

# Deone Skewes

**Interviewed by Jean McDowell in Moab, July, 2003.**

**Q: Were you here during the boom times?**

A: I lived in Salt Lake but I never left Moab. Really, I always came back here.

**Q: So were you born in the Grand Old Ranch House?**

A: No, I was not. My mother was. That was her childhood home. But I never did live there. As a young girl she lived there.

**Q: Were you born in Moab?**

A: Yes, I was. I was born in Moab in 1920 and that summer and fall we were the first bunch of babies born in Moab to a new doctor called Dr. Allen.

**Q: Oh. Allen Memorial Hospital.**

A: Yes. And at that time, the hospital was just a large white house where the tourist station is. The big hotel. Down on the corner.

**Q: Near Pasta Jay's [ a restaurant located on the southwest corner of Main Street and Center Street]?**

A: In that area. Yes. And, the hospital was just a big white house.

**Q: I think we have a picture of it. Along with a baby that was in an incubator with a 25-watt bulb.**

A: Probably, yes. And, Dr. Allen came down here. He didn't plan to stay. He was going to come down here and he figured it was a good place to get a lot of good experience. He was out of medical school and so he was going to come down here and stay for a year but he never left.

**Q: And they named the hospital after him?**

A: They named the new hospital after him.

**Q: So you grew up to know him, I suppose.**

A: Oh yes. His son and his step children were good friends of mine. We were life-long friends as kids, you know, and still are -- the ones of us who are still left.

**Q: So your mother was Lydia Skewes.**

A: Yes. She was Lydia Taylor Skewes.

**Q: Sam Taylor's cousin? Or your first cousin?**

A: Yes. Sam and I are first cousins. His dad and my mother were brother and sister. So, Sam and I go back a long way too.

**Q: Just you and your sister, Elaine Peterson? Were you the only children?**

A: No, Mother had five children. Our one sister, Madge, is not living now and our two brothers do not live here. One lives in Texas..

**Q: He's the one who gave us the gun.**

A: He's the one who gave you the guns. And, the other brother lives in Bountiful.

**Q: So you see them every now and then?**

A: Well, not really often, because we are all getting too old to get up and go anywhere.

**Q: I think the Texas gun-giver did come up again. Either last year ..**

A: He tries to come every year, in October. Well, he just comes to visit. He misses Moab. He was born and raised here and he loved it and he didn't leave until the 1930s during the depression and there was no work for people so he found work in -- well he fell in love with a little school teacher here from Texas. So they went back to Texas where he could find some work 'cause there certainly wasn't any here at that time.

**Q: So he did find it there?**

A: Yes. But he is a young 92 and he still comes every year to check things out and see how we all are.

**Q: Well, you are quite the piano player. Were you a professional piano player or teacher?**

A: Well, I taught but I did not teach piano. I did to a few kids in Moab but I didn't do it as a living or anything. But I did play a lot and I have played professionally and I did teach music in the schools.

**Q: Well, we appreciate the piano you gave the museum that was brought over on the ferry.**

A: Yes, that was the first piano in Moab.

**Q: And were you a teacher of something else .. not of piano but ...?**

A: I taught first, second, third and fourth grades. I also taught music, singing and instrumental music. I taught for 35 years in the Granite School District in Salt Lake.

**Q: Oh, that's where you were.**

A: When I went up there to the University I got a job and I stayed there but I never really left Moab. Moab was always home.

**Q: So you just checked in here quite regularly?**

A: Yes. Yes, I did.

**Q: Well, I guess if you were visiting you were aware of what it was like in the boom times?**

A: Oh yes. It was bad, you know. But it's not much different than it is now because

there is still an influx of people. You still wait in lines at the store and the Post Office.

**Q: And you had a house all along, didn't you?**

A: Yes.

**Q: So housing was not a problem for you.?**

A: No. But it was for a lot of people.

**Q: I gather that it was and that a lot of these trailers came in at that time that are still here.**

A: That's right. Yes, I know when I was a kid, we didn't even have any keys to our house. My folks would come to Salt Lake when I was in school there. Never locked their doors. Everything was just fine, you know. You wouldn't do that this day and age.

