

ORAL HISTORY

MYRTLE BERNICE HAMBLIN STODDARD

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U.S. HISTORY SINCE 1877

CHRIS PLANT

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This is the continuing life story of Myrtle Bernice Hamblin Stoddard. This part of the story begins with her meeting her husband, Wilford Stoddard.

Myrtle met Wilford Stoddard in the spring of 1934. Wilford's nephew, Marvin Taylor introduced them at a dance in the high school in Mountain View. They started dating, and that next winter became engaged. In June 1935, after letting their families know, they left a barn dance in Lyman and drove to Salt Lake City, Utah. On June 11, 1935 they were married in the city and county building by the Justice of Peace, with two clerks acting as witnesses.

Wilford had a job with the railroad, working on the section in Ragan. The railroad provided a one room duplex for them to live in, and this is where they lived until the winter months. In November the men were laid off because of the weather. Wilford and Myrtle then moved to her Dad's place and lived in a log cabin by the canal. Myrtle says that the married kids called this the "poverty cabin" because this is where they came to live when anyone was out of work.

Wilford and Myrtle's first daughter arrived 15 months after they were married. The first five children came about every two years then a five year lapse between the fifth and sixth children and about six years between the sixth and seventh. Myrtle had five girls and two boys. All of the children were born in Bridger Valley, except their third daughter (third child) who was born in Salt Lake City in the Cottonwood Hospital, their second son (sixth child) who was born in the Evanston hospital. The other four were born in Myrtle's aunt's maternity home in Lyman.

When Wilford and Myrtle's oldest child (Lois) was about a year old they decided to start ranching. They leased a ranch, took out a loan and bought some cows and sheep. They joined the Farm Bureau, and Myrtle joined the Ladies Club, which was the Women's Home Demonstration Club, a part

of the Extension Service. She says there were about five young couples that would get together about once a week or so in each others home. "That was about the extent of our social life." They would go to the local dances, but there wasn't any money for movies. There was quilting in the Women's Club and Relief Society (Woman's Club for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). These were fun social times in which the ladie's would get together all day. If they didn't have a quilt on they would bring their handi-work and the little ones. There would be a big meal at noon, an hour for the meeting, then the rest of the time spent on the sewing. On Sunday's there was Church. Myrtle tells the story of when the baby (the sixth child, 2nd son, Lee) was left at Church. Myrtle's brother and sister and their familys were all going to their house after church for dinner. The cousins were all trading places and riding in each others cars.

They had been home for a while when Myrtle said, "Where's the baby?" He was about 6 or 7 months old at the time and wasn't walking yet. They looked and couldn't find him so they started checking the cars as they came up the road. They also discovered two other kids were missing. They "beat it" back down the road. They met up with Louise and Betty (her niece) with a broom stick pushed through the handles of a fruit basket. Lee was sitting in the fruit basket and they were packing him home. "We had left him at the church."

Before Myrtle was married she had worked as a maid for \$3.00 a week, then as a typist for \$4.00 a day. After graduating from High School and going to Normal School, she then taught school. Because it was during the depression she had to quit teaching when she was married. She didn't work after she was married until her fifth child was three years old. Myrtle would then work a couple of months or

so during the winter when they lived on the Nebraska Bench. Bridger Valley Electric (BVE) was setting up a bookkeeping system and she worked for them during the winter helping them keep up to date while they did this. This lasted a couple of winters. In 1954 she started working for BVE full time where she worked for 11 years. She quit working there to help care for her mother who had poor health and was nearly bedfast. While working at BVE, Myrtle's jobs were, billing clerk, collection officer, receptionist, clerk-typist. "You name it, I did it". She started out at 65¢ an hour, but couldn't remember her ending pay.

