

Interview With Mabel Eggleston

by

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History of Wyoming

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Mabel Eggleston was born in Amelia, Nebraska on May 3, 1915. Her parents were Elmer Elijah Enbody and Mable Katherine Gilman Enbody. She had three brothers and four sisters. Her family had been ranchers in Nebraska and they continued to do so after they moved to Wyoming. They moved to Douglas, Wyoming, June 1, 1929. She married Jack G. Eggleston on August 17, 1932, in Douglas, Wyoming. She has three children, Warren Thomas Eggleston, Shirley Ann Eggleston, and Jerry Russell Eggleston. Besides ranching, she drove a school bus from 1950-1976, and was a forest look-out from the spring of 1957 to the fall of 1979. She retired in 1979 and is working as a housekeeper and companion. She is living at 134 Gateway Village, Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Mabel said that she wasn't sure why her parents moved to Wyoming but the best reason she could think of was, "To see what was on the other side of the hill, I guess." The first things that she remembers about Wyoming are, "The mud and the fact that there were no young kids in the community. The mud was horrible." She attended a one room school house in Nebraska from 1920-1929. She attended the school in Douglas, Wyoming, from 1929-1930 but she did not graduate. She later began a correspondence course in 1958 from the American School in Chicago and graduated on July 29, 1960. I asked her about what the schools were like when she came to Wyoming and she said:

"It was different because I had always gone to one room country schools. My first year in high school was even to a one room country school and then to move to Douglas and go into high school and have

forty, fifty, kids in one room when I was used to maybe ten. It was a big change."

Mabel did not graduate from the Douglas high school for two reasons. First, when she went home for the Thanksgiving vacation here brothers and sisters came down with scarlet fever and their home was quarantined. The scarlet fever was spreading thorough-out their community. Also, that was when the Depression hit and there wasn't enough money to keep her and her brother in school and take care of the rest of the children, so she and her brother quit school and went to work. Another reason that Mabel stated for not returning to school was that after missing the first year after the quarantine that, "...by the time it was time to start school the next fall why I was pert near smart as the teacher so I didn't go back." After Mabel told me that it was to expensive to keep her and her brother in school I asked her if she didn't live with her parent when she was going to school. She replied, "No, after we come to Wyoming I had to stay in town. We lived to far to get back and forth. In Douglas, she worked for her room and board by babysitting, doing dishes, and cleaning house for the family she lived with. Her first job after that was, as she described it, "Cooking on a ranch for 18 hay men. You got up at about 5 o'clock in the morning, had breakfast at six, and you done your dishes, there was no dishwashes, and by 9 o'clock you had to start preparing dinner so you had it at twelve. And I go 50¢ a day." She kept that job for one summer and then when winter came she went back to helping on her families ranch. On the ranch some of her duties involved, milking cows, helping move the stock from one pasture to another, and she also hauled lumber from the saw mill with a team and wagon. I then asked her if she had ever felt any different from her brothers in the work that she could do. She told me that this had never been a problem for her. She

said:

"Never, cause anything they could do I could do too. That was the way I was raised. / Then even in your family there was no. No, my brother was very unhappy at me most of his life when he was growing up because anything he could do I was allowed to do too, and if he wanted to go someplace on a date or something, and it wasn't where he thought I ought to go or something, why, dad always said, 'Well, if it isn't any anyplace for sister to go, I don't think brother needs to go either.' And he didn't get too. I never knew that that I wasn't liberated until they started the women's liberation."

Mabel said that the work on a ranch now was different from when she was a girl in that most of the work is done by machinery. She thinks that although this makes the work easier and faster it takes away the slow, easy, life that she remembers, and she doesn't like it. She feels that now, "It's hurry, hurry, hurry." When I asked her if she felt this was true in other parts of society she said;

"Yes, yes I do. I think everybody would be better off if they slowed it down a bit. But I realize that in society you've got to work at several jobs to keep going. I realize that. But I think it would be much better if we could go back to the simple easy like that we had when I was growing up. Nobody had anything because of the bad depression but nobody wanted anything, we made do with what we had."

During the Depression the weather was very dry and this made it difficult for ranchers like Mabel and her husband. They were unable to grow crops, including the feed for their cows. Mabel remembers that they had 25 pure bred cows and they couldn't give them away. There was no feed to take care of the animals. The government had to intervene and buy the cattle for \$10.00 a head. Also, although it never happened to Mabel's stock, the government killed the cows that were too poor to buy so they wouldn't starve to death.

