An Oral History Interview

with

ELMA UDALL (part 3)

conducted by
Julie Ferdon

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Elma Udall Biography

The second of six children, Elma Udall was born on Dec. 23, 1917, in St. Johns, Arizona. She attended Flagstaff Teacher’s College and Brigham Young University, eventually graduating from Arizona State University with a degree in social work.

During World War II she signed up for the Red Cross and served in Africa and the Middle East. Following the war and a brief stint with the FBI, she joined the newly formed CIA and worked in London and Helsinki. She later worked for the Department of State in Moscow, Berlin, Stockholm, Vientiane, and Budapest. She ended her career working directly with Ambassador Kingman Brewster at the Court of St. James in London.
JF: This is Tape #56 on February 21. We’re here with Elma Udall. We took a little break. We’re talking now about when David King Udall, Elma’s grandfather, became president of St. Johns Stake, which was 1887. Was he the first president of the stake, do you know?

EU: Yes. Snowflake—Jesse Smith, I guess his name was—St. Johns was in Snowflake Stake, and Jesse N. Smith was the president of the stake. And then they broke it down and St. Johns became a stake. St. Johns included Eager, Nutrioso, Alpine, Luna, Bluewater, Ramah, and Vernon. Anyway, well, Conch was a Mexican town. That was their area. And then Snowflake had Holbrook and all that area over there.

JF: So that stake had some of New Mexico? And was the Mexican colony also part of it?

EU: No. There were Mormon settlements in Ramah and Bluewater in New Mexico.

JF: So it incorporated them?

EU: Yes. I mean, it had to be a Mormon settlement to be part of the stake.

JF: Right. What was the significance of being president of the stake? I would assume that would be fairly prestigious?

EU: Well, it was. You were head man, the Number One man. You had two counselors, and you had a council, called the high priests council. They’d all meet—you know, advisors. It was kind of a miniature—the stake, especially in the early days when it was all Mormon, was kind of a miniature county. I mean, there wasn’t much state or territorial activity around, and so whatever came up, the community and the Church kind of handled it. Once Arizona got to be a state and all that, then you had your county officers and stuff. But in the beginning, these Mormon communities that were way out from nowhere, the community was all. And so they would go to each ward, each little town, and you had leaders there, you had bishops, you had activities, you had people in charge of the young people’s activities, the women’s activities. You had all these people that had to be called, and replaced if necessary, if anything happened. And so you were kind of responsible. They had quarterly conference. You’d go four times a year to each place, and you’d visit with everybody. They were all small enough so that you knew everybody.

JF: But that involved a lot of travel?

EU: It did, by horse and buggy. David King never complained. This was what the Lord wanted him to do, so therefore he was going to do it. But that, and making a living, kind of cut into each other. And see, we have no paid ministry.
JF: Well, that’s what I wondered. He wasn’t paid. How about his travel expenses?

EU: Well, I guess even in those days, I think the Church did sort of reimburse you for your travel.

JF: Good. That could add up.

EU: But see, my father would be doing the same thing. They would arrange it around weekends. Of course if you had to go by horse and buggy, you were gone for a whole week here and there. But later on, Dad could drive all over to these places on a Saturday morning. They’d have meetings on Saturday and Sunday, and then come back Sunday night, so you weren’t away from your regular job or anything like that—when you got to have cars.

And then my grandmother, his wife, was sort of in charge of the whole stake of the women’s activities, so she would go with him.

JF: And did the kids all pile in and go too?

EU: Oh, no. No, it wasn’t that kind of thing. But then, you see, you always stayed with the people. There weren’t any hotels or any of that stuff. And when the visitors from Salt Lake came down to tour the stake with them, they stayed with the stake president.

JF: And then the stake president would stay with presumably the bishop?

EU: The bishop, yes. But everybody knew each other, it was all a very friendly thing. And I think there weren’t—you know, there wasn’t too much contention. I remember my father saying once that…. And see, the advisors and the bishop and everything, if there needed to be a change in some of the jobs, they’d discuss who’d be the best. But then they would put it up to a vote of the congregation. I don’t know whether it was one of the places in Mexico—somewhere—the powers that be decided who was going to be the next bishop, and they put it up for a vote, and the people said no. So they got somebody else. So it wasn’t a hierarchical kind of thing.