**Q: Well, I've gotten in that habit of not locking the door. Do you know where Juniper is...?**

A: Yes.

**Q: Out near the golf course but it is a dead end street sort of thing. I am probably getting careless.**

A: It's a good idea to lock your doors. The things I read, I lock my doors.

**Q: You are younger than your sister?**

A: Yes, Elaine is now 94. She will be 95 this year. In fact, this month. And I am 12 years younger than she is. I will be 83 in September.

**Q: Well, it seems that time goes by.**

A: It really does. It goes in a hurry.

**Q: So what do you think of Moab now? You said you still have lines to wait in and that it is sort of the same.**

A: Yes. I don't like it as well as I did when I was a kid. Even though it is still not large, it is large compared to what it was. It used to be about 800 people when I was a kid growing up. Everybody knew everybody in town and all their business. Names of their horses and dogs and the whole thing, you know. But it was a real fun place to grow up.

**Q: So did it become less fun to visit when you came back to visit it during the uranium times?**

A: No. No. It wasn't. You know, it was like any boom town. I think lots of people heard there was lots of work and lots of money to be found here and there wasn't.

**Q: I suppose it depends on if you were in it? I was talking with Maxine Newell who, evidently, her husband was an engineer and she had just one big party.**

A: Well, they had a big party every year

**Q: Well, not just a big party. But it was a social situation where every night they would meet together at what is now the Nifty Fashion's -- sort of over there somewhere. There was a ballroom or something.**

A: I don't know.

**Q: The one that is across from the MIC parking lot. You know where the Nifty Fashions is ... seems like there is a big open space in back of that that I thought must be sort of a place to dance and have fun. I don't know.**

A: I don't know at all.

**Q: Oh well. Did you come here on weekends when you lived in Salt Lake?**

A: Yes. And holidays.

**Q: So your mother was still living then?**

A: Yes, she was. And then, she left her home to me, and Elaine and my other sister Madge were still here so I would always come back. So I would just lock this house and go back to Salt Lake when I still working there.

**Q: So you had two homes?**

A: Yes. And I had a place to live down here so I did not have to worry about motel reservations and all that stuff.

**Q: Did you drive back and forth?**

A: Yes.

**Q: So, do you miss Salt Lake?**

A: Not really. I miss the area I lived in. You know. But Salt Lake is big and it was even smoggy when I lived there.

**Q: Oh, the inversion that they often have.**

A: I still have good friends there but I don't really want to live there.

**Q: Well, if Sam Taylor is your cousin, I guess you kept touch over all the years with the newspaper? Did you ever get involved with the newspaper?**

A: No. No I didn't.

**Q: So what years were you in Salt Lake? You graduated from college and stayed there?**

A: I went there in 1934 and I graduated from the U in 1938. No. I graduated from the U in 1942. And then I stayed there and worked until I retired. But I always came back home.

**Q: So you came here as soon as you retired?**

A: Yes. I still had a lot of friends here and family.

**Q: What did you major in?**

A: Music and art and education.

**Q: Do you paint? Is that your painting?**

A: Yes, I painted these pictures, yes.

**Q: It looks as though you paint local scenery, if those are both yours. Nice.**

A: Yes. They are all over. I was a Saturday painter

**Q: So you left your paints here in Moab?**

A: Oh no, I would take them back with me - back and forth. But I never did paint here because oil painting is not for Moab climate. It's either too hot or too cold. The wind blows sand in your paint . There are insects so what you do is take pictures and slides or even a picture you like on a calendar and then paint at the kitchen table. That's what I used to do.

**Q: That's handy.**

A: So, after a few years of that I decided I didn't want to do this anymore so I gave my paints away.

**Q: Oh, no. Well, maybe it was just the time.**

A: Yeah. You know there is a time for everything. You finally just give up.

**Q: Oh well, I don't know about that. Since you retired, what's that time been for you?**

A: Not much of anything. I used to play the piano quite a bit for things. I used to play at the Pack Creek Ranch for their Sunday night dinners, evenings. But I don't do that anymore.

