

A Summer of Fun

By Pete Clark

The Hams Fork River flows south toward the Green River a little east of Kemmerer, Wyoming, in what is now Lincoln County. I had the privilege and joy of working out of Kemmerer during the summer of 1957. Kemmerer was and is now a solidly Mormon community and the Mormons are very family oriented. The church sponsored many youth activities in a fairly successful attempt at keeping the town's teenagers from getting into trouble. Although I am not a member of the church I took advantage of some of the opportunities, especially the Friday night dances, held on the second floor of a building on the west side of the triangle that configures the layout of downtown Kemmerer.

Like many places in Wyoming, coal built Kemmerer, incorporated in 1911, and its satellite towns of Frontier to the north and Diamondville to the south. The two other towns were founded as company towns in 1896. Diamondville was named for the high quality anthracite coal that came from its mine, looking like sparkling black diamonds. Frontier grew up around a mine but was never incorporated. Underground coal mining in Wyoming died out during the mid-Twentieth Century and was replaced by the more efficient, but environmentally destructive, strip mining. Kemmerer received a reprieve when a coal powered generator was built outside of town in 1963 and a strip mine was opened to fuel the furnaces. With the generator converting to cheaper, cleaner natural gas, coal mining at Kemmerer is once again in its death throes.

While in Kemmerer I made a few purchases at the original J. C. Penney Store. Penney had opened the store in 1903 as the first Golden Rule Store. At the time I was in Kemmerer Mr. Penney's home still stood across the street from the north corner of the Triangle. When my daughter Lori and I were there last summer, his home was gone.

I enjoyed a trip to Fossil Butte where I dug for fossil fish with a couple of geologists from the crew and I found a perfect fossil about four inches long. Fossil Butte is now a national monument so fossil fish can no longer be collected there. That is why Lori and I went there last year. I wanted to visit the place one more time, even if I could only look from a distance.

I had a lot of fun the summer of '57, enjoying the company of the people I worked with and people from the town. A friend and I sometimes went to the passion pit, otherwise known as a drive-in theater, at Evanston. One weekend we saw a double feature of *Invasion of the Saucer Men* and Michael Landon in *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*. We also had a lot of fun swimming in the Hams Fork River. The river had eroded a semicircular spot on the west bank just deep enough for good swimming when the river wasn't carrying the spring runoff. Skinny dipping at midnight was a whole new experience.