Her next job was with the Forest Service. Wilford, and their 2nd, 3rd and 4th children (Louise, Coralie and Elaine) were working up in the Pine beetle bug camps. Wilford was a foreman and the girls worked in the cook shacks. The clerk up at the camp was going to be transferred and they were looking for someone to replace her. Wilford told then that Myrtle Had experience as clerk, and they hired her. The other clerk ended up not being transferred, but they kept her on. She worked part time- pay roll day, gas issue etc. "and hopping back and forth between ranch and kids and up to the camp." The next summer she applied for the opening in the Mountain View District office and got the job. She had applied for the job because the Forest Service had told her it was to be a three day a week job. She felt good about that because it would bring in some income, and she would still have time at home. It ended up being a full time job that lasted for eighteen years. (Retiring in 1983.)

While Myrtle was working for BVE during the winter months, they lived on the (Nebraska) bench in a 2 room log house during the summer. She explains this "was strictly a summer home because the snow blew through the

cracks and it was too hard to get out to get the kids to school." Wilford and Myrtle had bought this land in order to own their own place and not have to lease. They sold all their animals except 100 sheep and ten cows. They paid \$1600 cash for 160 acres. Wilford built the little log house, taking about one month to build it and spending approximately \$25 for nails and rough lumber.

The first home they had built was two mining houses brought up from outside Rock Springs. They cost \$600 each for the houses, and \$300 each to have them moved here. Wilford then put them together to make a house. This house did cost more than the one they had built earlier up on the bench, but they didn't go into debt for it. Myrtle says that the 33 year loans needed to pay for houses now "boggles" the mind.

Besides the log house, they built a "junk" house. This was a place to hang harnesses in. They built a corral to milk the cows in, and an outhouse. They had to start from the beginning on this land. There wasn't any previous crop, or hay on this land. So they started "grubbing sagebrush". This means they took a hand plow and team, plowed through the sagebrush, then pulled it up by hand, piled it up and burned it. Then after that they would harrow the ground, clean off all the excess brush, level the land and prepare it for the seed. They planted 10 acres of grain and alfalfa that first spring in 1945. They had to work off the place to buy hay to feed the animals. Myrtle says "It was almost like homesteading because we started from virgin land." Wilford and Myrtle had five children (Lois, Louise, Coralie, Elaine and Bob) at this time and they helped out on the ranch. They made a party out of the work by roasting hotdogs and marshmallows over the burning sagebrush in the evenings. Myrtle says their interest span was a little short but they got some help out of them. As they got older (Lois and Louise were old enough

at this time)". They began milking and doing other chores. She says there were chickens to feed, eggs to get in, and the pigs and cows to care for. "They were totally involved in the entire operation. It was a family effort." They raised almost all that they ate. In the summer they had mutton or chicken. Myrtle tells the story of two of her daughter's, Coralie and Elaine who were about five and three. They had watched their mom butcher and clean many chickens. One day a little chicken had fallen into the pig slop and drowned. The two little girls pulled the chicken out, skinned it and got it ready for the family to eat. They then called their mother out to come and look. Myrtle says it "was the funniest looking sight." It wasn't as big as a robin with its spindly legs. The girls felt they could eat it "because it was dead and you didn't eat chickens that were alive." Myrtle says it was hard telling them they couldn't eat this little chicken that had died an unnatural death.

There was no alfalfa the first year because as Myrtle explains it takes two years to get an alfalfa crop. The first year you plant grain with the alfalfa as a cover crop. This protects the alfalfa from the wind, sun and birds. The first year you get grain, the next year you get "a small hay crop." Each year they grubbed more sagebrush, planted more grain and alfalfa and this added more acres to their hay land. This was all done mostly by hand. They did have a tractor, but the hand plow did a little better and piling up and burning had to be by hand.

Housework was mostly "keeping the dirty clothes picked up, making the beds, doing dishes, and sweeping the dirt down the cracks of the wide board floor." Myrtle did do the sewing for her family. She made all the girls clothes and the boys shirts, but she didn't make the overalls. To make a girls coat, she would take a woman's old coat, take

it apart, wash it and then turn it inside out and make "a nice coat for a little girl." She says the material was usually very nice. She also used ladie's old dresses for making new dresses for the girls. Myrtle also used the cotton print flour sacks to make dresses and shirts. She made all the bread and baking for her family, so got quite a few cotton sacks.

