

Transcript of interviews with Fran Hay for History of Wyoming

Interviewed by Karl Gustafson

Monday April 10, 1988, 3:30 p.m.

I think you once mentioned you were born on a ranch outside of town.

Well. I (uh) lived out there but my parents came west in 1901. Oh, my father came west on a hunting trip. My parents both came from New York and Pop's from Long Island and Mom's from Staten Island. But (um) both parts of New York City but not Manhattan itself, a more residential part. And Pops came out on a hunting trip with some freinds and they went up to Grannvill. And they packed up into the Mountains and he fell in love with the country. And he thought when he graduated from Yale, he didn't really want to be a business man in New York. This looked very romantic to him. I think he was just really sort of a dreamer. He thought he'd be a rancher. As soon as he graduated the next June, he came west. And picked out a homsted site (and uh) down on Sheep Creek and then when he found out that had been reserved to be part of the Ashley National Forest. He couldn't homestead there. He went over several valleys to the north and found an old ranch that was for sale on Henry's Fork. And so he bought the ranch. I think it was probably for sale very cheap and besides which he had to go east and borrow some money to get it. But he did borrow some money and got some

friends interested in coming out with him. And they just thought it be a lark. They would be ranchers for maybe ten years at the most and then settle down to doing something respectable afterwards. But they just thought this would be a wonderful adventure and by the end of the ten years, the others had all left. And Pops was so in debt he had to stay with it. But he liked it. I mean, he thought it was a wonderful life and he liked being his own boss. And in the mean time my mother had gone west with Pops's sister. They had gone to school together and she had visited the ranch and she thought it was a wonderful life too. And so they were married. Of course her parents thought it was terrible. They said, why are you gone to Bryn Myrr and then just bury yourself out there at the end of no where? And mother said, Well, this was her decision she'd made and she'd stay with it. But whenever she was going to have her babies she'd go east and stay with her parents in New York because we didn't have any doctors within sixty five miles. And there was a hospital here in Rock Springs but that was sixty five miles away and we didn't have any doctors in the valley. Greeson Valley where we lived. Where our ranch was. That's where Manila is. You know, Manila? That's when you circle your way around Flaming Gorge. Well, we were in Linvill which was just five miles west, five miles east of Manila. So, the town of Lindvill where we lived was really just a post Office and a ranch and that's about all. Several ranches up and down the creek. But that is all under

water now. All under Flaming Gorge dam. Linnvill Bay. But anyway there weren't any there weren't any good schools nearby, though and there weren't any doctors or any help. So, mother would go east and have her babies and then we went to school and stayed with grandparents. And we did try, mother did try three winters out in California because she heard there were very good public schools in California. So (ah) she rented a house and had all four grandparents, who were all retired by then, all living with us and she took us four children out there. Pops of course had to stay on the ranch to keep things going. And she did that for about three years. I suppose probably grandparents came to think less of us, the ranch was in a very bad way. But anyway we tried that and then we decided to go back and go to school in New York and stay with grandparents there, mothers parents. And that was wonderful because we would have all the advantages of going to good schools in New York and then being able to come out to the ranch for the summer. And we all worked in the hay fields and had lots of visitors and we had freinds come out. And they all had to work too. And we had lots of cousins who would come out for the summer. In fact one summer there were eighteen of us around all summer long. And they would send some of us out to the vegetable garden, pick peas for lunch. Then somebody else. The boys would have to help with the irrigating and with the haying. It was really a lark for everybody. And then we could go fishing when there was time. And we went on camping trips and that

was all kinds of fun and we went up. Let's see. We had summer herds with sheep up in the mountains. And we would pack up and stay with the sheep.

The Uinta Mountains?

The Uinta Mountains, yeah. And so, we would stay at sheep camp, and fish and have a great time. (Time out to check on some coffee)