JF: Well, it was, but it was a democratic hierarchy, it sounds like.

EU: Yes.

JF: And did the women have any say in the running of the Church?

EU: I think most church organizations, their women—you know, there’s a women’s group. My mother worked with the Indian women a lot. You’d have a lesson—Relief Society, they’d meet once a week, they’d have a lesson. And then they quilted, they had activities, they made all sorts of things. And they were in charge if there were burials and stuff like that. And a lot of the social work—you know, families need…. You’d go around and visit everybody.
JF: The men were more the government?

EU: Well, and they’d take care of the men’s activities. The women worked under the men’s leadership. But yes.

JF: In 1888, or sometime around there, David King and his brother Joseph bought Mill Farm, near Springerville and Round Valley.

EU: Yes.

JF: Why Round Valley? Was that a more central location for him, or was it strictly for the farm?

EU: Well, it was—you’ve been there?

JF: I’ve been to Springerville.

EU: Well, Springerville and Eager are Round Valley. I mean, those two towns.

JF: Right. And where was Mill Farm in relation?

EU: It was off to the west, toward Greer, out in there. Well, it’s higher, it was better climate. It was not as arid as down here. It was also on the Little Colorado River.

JF: It’s beautiful in that area.

EU: You can run cattle up there, but come winter you’ve got to bring ‘em down, it’s too cold. Although I’m not sure they had cattle. But anyway, you could have better crops up there, but you had a shorter season. They also had the mill, where they were grinding. They were growing wheat and grinding it.

JF: It would be interesting to know where that is in relation to…. There’s a very, very old cemetery outside of Eager, toward Greer. It’s on a ranch that used to be owned by, I believe, John Wayne. There’s a ranch there that the Hopi—it was the John Wayne Ranch or something, and the Hopis bought it. Sounds like it might have been in that area.

EU: Well, I was at that cemetery a while back. Yes, it’s out in that area. If you read Aunt Pauline’s book—see, she was a little girl there, and she tells all about what a wonderful time they had. And she may even describe where it was. Those Eager people, they know exactly where it is—those Eager Udalls. I’ve never been out there.

JF: Because it did sound like there was a bit of a baby boom there, between Joseph’s wife and Ella.
EU: Well, that was the one time that they all kind of lived together. But Aunt Pauline is very good about that.

JF: Your father Levi was born there, wasn’t he?

EU: No.

JF: Oh, he wasn’t. Okay.

EU: He was born in St. Johns.

JF: He grew up there some, though. Was he too young to have any memories himself about Mill Farm?

EU: Oh, he talked a little about it. Not particularly. He was a very happy kid.

JF: It sounds like it. It sounded like a wonderful place to grow up.

EU: Yes. I’ve never looked at the dates. He was born in ’91.

JF: They lost it in ’99?

EU: Yes.

JF: Okay, I have that wrong, then. The men there also took part in building a lot of the dams, like the three reservoirs that are up in Greer now. Was that primarily the Mormon men, or was that men from all over the area?

EU: Well, there were other people up in that area besides the Mormons. Now, in St. Johns there was the Mormons and the Mexicans. Springerville was more of a commercial town. It was not a Mormon town. You know, the Beckers and all those people. See, that was good cattle country up there. That’s what a lot of them did, that’s what Joseph did. But I don’t know that the Mormons—I don’t remember ever—the Mormons I know were very involved in the Lyman Dam.

JF: Which now is a state park.

EU: Yes.

JF: The Lyman Lake State Park.

EU: Yes. But then there’s still the Lyman Reservoir and the dam. And Mary, my cousin in Phoenix, who’s a little older than I am, as she pointed out—I hadn’t thought of it—but in the spring of 1915 Mary was born. Ruth Udall, Nick’s mother, died, and Ida died, and the dam went out. That was the one time the dam went out, which caused havoc. It was at night, and there were people who lived down there. A few people drowned, I think.
JF: Big year.