Mabel said that World War II changed things on the ranch. She explained that:

"You couldn't get help on the ranch. Everybody went to war and to war, and they went to munition plants, and to ship yards, and one thing and another. There was nobody left to help on the ranches, so we just leased our ranch out and moved to town for those two years. We worked in town, I clerked in a store and my husband worked for a geophysical crew, they went around testing for oil, sismograph type, then after the war was over we come back to the ranch. Started all over again. Course we'd had to get rid of the cows and one thing and another, so we had to buy cows and start over. Still we had the land."

She also said that after the war things were still changed because out of the men that returned many of them did not wish to return to work on a ranch. It was then that ranches began turning to the use of machinery.

The weather also played a part in Mabel's becoming a forrest look-out. Several dry years forced her husband to take a job as a forrest look-out on Black Hall Mountain, south of Saratoga. The next spring he was transferred to Laramie Peak division of the Medicine Bow National Forrest. She remained on the ranch for a year or two more taking care of the stock but it wasn't enough to keep them going so in the fall of 1957 she applied for the look-out position on the Ester Brook tower and got it. She was the first woman to work with that crew but she did not have any trouble with them. When she needed them for a fire they listened. She also had another honor:

"At one time I had the dubious distinction of being one out of eight women in the United States that had that job with that authority. There were a lot of women look-outs but none of them had the authority that I had to dispatch, do my own dispatching, send my fire crews. It took a while to earn that, but I did it."

Mabel has many memories from the time when she was a forrest look-out.

One of her first memoiries is recorded here.

"One time, the first year I was on the tower we had a large forrest fire and my husband was on the same tower at that time because when you worked twenty-four hours a day you got to have relief, and I gave a fire order to the office in Laramie and they had to relay it thorough another look-out 'cause I couldn't reach the office at that time and I ordered, let's see, there were a lot of fire tools, and then one thing in particular was a power-saw. The man on the other look-out was an Englishman with an accent as broad as this table and I listened to him give the order and checked them off of my list as he gave them. He gave everything and then pretty soon this fire chief in the office came back and said, 'Kennedy Peak, would you please ask Fletcher Park what the... she needs with a parasol in a forrest fire?' I said, 'Kennedy Peak, would you please tell him that it is a powersaw and spell it for him, and not a parasol. That was one. We got a chuckle out of that afterwards."

Mabel was a look-out until the fall of 1979. She received many awards during the time she was working. She says that she could be rehired anytime she went back to them. She was highly respected and received recognition for her work on several occasions.

She is a housekeeper and companion for a woman confined to a wheelchair now. She was friends with the woman's father and has known her since she was a child. Mabel lives with this woman and her husband at 134 Gateway Village, Rock Springs, Wyoming. Mabel's husband died July 25, 1971. They had to sell several acres of their ranch during 1943 and 1944 but she still owns 120 acres of it in Douglas, Wyoming. She is leasing the land at the present time but as she stated, "That's still mine." I found Mabel Eggleston to be a very interesting person and her stories about her life to be worth sharing with others.

NAME: Mabel E. Eggleston

PRESENT ADDRESS: # 134 Gateway Village R.S. WY.

1. Present profession or occupation: House keeper & Companion 1976
2. Occupations followed in the past (give dates): Bus driver 1950-~~1958~~
Forester look-out 1957-1979
3. Date of birth: 5/3/15 Place of birth: Amelia Nebr.
4. Date of moving to Wyoming: June 1st. 1929
5. Full name of parents (give mother's maiden name)
Elmer Elijah Embody Mable Katherine Gelman Embody
6. Names of brothers and sisters (and to whom married):
7. Schools attended (give dates): 1-9 attended at Amelia Nebr.
She took R correspondence from 1958-1960. 9-12 American school.
1929-1930 - graduated ~~1930~~-1960
8. Places of residence in Wyoming (give dates):
Douglas Wyo 1929-1979 - 1979-1982 R.S.
9. Military service (dates, awards, area served, rank, etc.):
10. Political offices held (give dates): —
11. Political affiliation: Democrat
12. Religious affiliation: Episcopal
13. Marriage (spouse's name, date and place of marriage):
Jack E. Eggleston. Aug 17. 1932 Douglas Wyo
14. Children (names, dates of birth, grandchildren, etc.):
15. List of clubs and societies of which you are a member:
None