**Q: I think you played for the Museum one time. At one of our first sort of annual meetings.**

A: I think I finally did. Yes.

**Q: Do you want to do it again?**

A: No, I tell you old age has set in and I have Parkinson's and with that you can't control your hands and that is important if you play the piano or anything else.

**Q: You do have a little shaking.**

A: Very shaky if I miss my medication.

**Q: So it does control it? The medication?**

A: It pretty well does control it, you know. Up to a point. When I miss my medication, I know it. I know it's missing.

**Q: So when you were out at Pack Creek, was that with Ken Sleight? Or with the**

**previous owner?**

A: Yes. Ken and Jane. And, strange how that began. They were having a big Thanksgiving dinner out there and I was invited so a lot of us were peeling potatoes and doing all this work toward the dinner and someone asked me to play, so I played while they worked. And, then after that I started playing up there every Sunday at the dinner in the evenings. That was fun.

**Q: I trust they paid you for it?**

A: No. I wouldn't take any money so they said I couldn't do it anymore. So, if I wouldn't so I said, "Let's not do that"

**Q: Did they feed you?**

A: Yes. I said, "Why don't I just have dinner and we'll call it square?" So that's what we did.

**Q: Well, that was certainly a good deal for them. Did you play all through the dinner hour?**

A: Yes. Usually played for two or three hours Sunday evenings and once in a while somebody would come up and ask me to play something, Stardust or whatever, and leave a nice tip on the piano. One of the waiters put a big goblet and I said, "No you can't do that. I don't want that here at all." So I took the money container off the piano and that is kind of like asking people to put something in there and I didn't want them to. So, we got rid of that and so they would just talk to me and under their hand might be a nice bill, or something you know, so that was okay, you know. But I didn't want people to think

they were supposed to do that.

**Q: Well, they probably assumed you were paid by the Sleights, as far as that goes.**

A: Probably.

**Q: So, what sort of music do you like?**

A: Well, you know I look at it this way, I got the practice and I got the dinner so I was coming out ahead.

**Q: So you play anything? Are you a classical pianist?**

A: Yes. All through school I took classical and I did, up to a few years ago, play classical music as well as pop tunes and jazz and all that.

**Q: Do you play by ear?**

A: Yes. But I also play by note.

Q: So this fellow who asked you to play Stardust...you could just go ahead and play it?

A: Yes. Go ahead and play it. I would have a hard time remembering what to play so I had this little book and I would write down everything I played so I could remember and just refer to the book.

**Q: You had the name of it?**

A: Then I put it in alphabetical order and I had about 300 songs there that I could play and I just looked at my little note book. Finally one man and his wife were sitting by the piano having their dinner and he asked me to play a certain thing and his wife said, “No. Don’t do it because, don’t you see she is playing in alphabetical order and she will get to it pretty soon.”

**Q: Oh no! She saw your list**

A: She saw the note book and the list. She said, “She will get to it.”

**Q: And you did?**

A: And I did. Yeah. Those were fun days.

**Q: Did you have any interaction with the agencies, the park or the BLM?**

A: No, I didn’t.

**Q: Do you like to go hiking or riding or...?**

A: No, I haven’t done anything like that since I was a kid. I haven’t the whatever it takes. It’s too hot, I’m too old and I have emphysema and asthma so I am no hiker.

**Q: Well, had you been?**

A: Oh, when I was younger, we lived in the hills.

**Q: Where did you like to go? Any place in particular?**

A: Oh, just climb all over the hills. Mother had some binoculars and she could check on us and see that we got clear to the top and then we would come back. But, we had to entertain and amuse ourselves, you know.

**Q: Well, I think people like you did. Seems so often we don't have things for the teenagers to do. Well, they used to do whatever they did before without it being \_\_\_\_\_.** Well, there is just a lot of nice country around here. Just to wander.

A: Yes, it is. You bet.

**Q: Well, did you know people like Bill Meador?**

A: Oh yes.

**Q: Was he School Superintendent when you were here?**

A: Oh no. He was a little boy in school.