EU: Yes.

JF: I guess after several years, Mill Farm, I guess, had serious drought years.

EU: That’s right.

JF: And Joseph bailed out?

EU: Joseph was a very good financially—you know, he was in a better position.

JF: He was a smart businessman?

EU: Well, to raise cattle and horses up there was more productive than trying to farm.

JF: And that’s what he did then? When he left Mill Farm he went [unclear].

EU: Well, and probably at the same time he was doing all of it, I don’t know.

JF: I guess the following year, in 1899, Mill Farm was foreclosed on. I gather that was a really hard time in your grandfather’s life.

EU: Yes, it was.

JF: And probably for the whole family. Did he ever talk about it?

EU: “Move on.”

JF: Didn’t talk about things, huh?

EU: Well, he probably did, but certainly not to me. I never heard about it. I was oblivious.

JF: Well, they would have had to have been stoic people.

EU: Well, I think in a way they didn’t have any choice. I mean, this is what happens, and so here we are.

JF: Was David King Udall a good farmer? I mean, we know he was an exceptional leader.

EU: Well, considering circumstances.

JF: Or did he just have bad luck?
EU: Considering the circumstances he was working under—I mean the conditions, climatic and what have you. He loved farming. He even tried to have—he grew sugar cane and tried to make molasses at one point. But he never—I mean, he made it, but it was not—a lot of things that he did, it wasn’t just him, a lot of other people around there, too—it was just not easy to be successful. But his wives were very, very good about making the most of it, and helping out, and all that sort of thing. So they got through.

JF: When Lyman Lake washed out, I remember that he wrote something like “another of my projects has failed.”

EU: Yes.

JF: I wondered if he felt like a failure. But how much can you do when you’re….

EU: Well, you can move on. I mean, there you are.

JF: I mean, on the stake, when he was traveling around constantly, too.

EU: Yes. But, see, they not only had to build the dam, they had to then build canals down to the farms. That’s how they got the water down to the farms. We got the water for the town out of the Little Colorado River. But for the farming area, you had to dig canals to get the water to the farms.

JF: I don’t know when they had time to farm and do the things they needed to do with all the building, and….

EU: When you’re sent out there, and if you’re going to survive, you all pitch in and you work night and day and you did what needed to be done.

JF: That was certainly the Mormon pioneer way, but it was sort of also the way for any settlers, wasn’t it, in the West? I mean, they sort of all had to chip in.

EU: Oh, of course. I mean, if you wanted something done, you did it. They were jacks of all trades. The thing that in a way sets Mormons’ little communities apart, I think, is not only that every town had poplar trees (chuckles)—but their theory was everybody would live in town and go out to the farm. You didn’t have many people that lived on the farm. So there was always some, but the idea was to have a community in town, and schools where people could take advantage.

JF: Which would have been a bit safer, too, I would think—to have everybody in a smaller area.

EU: Yes. Of course if your land was too far away, then some people lived out there. But to then try to get your children to school and all that sort of stuff, on the whole, it was
easier to live in town. His farm in St. Johns was about three miles out of town, and until the day he died, practically, he walked every day out there.

JF: Health was, or is, a big issue among Mormons, isn’t it?

EU: Oh, yes. We have the Word of Wisdom, and to me what it says is, everything in moderation. And they pretty much did that. Nobody got very fat, I’ll tell you. But they had enough. Both of my grandparents lived until their eighties. My grandmother had a doctor book, and she took care of a lot of things. And the Church also….

JF: This was Ella?

EU: Yes.

JF: And she took, you say, a doctor book?

EU: Well, she wasn’t—I mean, if anybody had an accident or something like that, she’d help them, in her own family, which was pretty good size. But the Church also trained midwives. Sister Sherwood….

JF: Was she a midwife?