I went to private schools in New York. My Uncle was interested in a country day school there and he was one of the trustees and he was a lawyer in New York. And so when we couldn't pay the tuition, he'd pay the tuition which made it very handy and so my sister and I both went to this private school, Brandon Hall, on Staten Island and lived with my grandparents and then I went to Smith College. I graduated from Smith in 1936. And I thought I might like to get into writing. I went to New York and applied for a job as a research longtime at newsweek and didn't get anywhere with it. But in the meantime I went to the YWCA and in the evenings and had a wonderful time doing modern dance. I'd been in the dance group when I was in college and I loved dancing and so I said well "Maybe I will study dancing instead." My parents were wonderful, they let us do, let us follow any crazy ideas we might have. So, I went to grand central art school there in New York, there in this first year when I was trying to get a job. Oh, I had a job for a short time with Encyclopedia Brittanica. Because they needed

people, of course, just out of college to look up things. Look up answers to questions people would write in. And we didn't have to know about the subject. All we'd have to know was how to use a library and find the answers and so, I worked with them for a while. But then they were about to close up shop in New York and move out to Chicago. So that was very short lived. I guess it's still in Chicago. But that was good experience for a few months. But then the next year my sister was going back to teach at a school where she'd taught before in Cambridge, Massachusetts. So. I went with her and started studying dance with Mary Starks, who I'd seen dance when I was at Smith College and I liked her kind of modern dance and so I started working with her and danced in her group. Of course we were definite amateurs at that point, but she was professional but her group were all amateurs, schoolteachers and there was one girl who worked in a spaghetti factory. We were all kinds, a mixed group. And I just loved doing it. Of course we weren't making any money, whatsoever. I would accept forty dollars a month from my father on the ranch and my sister would make up the rest, she was teaching. and so I had a wonderful; time dancing and it was impractical, but it was the one thing that I just loved to do and then I got a few teaching jobs, so that was a bit better. I taught at Pine Manor Junior College, and one down in Virginia.

(Took another break to check on coffee)

So, You were dancing and teaching, teaching dance at the college?

Yes, Pine Manor was at Wellesly. Wellsley MA. And then I got a job at a college in Virginia, Sommes Virginia, they were both junior colleges. But then after that by about 1940, I was out on the ranch. I went back to the ranch each summer. That was one of the lovely things about teaching. You do have the summers off. And I could always go back out to the ranch in the summer and then well after Pearl Harbor my father was chairman of the draft board. Well my brother enlisted so he didn't have to draft him. But anyway they were very short of men on the ranch, So Pops said how would you like to help me on the ranch. You and my sister Susan. And we thought that would be great. So, we spent about eight years on the ranch and had a wonderful time of it. We were allowed to do all the things we hadn't been allowed to do when we were younger because it was they were supposed to be boy's jobs. I mean like driving the machines and actually pitching hay and that sort of thing. And bull raking. All those jobs that always get considered things that just the boys do. Well, with no men around they were glad to let us do it. And so we really had a lark out of that. We learned how to plow and every thing. Of course I wasn't very good at repairing machinery when it broke down. We would always have to get a man on the place to repair it. My goodness. they probably thought it was a pain in the neck. All the teeth had broke on the bull rake, things like that. But we had a

good time and we really got to know our parents for the first time. You know when you're young you sort of take them for granted and by then both being finished college and had grown up. WE could appreciate our parents alot more and we had a lot of fun with them. So, I was on the ranch until 1948. Oh, I was sent to the state legislature for a couple of years. My father thought it would be educational for me and as usual of most of the men in the county were nice asnd that because they were out keeping the ranch going. Actually he would have liked doing it but he had to keep the ranch going and so he said why don't you run for the state legislature. And he took me around and did most of the talking for me and it wasn't hard to be elected since our county only had four hundred residents and nobody else wanted the job very much. And I did have a fun time, but anyway, I did get elected to the legislature. So, I went to Salt Lake for a couple of months. That was fascinating seeing what kind of bills were introduced. (Took time for more coffee)

That was in Salt Lake. Your county was in Utah?

Yes, (Uh huh.)

So, how many years were you in the legislature? Just for two?

I was just there for one session and then. Back then they just met every other year. They had a special session the

second year and I didn't run again because at that point I was more interested in marrying John. And so I decided that. We were married in 1948 and I knew I couldn't do both. Be in the Utah legislature and be a resident of Rock Springs.

A little difficult then.

Hmm hmm. And John made it very clear that well we both wanted to have a big family. He came from one of eight children, and I was one of four. We both wanted to have a family. he made it very clear that I was going to give up all ideas of a career on my own because I was going to be very busy, God willing, bringing up a family and I was ready for that by then. I think it's much easier if you have whatever career you have before you get married, then you don't mind spending time with the children.

So, when you were in the legislature was there anything big or momentous that stands out that happened while you were there?

No, there were oh, fifty or more bills. This is an approved bill, it was approved in other words by the Unions, and a two year medical school started, that being the University of Utah, and of course since then it's gone into a four year medical school and then of course the university hospital has been built since then. But at that time they were just starting a two year medical school and then of course we

visited all the state institutions the reform schools and the penitentiary. That was all pretty depressing.

