

Oral History Interview
Ivan M. Fitzwater
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Wickman: What did you do at thirteen to earn enough money for your books and clothes? That's kind of interesting.

Fitzwater: Well, at that time the Duckwall store handled Singer sewing machines, had a Singer sewing machine agency. So Uncle Lease had a salesman out calling on the farmer trade and so on, selling sewing machines.

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Wickman: [W]here did you live? I mean where physically in the town did you live?

Fitzwater: We lived with my grandmother, of course, as I mentioned before, just off of Buckeye on East Seventh Street. The house was the second house from what was an alley behind Cleason Brown's home. My grandmother's house was the second house on East Seventh Street east of Buckeye on the south side of the street

Wickman: Well, is it the one that, the house A.L. Duckwall lives in now?

Fitzwater: Oh, no. No, it's not that one. It was on the other side of Buckeye Street from Uncle Lease Duckwall's home.

Wickman: East of Buckeye.

Fitzwater: Yes. At the time Cleason Brown lived on the corner of Seventh and Buckeye; high school's there now, I believe.

Wickman: No, junior high school. [Today Frontier Estates is located on this site.]

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Fitzwater: By that time I was night operator in the Bell Telephone long distance telephone office so my summer days were free, plenty of time for swimming.

Wickman: Now how old were you when you got that job?

Fitzwater: Well, I started in there in 1908, so I was sixteen. . . . Now this might be of interest to some of the folks there. This Bell Telephone office was upstairs over what was then Charley Townsend's drugstore; the location was 3rd and Broadway, where I believe it is, the Abilene National Bank [Today the central office for USD 435 is located here.], isn't it or one of the banks, is there, now.

Wickman: Yes, 3rd and Broadway.

Fitzwater: Well, it was on that corner. And there was an outside iron stairway to get up to this office, (telephone office). At that time, the local telephones and the long distance telephones were entirely separate—they weren't even connected, there was no way to connect them. If we got a call for someone in Abilene, we had to send a messenger out, if that person had a phone it wasn't even connected up, you see. It might interest some to know that long distance calls were limited to a distance of about 200 miles, after that, voices would just fade out. (That's the way it was at that time.)

Wickman: I see, did he have to come in?

Fitzwater: Yes. If a long distance call would come into Abilene for someone in Abilene, we'd have to get a messenger and send out and get them, see. Of course, I was on duty all night seven nights a week—had a folding cot, army type cot, you see. Sometimes I could sleep pretty near through the night, without interruption, and many times I'd be up maybe half dozen times during the night, you know, to answer calls and so on. I also had to relieve the day operator between twelve noon there and one p.m. every day and then Sundays. I had to work Sunday afternoons, as I remember to relieve the day operator. And let's see, what else—. While I was on night duty there, there was a livery stable that burned, which was on

Buckeye between 3rd and 4th on the west side of the street, and I could look right out the window and see that, and that thing burned clear down one night and some horses were burned in that fire. I didn't know a thing about it till the next morning; I evidently hadn't been waked up during that night, you see.

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Wickman: You talked earlier about a skating rink, Parker's skating rink.

Fitzwater: Yes.

Wickman: Where was that located?

Fitzwater: Well, it was located on the second floor of one of the Parker Merry Go Round factory buildings; it was on the second floor, as I mentioned.

Wickman: Roller skating rink.

Fitzwater: Roller skating rink, yes. They used the pipe organs that they built for the merry-go-rounds, for music and, oh, that was wonderful music for skating. It wasn't a very big rink as compared to the ones they have today. It was very, very popular.

Wickman: When would that be about?

Fitzwater: Oh, that was, let's see, that was after I was in high school up until maybe 1908 or '09, until that time. They had a mask skating contest on one time, or they did, for the best costumes and all.