EU: No, but my cousin’s grandmother on the other side, she was a widow, and I think they had, at different times, some of the women go up to Salt Lake and train. So we didn’t always have a doctor, but every town…. Of course, by then, the women were all experienced and could take care of each other anyway. Anyway, it was important. And I think their record was pretty good. They didn’t lose many. Ella had nine pregnancies between 1878 and 1891 and raised five children. And I don’t know that that was too uncommon. But mostly I think the children died from summer complaint as infants.

JF: And the women lived. And I think in other areas, dying in childbirth was fairly common in pioneer communities.

EU: Oh, yes, and all over the world.

JF: So they must have—these Mormon communities must have….

EU: They did their best. There were some instances where there’s nothing you can do. But yes.

JF: After Mill Farm they moved back to St. Johns—I believe the same year he was elected to the Arizona Legislature?

EU: Territorial Legislature. Yes, but you see, it’s like New Mexico now. They only sit for thirty days or something like that.
JF: Were they in Prescott?

EU: I think it was in Phoenix. I don’t remember when they moved to Phoenix—you’ll have to look that up. I think he only served one term, which was two years.

JF: And he would spend that time in Prescott?

EU: Oh, yes. In fact, as part of the stuff I gave to Roger [Myers of UA Library], it was interesting. You know how you go to college and school and everything and you have a yearbook? Well, the legislature kind of had a yearbook. And here was a little bit about each one, with their picture, and they signed their name—they autographed. He had his copy and a lot of his friends signed.

JF: I’ll bet those are rare!

EU: Anyway, it’s quite interesting.

JF: Do you recall any issues that he dealt with in the legislature?

EU: Well, there’s one issue, yes—women’s suffrage. There’s a letter when he’s down in Phoenix to his wife. These two women, what were their names? Mrs. Carrie Cat and somebody else. They were going around from legislature to legislature, pushing it. And he said they had been there and he talked to them.

JF: Really? How interesting. Now, Utah—I can’t remember exactly when it was—but Utah was a state where women got the vote first?

EU: That was Wyoming, isn’t it?

JF: I think it’s Utah.

EU: Well, Utah, because of polygamy, they were a territory for forty years. They didn’t get statehood ‘til 1890-something. I think that women could vote within the territory or state. I don’t know how it worked. It’s Wyoming, I’m quite sure, who had women’s suffrage first. Maybe Utah had something to do with it, I don’t know. But a lot of other states were states long before Utah was.

JF: Morris Goldwater, as I understand, served in that legislature. Was that Barry’s father or grandfather?

EU: Yes, he’s part of this…. No, Barry’s father was named Baron. He had a brother. He was Barry’s grandfather.

JF: Were he and David King friends or acquaintances?
EU: Well, they probably knew each other. It sounded like all these legislators—you know, if you’re going to spend thirty or sixty days with each other, you all get acquainted and stuff. But there was never any contact as far as I know, between [them]. I mean, after all, St. Johns is 220 miles from Phoenix, and from Prescott, too, so there was no way you’d cross paths with very many people.

JF: You have mentioned before, too, that…. When he’s—“out on the road” I want to say—but traveling around as stake president, and then he’s also traveling in the legislature, you mentioned how his wives really did well. They were at home, they were raising the kids, but they were also running a mail delivery business, weren’t they?

EU: No, they did everything they could to help make some money. One summer they had an ice cream place. You had to bring the ice in from the reservoir and keep it in sawdust 'til the 4th of July so you could have ice cream. But oh, no, the mail business is a whole ‘nother story.

JF: This was winter ice?

EU: Sure.

JF: And it would keep in straw?

EU: They had an ice house. That’s what ice houses are all about, and you kept it. We had ice cream in the summer because of that. You’d go up and buy a big hunk of ice.

JF: Okay. Right from the river. You wouldn’t do that today!

EU: Well, you drank out of the river, so what difference did it make? (laughter) And at one point, I don’t know how long, a year or something, my grandma [Ella] ran a hotel there in Holbrook. See, the mail system, that’s a whole ‘nother story, and he tells about it. What did I do with that? I found a wonderful thing. Grandpa had a contract with the government for years and years. The train would come into Holbrook, and the mail, of course, was delivered there, and then they had a buckboard. There’s a picture in the book. So the older boys, Grandpa’s older boys who were twenty-one or thereabouts, they would pick up the mail and take it to St. Johns. Well, it was sixty miles. They could make about thirty miles a day, and Hunt was the halfway point. And that’s where Ida lived. You’d have the mail, but once in a while you’d also have passengers that rode.