Well, being Utah, we all have this idea of Utah being a fairly strong Mormon state and being rather sexist along some the lines, not wanting women to participate in public, did you run into any of those problems when you were in the legislature?

No, there were about four women in the legislature they were good to us they didn't object, of course they were a minority but they didn't (Pause to refill coffee.)

So, that was between 1946 and 1948?

Hmm hmm. Then after John and I were married pretty soon we moved to Rock Springs. We lived down in the Bertonnelli Apartments. Right close to the railroad. And I can remember the sound of the railroad decided to pump sand in on the track because they were afraid, you know with the mines the railroad might subside into a coal mine. So they had these blowers blowing sand in the tracks all along in town here. I don't know how far out into the country they had to do it but I suppose it was probably just in town. So, we would hear these sand blowers going all night long and then as I mentioned to you before I remember the mine whistles because the mines were still open at that time. They closed in 1950, I think it was. And so you'd hear a mine whistle at six a.m., I guess at noon, and six p.m. Anyway, when it was time

to change shifts. And everyone predicted, a lot of people predicted that if they ever closed the coal mines this would be a ghost town. And fortunately with trona. They had started to develop trona by then and so it wasn't a ghost town after all. Of course, there was the livestock business too. And naturally things have improved a lot since then. The shopping was better in those days. I used to love to be able to telephone the Pacific Market and have groceries sent up. And, you know, nobody delivers anymore. But that was very easy. And they had some very nice stores right down in town here, right along Broadway and Mainstreet. And so you could walk to buy. Well, the Stockgrowers carried everything, like groceries and clothes and anything else. It was a very good store. Like a department store. And good clothing stores. I swear the stores were better then than they are now. But we have a big mall with lots of junk shops. But there have been, certainly a lot of improvements in the town. It's a much more beautiful spot now, with all the planting, along Dewar Drive for instance. The grass and trees they have put in there and all of the improvements at the cemetery. In fact some of my friends got special permission from Mayor West to ride their bicycles in the cemetery. Kids aren't supposed to because they are making all the noise. But these were my contemporaries. They said they wanted a safe place to ride where nobody would run over them, where they wouldn't be in anybody's way. And so he gave them special permission to ride in the cemetery.

Then of course the college was started since I moved to Rock Springs and that's a great improvement. They started out with just night classes at the high school and then they moved out to Reliance. You probably know this already. They used the Reliance High School because after the coal mines closed they had this empty school building out there. so the college used that for a few years. and then they started this campus up here on college hill. And it moved over there. So, I think the college has made this a much more interesting place to live. Real interesting with the arts and everything. And in science, too. I think they have some real good teachers up there. I always wanted to live in a college town. And I thought when I was growing up that Rock Springs would be the last place on earth I would want to live but it turned out to be a much better place to live. Once I move here I found it more freindly and a lot more interesting place than I thought it would be.

Well, what do you remember of Rock Springs, or was it just some place you passed through on the train on your way?

Yeah, that was about it. We would catch the train in Green River. That was the closest place to the ranch and I would always pray that we'd have such bad thunderstorms and such floods during September that we couldn't possibly get back to school. We'd much rather stay on the ranch. And quite often th road was washed out but we could ride up around burnt Fork and then get the railroad. So, nothing would keep

us from going back to school. I always hoped it would. And then we'd just take th train back to Chicago and then on to New York. I liked it when we got to New York because we had lots of relatives there. And I really liked the school we went to. But I hated leaving the ranch. The railroad whistle always sounded so dreary like leaving home. Although another improvement was changing to deisel engines from coal. They were all coal drawn when I was growing up. They were the dirtiest trains. The coal cinders would just come pouring over the train. We'd go out on the observation deck and get an eye full of cinders. So, when they put on diesel engines, the whole trip was cleaner and much pleasanter.

How long of a trip was it?

Two days and three nights.

That's including the change in Chicago?

Hmm hmm. We only had like two hours to wait. (Stop for more Coffee)

You said when you first move to Rock Springs, you lived down?

