mrs.--I don't remember their first name, but their last name was

Torgeson also. And Edward Ruberg. Eling Guningsrud was one of the oldtimers, and I believe that was all.

SAM: Would you be willing to draw up a list of these names for me when you get back down to southern Idaho so we can have the spellings right?

E S: Yes.

SAM: That would be very good. If you send that to Viola (his daughter), well I'll get it from her.

E S: Send it up here and you could get it.

SAM: Yes, yes.

E S: I'll do that.

SAM: OK. There's just one more question that I think I have, and that is, did other families besides your father work out in Genesee Valley?

E S: Oh yes, nearly all of them had to get a grubstake, you know.

SAM: Is the reason that they worked there because they spoke Norwegian in Genesee Valley too?

E S: Yes, that was a Norwegian settlement.

SAM: Were there many people that were related to people from there or who knew them from the older times?

E S: I can't say about that. You mean as a neighborhood there?

SAM: Yeah, like families that were related from one to the other.

E S: No, I can't remember that there were, because I never knew of any two families that had the same name, so they must have been people from other parts of the East or West.

SAM: Did other people from Park who came to Park come as you did, because they had relatives in Park?

E S: Not so many. The later settlers that came in there had different names and were from different parts...

(Break)

...And just put some posts in the ground and put a pole roof on and shakes. The sides were still open. It was just to kind of keep the snow off of the wood, you know. So he and my older brothers were gonna kind of remodel it once. In doing that one of 'em had taken off a brace that supported the framework there. Father was underneath the roof there, just about in the center of the shed, along a big post there. And the shed started weaving and fell. And father fell--it so happened he fell right alongside of this post. That saved his, perhaps his life. And my older brothers, right away they tore open the roof to get father out. Well a neighbor named Ole Sunby was breaking up the first piece of land that was broke on that place, about an acre of ground. He was breaking there close by. And he saw, he looked back and saw the woodshed laying flat on the ground, and they were taking father out. And he came running, but by the time he got there, father was on his feet and wasn't injured. So he and Mr. Sunby was always teasing each other, so father said, "What are you coming for now," she says, "you are too late to do anything." Father had a pair of new shoes on, and Ole said, "I didn't come to help you," he said, "I thought maybe I could get your shoes." (Laughs.) That was a lot of sympathy, wasn't it?

SAM: I suppose they joked with each other a lot in those days.

E S: Oh yeah, yeah, they sure did. They sure did. Those that knew each other pretty well and knew their habits and their ways of doing, and knew that they could take a joke, why then they'd sure lay it on sometimes. (Chuckles.)