JF: Did they have a bunkhouse there?

EU: No, she had a big old lumber building. It wasn’t very often, but…. And then the boys would sort of change—the younger boys then would take it on to St. Johns, and the older boys then would go back to Holbrook, and that’s the way it was. And that was his one cash crop. So it was a big thing. And every so often he’d have to bid on it.

JF: It was a family business, it sounds like.
EU: It certainly was.

JF: Was the mail delivered five or six days a week, or….

EU: It was probably six. He was still doing the same thing when we grew up. The newspaper from Phoenix, *The [Arizona] Republic*, would come on overnight train to Holbrook. We read the Sunday funnies on Monday. We were always a day behind with the newspaper. We didn’t know or care. Didn’t make any difference to us. But letters were very important to them. You can tell that from the ones that Grandma saved and everything. And I think they had packages, regular mail service. Then I think it would go on to Eager. See, those people up there, they probably read the funnies on Tuesday (laughs), I don’t know. And of course by the time we came along, they were doing it with trucks. Grandpa no longer had the contract. But in the early days, it was by buckboard.

JF: He had that contract for a number of years.

EU: Yes, he did.

JF: Your father, Levi, it sounds like they put him to work early, because I remember on the ice cream parlor, I guess it was your grandfather that was writing, but saying that Levi was the Number One chore boy when it came to the ice cream parlor.

EU: Well, he lived there in Holbrook with them. He’d meet the trains and carry the bags back to the hotel and all that stuff. Well, everybody, you didn’t have any choice to work or not to work. I mean, there was also gardening to do, and everything—farming. And the trouble was that a lot of the boys kind of got behind in school because they had to finish up all the chores of the farming in September and October before they could take time off and go to school for the rest of the year. They never got in on the beginning of the year—they’d kind of pick it up as they went along. And the high school there in St. Johns—it was a Church school at first—it was only two years.

JF: The high school was only two years?

EU: Yes.

JF: Was that true when you were there?

EU: Oh, no, it was a state school when we were there. And then what is now Eastern Arizona College in Thatcher, that was a four-year high school. That was the academy, the Church Academy. And so my father and his brother, Uncle H. [John Hunt], they went down there for their last two years of high school, and that’s where he met my mother.

JF: Oh! So he met her in high school.
EU: Yes.

JF: I had thought that was college—maybe junior college. (laughs)

EU: Not in those days. It is now, but it certainly wasn’t then. It was called The Academy. It was a Church high school. And when Arizona became a state, they took these schools over. They were no longer just Mormon schools—you had other people.

JF: And that happened right after statehood?

EU: I think so.

JF: In 1911, your grandparents built a home in St. Johns. Is that what is now the Elm Hotel?

EU: Elm Hotel. It’s not a hotel, but that’s what it’s still called, yes. It was not built as a hotel, it was built as a residence. It was a family affair, the boys all took a year off and came and helped. There was a contractor out of Thatcher that came up and did it. Aunt Pearl took off and she came down and cooked for everyone. They never actually owned a home before that. Once Uncle Jess showed me, “They live here, and they lived there.” Dad showed me the house he was born in. But anyway, they’d always wanted a house. It was very nice, but I don’t think they ever got the mortgage paid off. I think when Grandpa died, they still owed on it. But it eventually—see, David King went to Mesa for—I think he was there for five years—or seven—being president of the Mesa Temple. So it would be rented out in that time. But it was often used also as kind of—they kind of cut it up into some apartments, and the schoolteachers and people like that would live in it.

JF: And that would help pay the mortgage?

EU: Oh, sure. Then, when Grandpa died, then Uncle Grover and Aunt Dora bought it and took it over, and she turned it into a hotel. She even got AAA approval. She put in a lot of bathrooms and all sorts of stuff, and it was quite successful.