We lived down at the Bertonelli Apartments. Down on Third Street. And let's see. It had a view, it had a view of the railroad. And then we moved up. This is the family house. John wsa born in this house. His parents moved here, well before the turn of the century. I guess it was probably

about 1899. But John was born in this house, He had a brother and sister that were born here. And so we moved up here in 1950. John's mother had died and his father was still here, but he had to have nurses around the clock. He'd had a stroke and was quite sick. So, we moved up into the family house and kept house for him. He had nurses so I didn't have to do all the nursing. By that time we had twins. It was a one bedroom apartment, and we started out with twins and then another one, a singleton, was on the way. So, we , it was time to move out of the apartment. WE knew that. His father said why don't we move into the family house. You need more space than the rest of us do. (break in tape)

Well. it was quite sociable. Let me see. Mountain fuel was going strong. The mountain fuel people all lived here in Rock Springs. They hadn't moved all their headquarters to Salt Lake. So, they were always doing exploration around here. And there were some other oil companies that were looking. And most of the sheep ranchers, their families would live in Rock Springs for the wiintertime. Their kids could go to school and they would go out to the ranches in the summertime. And so there were a lot of ranch families living here. And of course there was a lot people connected to the coal mines. You know Wardell Court used to be. Well it was company apartments over there. So, I guess it was called the clubhouse, but the place is now apartments is now Wardell Courts. Well anyway, there were a lot of people from

the Union Pacific coal mines in the apartments there, and also a lot of Railroad people there. So, there was a good deal of social life. It was quiet. There was a big influx of people but there just weren't any changes here. The same store would stay in business for a long time, before we had shopping malls where rent is high and the stores keep changing hands. And of course we were interested in the schools, having four children. And John was on the school board and the college board. And of course to see those, and the changes there.

When did the big influx of people and change really begin to happen? Everybody knows about the boom in the seventies, The CBS News, etc.... Were there other small booms before then that kept coming and going or was that sort of?

I think it hit a peak at that point because, it was really quite quiet when I got here and then when the coal mines closed then everything was going to close down. And a lot of the miners got jobs at the soda ash mines instead, So, it wasn't really as bad as you might have thought. And most of the miners had saved money. They all had savings in the banks and weren't as destitute as you might have thought because most of them were economical and they weren't used to the boom times so they had saved their money. And so we didn't have a very bad time. And I suppose most of the booming was in the seventies.

Were you surprised to see Rock Springs on Sixty Minutes?

Yes, it was horrible because it made the town look so black. Friends of mine from the east, my college friends were living in Florida, wrote and said what's a nice girl like you doing living in Rock Springs. But I think any small town, almost any town has some black corners which can be painted pretty badly if you wanted to make a sensational story.

You talked about during the summers all your relatives from back east would come out and spend the summers, sort as I guess your father would have considered it cheap labor?

Yes it really was fun all around and pops always saw to it that there was enough pleasure involved, You know, enough time to go fishing and he thought it was a good way to entertain all the cousins and to reciprocate for all the times we visited them. We would spend quite often with the various cousins Christmas vacation, that sort of thing.

Did any of your relatives decide to come out here to stay afterwards?

No none of them decided to come out to stay. My brother, my oldest brother had one year of ranching and the year after he graduated from Yale he decided just as my father did and he came out. He graduated in 1928. And then he came out to the ranch. It was the worst winter in history. I mean as far as snow and ice. and we couldn't get out to the ranch in the trucks at all. The roads were all closed with fifteen

feet of snow. And so they'd have to haul corn out to the sheep. They'd have to give them a lot of extra feed. and they'd have to drive along down on the river to get to the ranch and the river was frozen over of course. but every so often there would be a hole and the truck would crash through and fall in the whole. So that was a really terrible winter and either my or my brother would have to ride on the truck to persuade the truck driver to risk it and do it because they had to get some feed to the sheep. Nobody was killed but they did get dunked in the river a couple of times. And so, after that one winter out here, my brother decided that no matter how smart you were or how hard you work, you could lose your shirt at ranching in one bad winter. So, he went back east again and by then of course the depression was on and he got a job at JMA company part with Connecticut they made gold alloys and he could live on 25 dollars a week and so he took a job with them. Then he stayed with them all through the years and got to be president of the company and then finally when he reached retirement age he was the chairman of the board. And so, after he retired from that after he retired from business and his wife had died he came west again. and he had built a cabin for my father up on in the Uintas near Flaming Gorge. because when our old ranch went under water. It was Progress but it was the end for me. and they both said well it's not the end. We'll move the old cabins on high and we'll build a new cabin. I'll retire to it when I can retire and in the