**Q: Oh, he was?**

A: Yes.

**Q: He had a brother named Junior? He must have been older.**

A: Junior was near my age. But Junior was younger than I am. They had Junior who was the oldest, then there was Bill and Donna Jean, and I don't know whether Donna

Jean is older than Bill or Bill is older than Donna Jean. I just don't know.

**Q: I guess I haven't met Donna Jean.**

A: Well, she is married to Robert Reid. They live out in Spanish Valley . She is Donna Reid.

**Q: I can't remember why I went there. I think it had something to do with the Museum. They were nice folks.**

A: Yes. They have a large place out in the Valley there.

**Q: Well, this neighborhood is pretty much the same as it has always been?**

A: Quite a bit. It has changed though. On the corner this vacant lot, used to be the old Goodman home. And I'm just sorry there isn't a picture of that.

**Q: The one the library is going to have?**

A: Yes. That corner was Mr. Goodman's lot.

**Q: Well, I know Rusty has investigated Mr. Goodman. He must have been quite a character.**

A: He was a character. He was a funny man and he didn't even mean to be funny. But, he was a cattleman and he and his friend, Harry Green, came to Moab. They married two girls from Colorado, Dolores around there. I think it was called Northdale, Colorado. It was a little wide spot in the road. And Mr. Goodman married Louise, Mary Louise,

and Mr. Green married Annie. And, they each had a nice home here.

**Q: Where did the Greens live?**

A: Mr. Green was one of the founder's of Moab's First National Bank.

**Q: He was the banker that supposedly carried a gun?**

A: Yes. That was Harry Green. And, so they were two of the towns pillars. My grandfather also was. He built the big Ranch House down there -- or had it built.

**Q: Well, then your father was the Sheriff?**

A: Yes. Dad was a newcomer though. He came from California.

**Q: Oh. An outsider.**

A: This was in the early 1900s. He and his father were interested in the big Indian mines.

**Q: Oh, he was involved in that?**

A: Yes. And he met Mother.

**Q: The Indian mines, when there were copper mines out here?**

A: Yes.

**Q: Not the uranium?**

A: No, uranium they didn't even know about then. They knew about it but they didn't think it was worth anything.

**Q: Well, we have pictures of the copper mine established when it sounds as though they got it all fired up but it never produced a lot of copper.**

A: It didn't. It wasn't too successful. I know there was Senator Smoot, Sen. Reed Smoot, way back and his brother Harlow, who they called Brownie, and they were friends of Dad's. Dad was sort of a foreman out there.

**Q: Was he also Sheriff at the same time?**

A: Not at the same time. He became Sheriff a little later.

**Q: According to Grand Memories or something, he led this hazardous life as a Sheriff and then he was out climbing in the orchard and he fell.**

A: Out in back of the house. He was up in a tree, pruning at the ripe old age of 72 and Mother went out to tell him to stop it and get out of that tree immediately. She went back into the house and apparently he fell out of the tree. Two little school boys saw him fall out of the tree.

**Q: Did the fall kill him or did he have a heart attack?**

A: They don't know whether he had a heart attack and fell and broke his neck or whether he had a heart attack in the tree and ... they didn't know which came first, you know.

Anyway, these two little boys, I believe one of them was Tom Stocks came running in our back door to the telephone. Mother didn't know what these kids were doing in her house.

**Q: Were you there?**

A: No, I was in Salt Lake. And, of course, they were calling the equivalent of 911, whatever that was then, you know. But that's what happened to Dad.

**Q: So, Dr. Allen came over to see him.**

A: Oh, you bet. Dr. Allen made house calls.

**Q: Was your mother worried about his being a Sheriff ?**

A: Oh yes. There were some pretty touch and go things happen here. You know there, at one time, there were two escaped prisoners from the penitentiary, they were also murderers. They were in there for murder and robbery. They escaped and came down here. Dad caught them and things like that you would be bound to worry. But he had some wonderful experiences.

**Q: So how long was he Sheriff, more or less?**

A: I think over 22 years.

**Q: Oh quite a while. So he was out at the copper mine before that?**

A: Yes. That was early on, you know. Before 1910.