JF: When did it cease being a hotel?

EU: Well, it was the only kind of place, except for the Barth Hotel, for a long time. And then they brought in another motel or two. And so they were newer and all, and kind of competition to her. And so I think when Aunt Dora died—Uncle Grover died earlier—when she died, Keith and Gwen bought it, and it’s their home.

JF: Okay. And Keith is the father of Brady Udall, the author?

EU: The grandfather.

JF: Grandfather, that’s right. I’m getting better at this. (laughs)
EU: But that house—I’m going to give this stuff to Roger. [tape paused]

JF: You were saying there was a cornerstone that they put things in, in the house?

EU: When they were building the house, the sons—Grandpa wasn’t too thrilled—they put a lot of things in the cornerstone. We’d heard about it all our lives. In 1993, they opened it up. And we were all there, we had a big deal—the family. And you see the elm, the tree in front of the house. When they divided up the town, he got this lot. And in 1887, he planted this elm tree. And he tells about it. His daughters, they were with him, and they helped. I guess Aunt Pearl writes about it. And so that’s why it’s called The Elm, is because of the big elm tree. And it now, we play, it takes five of us like this, to go around the trunk.

JF: Really?

EU: Yes.

JF: Five of you with your arms outstretched to go…. Wow.

EU: Yes. But in 1993—now, Keith wrote this—“Enclosed find a copy of the contents found in the time vault opened the 24TH of July, 1993, which was taken from the northeast pillar of the David King Udall family home, The Elm. It was a happy day, with approximately 150 descendants of David King and Ella and Ida present. Thank each one that sent things to go in the replacement capsule”—which we did, we put new things in there—“which was sealed into the same pillar October 1993. We appreciate your love and your care. I’m so glad we belong to the same family tree.” And then he lists the things. And I made a speech, apparently. But one of the things—I guess Dad had something to do with the finances. Anyway, this is the check to the contractor for building the house.

JF: Oh! The actual check? I assume after it was cashed.

EU: Yes.

JF: And that was one of the things in there?

EU: Yes.

JF: Oh, that’s wonderful. The library’s going to get a copy of this?

EU: Well, what they’re going to get is the whole thing. They put in the newspaper and…. Anyway, Keith and Gwen have had all these items, and they have them kind of on display upstairs. And the last time I was over there—I’d talked to her before—I said, “Gwen, the place for this stuff is really down at the university,” and she agreed. And I
said, “The next time I do it, I’ll come over and get them and take them down there.” And she said okay.

JF: That’s great. You have your own family time capsule. I think that’s wonderful.

EU: They listed—yes, see here, this was in the thing too. They listed David King Udall and Ella and all their children.

JF: The children and the dates and where they were born.

EU: Yes. And then the next page is Ida and her children.

JF: Okay, and the name of the builder of the house.

EU: Yes. And then they put some pamphlets in there.

JF: “Guide to Salt Lake City, the Wilson European Hotel.” Do you know the significance of that?

EU: No.


EU: Yes, that’s a Church publication.

JF: That is wonderful! And so it’s been kind of fun when some of the family go, you know, you can go upstairs and see this stuff. But Keith’s gone, and Gwen’s going, and they don’t know what they’re going to do with the house, so I’ve got to put that on my list. I’ve got to get over there and get that stuff.

JF: Yes, that would be an important thing. What a wonderful tradition. I wonder when the next time capsule will be opened.

EU: Well…. And this is one of the latest pictures of the house.

JF: It’s a huge house, isn’t it? How many bedrooms?

EU: Oh, who knows. Well, it’s been cut up.

JF: Has it been added to, as well as cut up?

EU: No, but it’s been changed. They’ve added a little bit in the back. And in 1987—I was in England at that time—they had a tree party. They celebrated 100 years of the tree. And the family all came, and they danced around and had a good time. Keith’s daughter—she’s a historian too—and she made a speech and told all about the history of
the tree. And she said, “And even the townspeople in St. Johns have peed on it, from it….” (laughter) Anyway, apparently it was quite a speech.

