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Interview with Elmo Lewis 12/4/84
By Charles Dallas
Old Davis Grocery Store, 501 East Simpson

What do you recall about that building? Well, as I recall the building, the first that is in my memory is coming in contact with a man by the name of J. S. Morgan. He ran a grocery store, the J. S. Morgan Mercantile Company and he had everything in there. What year was this? I came in contact with him in about 1918. I lived in the town before that but that was when I got to know those people. So, anybody that was in there before that time, I don't remember. I remember other things in that part of the town, but I don't remember anybody in there except J. S. Morgan.

Of course, as you mentioned before, there was a harness or horse - buggy and tack - in there. Before J. S. Morgan, Abernathy, I understand he's the one that was supposed to have built it. So, they'd have had to had that in there until after the Grand Store burned down. And after the Grand Store, which was a big department store, burned down - it was a two story building. Elias came over there and opened up a grocery store. So, in surmising, that's what I'd say, he came in there and he ran it and then his son-in-law, D. J. Burns, came in and he ran it up till about 1923. And then he ran it up to about the start of the depression. We had a strike here - a 1927 strike, a miners' strike for a couple of years - they called it the Wobbly Strike. And so he'd give them credit and the Wobblies guaranteed the credit of it and that wasn't any good. And so he sold it to Davis and Davis moved out here and he ran it until the middle of the '40s and then his son took over, who was Horace Davis and then he ran it up until the '50s. Horace Davis ran the store until the '50s. Yes, until the '50s. Then after that, after Horace left, I've lost track now. So many came in that I've lost track of the ownership and who was in there.

When did Horace Davis put the addition on the back of the building? L. M. Davis did. It was after he got in there and after he built up. He built a small chain of stores and he needed more room for storage. So, I would say the time he put that addition on was the last part of, oh about 1933, 34. Cause it was there when I ran the grocery store in Louisville for him. I could be off by a year or two. The purpose of adding it on was to make more room because he had these six stores in the area.

When did he put the bank vault in there? The bank went broke in the depression times and there was some consolidation in there. It was in the first part of the '30s.

Where was the bank? It was up on the, where they have a two story building there now - you know where the lot is up on south Simpson Street, you know the two story one - you know the empty lot west of there, you know the new building that's just a block from your place? That empty lot that's to the west of it? That's where the bank was. The bank came in on the street, on an angle, you know like this. That's where he got the vault off the bank there. That safe that you have there could be a real old one because they had two of those back in 1913 when they had the five year strike. And the bank was in there at that time and that bank went broke. And the safe could have been kept in there. Somebody could have kept it in there because I remember after

the bank went broke, I remember they had an icecream parlor in there. Some Greeks did. And also a pool hall. So, the safe could have been left there from the bank going broke at that time. And kept with the building and the safe didn't come out until, of course, Davis bought it.

Do you remember, another fellow by the name of Jack, I don't know what his full name is, he was telling me that his wife lived here all her life and she remembers somebody blowing up the bank. And they used too much explosives or something and just blew the money all over the place. That's right, they did and the kids in town went to pick up a lot of gold pieces. They picked up those \$5.00 gold pieces. And they'd go to Callahan's Grocery Store and buy candy bars. I don't know how much they got away with. But I know that Callahan had to give that money back. The sheriff came over. I don't know whether they got all the money or not, but the kids did that, yes. Now, what bank was that? I think at that time, it was the Lafayette Bank. The same place though? Yeah, oh yeah. Right across the street from the current grocery store, now, catty-corner. Yeah, the lot next to it with the two story building was the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company Store. That was a two story building, see, and the bank was right next to it.

Do you remember when the facade was changed on my building? The front of it looked considerably different from the pictures I've seen. Davis didn't change it. So, you're saying it was done after Davis? After Davis. See the store went in the front. Oh, really, not on the corner like it is now. They had two windows on the right side and a window on the left side. And between, you'd go in a ways to the door. They had show windows. Did it have glass on the west side there the way it does now? No. It didn't have glass on it? No, the west part was just the south part of the west side of the building, do you follow me? The building was facing south so they had show windows. Only on the south end? No show windows facing west at all? No.

We bought it in 1964 from some fellows who were named Shoemaker and Asti. Yeah, they're the ones that changed it. Oh they are? How long did they have it, do you know? I don't remember. So, you don't have any idea of when they might have bought it? I imagine it was the first part of the '50s. Then, you don't remember what was in there after Davis? You don't remember the name Harmon? When we bought it there were lots of paints and things like that. Now that may have been some of Shoemaker and Asti's stuff. Yeah, that's right. Did they change the doorway? They must have. They made lots of changes, yes. Did it always have the sign that wrapped around, that had the three-sided sign on it? They did that too. It was just a square building, north and south and you can see where they've added on and it had a side door. I worked for everybody that had the grocery store when I was a little kid. So, anything that was added was after Morgan sold the building. I thought it had always basically resembled what it does now, just with a few, I didn't realize that the doorway was right smack in the middle. Right square in the middle. Funny, there's really no evidence of it's being like that. No where that I can find, anyway. I worked there and that's the way it was.