**Q: Was he an Engineer?**

A: No, he wasn't.

**Q: So, do you have any dogs or cats or birds?**

A: No. Allergic to feathers, fur all that sort of thing.

**Q: But you have plants?**

A: I have plants and cross words, you know.

**Q: You like cross word puzzles?**

A: I don't have pets. You just get attached to them and you die.

**Q: Well, you got any comments to make about Moab at this stage ?**

A: Well, not really. Not really. I will say it is not like it used to be.

**Q: Well, it sounds like when it used to be so small that everybody knew everybody and trusted everybody.**

A: Yes.

**Q: What about the economy? Lots of t-shirt shops and have you gotten involved with the people in the river running or the biking?**

A: They didn't bike then.

**Q: No, but I mean now. Are you involved?**

A: Not in a thing.

**Q: Do you think it is a good thing to have instead of mining,**

A: Well, there is going to be something.

**Q: Well, there has gotta be something.**

A: And, I guess the biking is alright.

**Q: As far as the Council members, three or five or seven,, County Council Members, do you care how many there are?**

A: No, I really don't. Because they will do whatever they want whether I like it or not.

**Q: Oh well, you can vote for the ones you like.**

A: Oh, I always vote.

**Q: Oh that's good.**

A: Yes. I always vote.

**Q: So you are in the City so you vote for the City people too?**

A: Yes.

**Q: Well, both the City and the County have gotten managers since the early days. So, I suppose any town that gets big enough they have to have somebody to run things. Aside from the elected people who make the decisions.**

A: Well, I suppose.

**Q: It's nice to have a business manager, I guess.**

A: I can remember the days when people did that sort of thing for no salary and just out of civic pride.

**Q: And I suppose, maybe the council members divided up the chores of what to do and did it.**

A: Yes. Those days are gone.

**Q: How do you explain that?**

A: I don't know. Maybe it's called growth, I don't know.

**Q: Do you think the people have changed as far as free work?**

A: Some individuals have changed a lot, you know.

**Q: Well, you played the piano for free, except you played for dinner, but outside of that...**

A: Well, but I do remember that commissioners and people used to do a lot of things just for money for postage and stationery.

**Q: Maybe there was just a job to be done and they did it.**

A: And people did it. Yes. I think a lot of people get salaries for other people used to just donate their time.

**Q: I wonder why that is?**

A: Well, maybe you can call it greed, I don't know.

**Q: Well, is that what you would call it?**

A: I didn't say that now.

**Q: Are you a church going person?**

A: No. I just stay home.

**Q: So. Some people think this is a Mormon community. Do you have Mormon roots at all?**

A: Well, really yes. I'm not a Mormon, but my mother was.

**Q: Oh really. What about your father?**

A: Oh, he was not a Mormon. No. He wasn't ... he didn't have any religious affiliation, however, he was a Mason.

**Q: Did Elaine become a Mormon?**

A: Well, she always was but she was never active until she was an adult and then she became quite active in it.

**Q: Was your mother quite active?**

A: Well, in a way. Sometimes she was and sometimes she wasn't. It depended on what she had to do, I suppose.

**Q: What made you decide not to become active?**

A: Well, I am too much of a doubting Thomas. I ask too many why's.

**Q: A skeptic.**

A: How come this and how come that?

**Q: Well, I think that is great.**

A: And so, I didn't do well in churches.

**Q: Were you asked to leave? And not disrupt things?**

A: No. No. I would just leave myself because I didn't want to stay. And I remember as a little kid I used to.. We had two churches and I used to prefer one over the other and I suppose I wasn't supposed to go to the one I preferred.

**Q: I suppose that was the Baptist?**

A: Yes, and so I didn't go at all. If I couldn't go to the one I wanted to, I wouldn't go at all. So I didn't.

**Q: Did you find any problems with playmates or parties or anything?**

A: No. As kids, we were a mixed neighborhood but we all got along just fine. Then on Sundays, they would go to their own churches and what not but I played with the Baptist kids as much as I did with the Mormon kids.