JF: It would be fun to have all those together. What a history! What a history for a home—that really is. I hope something….

EU: And then, you know, the Wobblies—it was some kind of a labor group, almost a socialist kind of thing—and somehow there was a pamphlet of that organization, what they were for. And I think the judge tried to put that in, and Grandpa wouldn’t let him. So anyway…. (laughter)

JF: Oh, that’s wonderful! When they were building this house, wasn’t that when Ella got very ill and had to go to Los Angeles?

EU: I’ve never associated it with the building of it, but it was about that time, yes.

JF: What happened?

EU: They were very vague. I don’t know whether it was female problems, what it was. I never knew and I never asked. She came out of it, so that’s the important thing.

JF: That’s the important thing, exactly.

EU: But see, Ida died there. She died in 1915. But she’d had a stroke earlier, and she’d been living with her daughter, with Pauline.

JF: When did she have the stroke?

EU: In 1908, I think. That’s all in her book.

JF: Okay. So that was even before the house in St. Johns was built?

EU: She had the stroke. But it was minimum then. But then she had another one and died.

JF: [unclear]

EU: Yes.

JF: I’ve got 1915 as when Ida passed away. Did Levi ever talk about that? Do you know anything about the funeral?

EU: No.

JF: It’s probably in the book.
EU: Yes. The services, I think, is somewhere.

JF: The Nebo Electric Light and Power Company.

EU: (chuckles) Yes.

JF: David King Udall and his sons built that in 1911 and ’12. It was a water-powered electric plant. Was that the very first one in that area?

EU: Yes.

JF: So there was no electricity up until that?

EU: Heavens, no.

JF: And he wired up several houses, didn’t he?

EU: Well, I never heard him talk too much about it. I think he had plenty of help. But it was his idea. In Nephi there’s a mountain, and it’s Mount Nebo. There’s also a Mount Nebo in the Bible somewhere. But anyway, he named it for that. But if you go to look at that area, to try to get power out of that Little Colorado River there—the Little Rezzie [reservoir], we called it—I mean, it wasn’t too good, and it was very kind of unreliable. We used to say, “If a cow takes too big a drink, the lights go out.” And it got to where during the day we finally got an electric washer—and Inez and I would often come home from dances at night and run it because the electricity wasn’t strong enough to run it during the daytime while it was being used all over town.

JF: Oh, I see, okay.

EU: With the Maytag, you turned on the power, and you had to have a click before you could make the thing work. And you couldn’t get the click, because there wasn’t enough power. So we’d have everything ready, and we’d come home from the dance, and if there was power, why, we did it. But they really didn’t have good electricity until REA [Rural Electrification Agency] came in.

JF: How did he know to do that?

EU: Well, we were probably some of the last. I mean, there must have been other towns around that already had it. But you had to have—you didn’t have any other kind of generators. I mean, he was using water because that’s all we had. Maybe before REA somebody else took it over and did bring in generators—I don’t know. I never cared much about that. But I know that we always kept kerosene lamps, and there was a lantern of some kind we had. You always kept those handy.

JF: It makes him sound like quite a trailblazer.
EU: Exactly. But Stewart says that in a way we grew up in the nineteenth century.

JF: Right. You did, in a way, didn’t you?

EU: Yes. We were sixty miles from the railroad. A lot of people in St. Johns had never seen a train. And we had telephone service from eight o’clock in the morning ‘til eight o’clock at night. The sheriff, I guess, was tuned in, and, you know, for twenty-four hours a day—I don’t know. But who cared, we didn’t know the difference. We didn’t have much—electricity wasn’t very reliable. We got the Sunday funnies on Monday. (laughter) They were still farming with horses and wagons. I guess they finally, in the thirties, got a stationary baler—it didn’t go around and pick up all the stuff, you had to bring it in to the baler.

JF: It doesn’t sound to me like—knowing what’s happened with your family, I think growing up in the eighteenth century was probably a good thing. I’m going to need to flip the tape right now.

EU: Okay.