meantime you can be enjoying it. So, Keith designed a cabin up in Greendale and he moved the old cabin from the ranch up there because they were very, they were old trappers cabins. Jack Robertson was one of Jim Bridger's trappers. And he had these two cabins on the ranch and my father had added on to it but he used one of them for a dining room and one of them for a bedroom. And then a kitchen in between the two and they added some more bedrooms and living room beyond that but they were. The State of Utah wanted to preserve them in fact they wanted to take them down in Salt Lake because they were on the first survey went through in 1830 I think it was. It went to Utah state and ...no Utah wasn't a state then. Well anyway when the first survey went through, they were there and so they decided they were a good historical sight and they would keep them. So, we said well we won't destroy them but we'll move them up to this high land and you can put a plaque on them. So, they put a plaque saying this was Jim Bridger's cabin that was on Henry's Fork but had to be moved because that was being flooded out with Flaming Gorge Dam and when we moved the cabins we thought we'd have to take them all apart because we thought they couldn't possibly stand up to being picked up and put on the back of a truck they were all hand hewn cottonwood logs you know, this wide. and they were so neatly dovetailed of course it was all hand labor and you could see the axe marks along them but they were built so soundly that they held together and we had to put in some new daubing afterwards, but that

was all. and we moved the cabins up by truck and put them as sort of wings on each end of the new house we were going to build. So, we enjoyed that place alot. Pops could look over the country we used to raise sheep on but he didn't run sheep anymore. But he could see where we used to raise sheep and he could look over the top of Bear Mountain where they had planted some Mountain Sheep. Nobodys allowed to go up there because they don't want the mountain sheep to be disturbed. But they come down to the river to drink. We saw them last summer when we took a boat out to the gorge. We saw them all drinking down on the river and thats where we used to have a dry herd in the summer.

So, were you the only member of your family to end up in the area.

Well, My sister, she taught in Cambridge Massechusettes and taught in Virginia too. In Chaplin Virginia. She liked to ranch and she likes to paint. She's done quite a bit of painting and so, she liked this part of the country. And then she married an engineer at FMC. So, she lives in Green River, now. And our youngest brother. Well he was in 1941 he went into the Army, but then when he got out of the Army he settled down in Salt Lake. And he lives there. So really, it was only the oldest brother who still liked to go eastbut then this was always home. He loved it out here. He always was enthusiastic about the country. He'd come out everytime

he had a vacation but he did think it wasn't any place to make a living.

Were there some differences you could tell between the people you went to school with and the people here?

Oh, I think everybody is provincial in his own way. You could be a provincial New Yorker or you could be a provincial Wyomingite. But I think that ... I think you can find congenial people anywhere you go.

During the time you lived in Rock Springs, what other changes have you noticed in the day to day life?

Well, of course they built more schools and it was handy in those days because our children went up to Yellowstone School and up to Junior High right down the street here. And then they went to High School in what is now East Junior High. So, you could walk, they could walk anywhere. They didn't need a ride. And the school lunch system was developed after my children were through school. But they had an hour to come home for lunch. And so, I think that made a difference in everybody's schedule, because we always took it for granted that the children would be home for lunch. And, well, John has always come home for lunch. And so that's of course the difference from cities where nobody goes home for lunch. And I suppose most people a lot of people go home for lunch here in Rock Springs. In those days everybody did. And I think a lot more people have planted

trees and grass and flowers and that. I think the town has improved considerably in looks and they have cleaned up some of the dumps. I think it's a very good program they have making kids go out and pick up bottles if they've broken the law. So, they have to go out and (end of tape)

Side two

I think the economy has been better since the days when John was growing up here. People always assumed that if you were ambitious you'd grow up and leave the town and look for work somewhere else. And then and especially during the boom times more and more jobs opened up right here. and that was definitely an improvement.

Did boom times effect day to day life very much?

Well, it didn't mine because I didn't go down to K Street much. No, it was just a bit rowdier and you wouldn't recognize anyone on the street. I mean it used to be when you knew everybody. And then there was this big influx and you didn't recognise most of the people who drove by.

Do you feel it's changeing back know?

I don't know how anybody can forcast the future. That was the big mistake they made up at the colleg when they thought we were going to grow to be at least fifty thousand people.

(Long Pause)

Well, I think we have enough natural resources here so, there will always be some kind of economy. I sort of think they will get back to more oil and gas exploration and they make more use of the coal once again. And I much rather have them use coal than atomic energy. And they could take out the pollutants from the air so I think there's really a lot of future for the industries we have here. I would like to see ranchers be able to make a living again. And it's pretty hard to do that right now. But things have always gone in cycles and I think they will continue to.

Conclusion of session