**Q: So they didn't have their own sort of social clubs or anything that excluded you?**

A: No.

**Q: You didn't have that feeling?**

A: I always seemed welcome. When I would come they made me feel very welcome.

**Q: Well, great. Sounds like you had a perfect life.**

A: So. The Parks' were Baptists. Their dad was the minister. And I was a good friend of all three of their boys, you know.

**Q: I didn't know the Parks or had not heard of them.**

A: Well, that's way back, you know. Sixty years, I guess, or more. They were a nice family and the Baldwin kids were Baptist. So was my friend, Walter Shutt, on the corner, Mr. Goodman's grandson. And, so as kids I don't think we, the kids I went around with, were too involved in church.

**Q: Well, maybe it was just the times that they weren't so much then as they might be now.**

A: I don't know.

**Q: Oh well. So you said Walter Shutt. There used to be some people named Waltersheid out on the highway, Betty Waltersheid.**

A: No, this was Walter Shutt. Teddy Goodman married a man named Mr. Shutt from....

**Q: And his first name was Walter? OK.**

A: And so she had a little boy about my age. We were close in age. She named him Walter and his last name was Shutt. And he and his mother, his mother and father divorced so Walter lived with his mother and his Grannie Goodman and Mr. Goodman. Mrs. Goodman was one of the founder's of the Moab Literary Club here.

**Q: Oh she was?**

A: Yes. And she used to always call her husband Mr. Goodman.

**Q: I guess that was the way it was done in those days.**

A: I guess so. It was really funny. She would say, “Mr. Goodman, would you do this?”

**Q: Were you in the Literary Club?**

A: Oh no. I was a little kid.

**Q: I thought it evolved into the Moab Literary Club, because they finally lasted a hundred years and they gave us all their minutes. They gave it to the Museum. I thought they turned into just the Moab Women’s Club.**

A: I don’t know. I have no idea.

**Q: It seems that the Literary Club, supposedly, helped found the Museum.**

A: They probably did. But I have never been a club person or a joiner.

**Q: You were just a free soul?**

A: Yes. I don’t like regulations and I don’t like to be at a certain place at a certain time. And feel that I have to do this, you know. I guess you can call it laziness.

**Q: Oh, I don’t think so. It sounds like a free spirit. So you must have evolved**

**some philosophy of life.**

A: Well, I don't know whether I have or you just try to live and let live.

**Q: Well, maybe that's it. Live and let live and you go your own way. But your way led back to Moab.**

A: Yes. Oh, I wouldn't want to live anywhere but here. I really wouldn't.

**Q: So why is that?**

A: I just don't know. I think because I have had such good memories here and a lot of friends and, few of them are still hanging around.

**Q: Yeah. I think it is really great. People talk about resale value and I say, "I don't want to sell. Somebody else's problem."**

A: I will let somebody else worry about that.

**Q: So you will be having a library on the corner?**

A: It's what they say.

**Q: So, doesn't Elaine live right next to you?**

A: Elaine lives in the house closest to the corner. This little house in the middle here, belongs to Elaine. It used to be a rental house. She didn't want to be a landlady any longer and I didn't either. So we just keep our things in there. Our junk.

**Q: Well, it's nice to have your own storage unit.**

A: Yes,

**Q: I think people would ask you, real estate people would be after you , when are you going to sell it?**

A: Well, quite a number of people come by and inquire about that house.

Q: It's a nice location.

A: And it's a cute little rental house.

**Q: You don't want to bother? You would have all that stuff to take care of.**

A: Yes. What would we do with our things. So, we will just let somebody else worry about that.

Q: Well, we know your specific reason for being in Moab and what brought you here. Here is a question. How has the influx of newcomers and their ideas, impacted the town's social structures? Have the newcomers, and their ideas, had any impact on you?

A: No, not really.

**Q: So you don't worry about it?**

A: I really don't because what will be will be. And what I say wouldn't matter anyway.

And, you know, there are young people who are willing to take this business on because, you know, others of us get too old to do it.

**Q: Well, I think that is a fine statement and maybe we will just close with that.**