When J. S. Morgan and D. J. Burns had it, on the west side was a dry goods and on the east side was shoes and hardware and also on the west side they sold shirts and things. And then on the north end was the grocery end of it. All in that little building; it's only like 2900 square feet, well, it's divided off a little bit now, and the back part of the original building, back there where the toilet is, well the toilet's right back of the safe and that's maybe the last 12 feet of the building is another room, from the original part of the building. A wall's put up there.

Well, that's the story of the building as I know it.

The back door of the original building - was there a back door on the very north end of the building? No. There wasn't, it faced Michigan. I've got that all covered up now, there's just a window where it was. You know where the cellar door is. Well, the cellar door, now, is in the addition. So they changed that. The cellar door was in the old building. Whereabouts in the old building? Right straight east of the door on the west. Oh, really? On the east side of the building? No, as you came into the door on the west side, it's right just east of that, right in the middle of the floor. There still is, right in the approximate area where you're talking about, an old chimney. There's a chimney on the east side of the building about 15 feet from the sidewalk and then there's a chimney on the very north end of the building. There was a potbelly stove in the middle of the building. Really, and they ran a stovepipe clear back to the north end of the building? Davis put a furnace in? A floor furnace. Was it in the basement? Yeah, it was a floor furnace. Was there a coal chute that you remember? Oh yeah. Did it face uh - No, I don't think there was a coal chute. Yes, I think there was a coal chute that came in from the west side. Yeah, yeah, 'cause I have a structural problem right there. It looks like they just knocked the foundation out and stuck this chute in there and the darn building is starting to sag right there now. And there must have been, just straight east from there, was the chimney for the furnace. Could be. I wasn't there when they did that; I was in Erie or Louisville. I wasn't in the store when they put that in. But I remember the floor furnace. It was done at that time that Davis was there. None of the others did anything to it. Were you ever up in the attic of that place? No. Cause it seems to be insulated with sawdust and I don't know of anything else I've ever seen that was insulated with sawdust intentionally. Well they used to do that. It's a real fire trap, I'll tell you that, especially with me doing what I'm doing in there with that dried up old building with sawdust insulation. What does your abstract say? You can get more out of it, bring it up to date with the abstract. Well, the abstract goes clear back to the patent on it, back in 1878 or something like that. That was owned by Miller. Lafayette Miller. So you could have it all up to J. S. Morgan. You think J. S. Morgan built the building? Well, in my mind, he did. I don't recall the names on the abstract, but it doesn't say anything as to when the property was improved. It never was improved from the time it was built. Of course there was no ordinance in the town and you didn't have to make any report to the town on what you did. You could go ahead and do what you wanted to.

As far as the building is concerned, your abstract will give you the information up to Davis. I don't think they ever turned the building over to Horace, old man, Davis, I don't think he ever turned it over to Horace. When they finally sold it, I think the old man sold it; your abstract would tell you. There doesn't seem to be any records here in town about building permits or anything like that. No, the building permits didn't start until the boom of the town. See, because the town was only 2500. I guess when you came here, it was about 3,000, maybe 3500. It was still a pretty little place. Not very big. Aldersons was still there and the barber shop and Public Service. There was even a Gambles store. Yeah. That was in the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company building. The Post Office and drug store were catty-wampus from you. I don't recall a drug store or a Post Office. No, you wouldn't remember them, they were before your time. They were catty-wampus from you.

How long had old Joe - Joe's Grocery been there? Joe down here? Yeah. Well, not too long. Joe had a grocery store up there where the City Hall has its courts. Right, right. That used to be Joe's. That was way back when - well, another fellow owned it, he was the same nationality. So, he took Joe in as partner. I can't think of his name. Joe ran that and then Joe quit that and he went butchering, I think in Denver. Then he came back to the store there. Joe opened up in the '50s, I think. I hated to see that close up; it was a fun little store. Yes it was. I don't see him around. Well he has heart trouble.

The Rodwicks didn't come in here until the '20s. First, the Rodwicks were where the TV store is. The old man, Rodwicks, he had a grocery store there. Now who are the Rodwicks? Joe Rodwick - his father. That's where they had their grocery store. Way back. Then Davis bought it. Oh, really; Davis was trying to get a monopoly on grocery stores. Yeah. What happened to the Davises? Well, the old man and the old lady moved to Denver and the daughter, she and her husband, got into, at the end of the war, building apartments in Denver. They made a fortune. Well, Horace stayed around here and got a job and he stayed here until he died. Claude, he got an apartment house in Denver. And they were all in the grocery business. They all came out here. They had stores in - Frederick - Niwot - Erie - - _____/

You were talking about Jack Davies and Ruth Davies is his wife. I don't know what his name is, he's an ex-fireman. He came here from _____.
She married Jack Mill and Jack Mill died and Jack Davies married her. She's quite a bit older than he is. I kinda gathered that from the way he talked; she's not in too good physical condition at all. Yeah, he comes in every once in a while and watches us work.