When the family was growing up, Wilford usually put in a 16 hour day in the field and also had a job outside the farm. He would work for the county, Forest Service, or the railroad besides other jobs. She never felt he should have to help inside the home over and above all his other jobs. She says there was so much work to be done and they all pitched in and did it. She feels that life styles are different now, and that if both the man and the woman come home from a job, the man can pitch in and do as much as she does.

Myrtle says that in the home instant obedience was insisted upon. Since it had been expected all their lives, there were very few problems. "Sometimes someone wouldn't get the dishes done or this type of thing. Out and out defiance, no." When discipline was needed, both Wilford and Myrtle disciplined, although the mother usually had more to do with the children then, the husband being involved with the outside work. If the kids weren't working they were off playing. "Except for morning and night chores there was not much expected of them.

After they were married, shopping was done in Mountain View. They bought a few groceries such as the staples, flour, sugar and cereal, then gasoline and kerosene. They did their shopping on "cream day." They bought the cream from the ranchers, tested it and then shipped it to Salt Lake City. They did this on commission for Mountain States

Creamery. Other than the staples they ate what they grew at home.

During World War II they were issued ration stamps and allowed to buy only so much of scarce items. Myrtle says that rancher's were allowed a little more gasoline because of the farm equipment, but you could only get so much for your car. She says "You couldn't chase around." They didn't feel the crunch on food because the children were small and didn't eat as much and they did have meat since they raised their own. She says they had a niece in California though that had trouble making the meat rations meet the needs. She said one thing she noticed was at Christmas time you couldn't get any metal toys. "Toy trucks and tractors were not being made. All that was going for bullets."

Help for the ranch was hard to get during the war too. Many of the young men were gone. Wilford needed help because the kids were small and there were cows to be milked and crops to be taken care of. All the help there was were those who didn't pass the physical "or were worthless. It was hard." Myrtle had three brothers in the war. All were Navy fighter pilots. The oldest one didn't come home. (He was declared missing in action). The other two did make it home.

Myrtle grew up in a Republican home, and married a Republican, so she herself has been one all her life. She says she wasn't too concerned with politics "all those years," but that she is a staunch Republican because "I believe in help yourself and not expect so much from the Government." Myrtle does have a brother who is Democrat and because of that "we banned Dad and brother from talking politics at any family gathering." Myrtle feels that most women voted the way they wanted and not necessarily how their husbands did. She remembers her Dad bringing home a sample

ballot and saying "Well here wife, here's the way you're going to vote" as he would tell her which candidate to vote for. One day Myrtle's mother said, "You know Roll, I'll vote for who I darn well please." Myrtle voted straight party ticket on the national level but on the local level she voted for the man, "good people" who felt the way she did. She feels President Reagan is sincere, and goes along with what he says most of the time, but feels the president doesn't have a lot of power.

In the late 70's the soda ash mines boomed and the oil fields opened up, creating a boom for the area that Myrtle had grown up in. "We were prosperous, community-wise, lots of work and big pay." So business people came in and Mountain View grew. She says that the Howard Porch ranch used to be "the prettiest hay field in the country, now it's covered with town." She says that before the boom came Bridger Valley was 70% Mormon. The Presbyterian and Catholic churches were the only other churches in the valley. With the boom came a new culture. Myrtle says they weren't trash people, but many were transient types. If the jobs or climate didn't suit them, "there were plenty of jobs and they could go elsewhere." This happens when there is prosperity. Crime did seem to increase during this time. But ironically you couldn't blame it on the move-ins. Myrtle was specifically talking about the Mark Hopkinson case in which the Vehar family in Evanston was killed. Mark was a local kid that her children had gone to school with.

All in all Myrtle feels that Mountain View has made a good transition between the "old days," and today. She says her grandparents came here at the turn of the century. Her parents settled here and made their contribution, as have Myrtle and Wilford and their children. She graduated from Mountain View High Schook, all her children followed suit. Her grandchildren are graduating from Mountain View

and as she says "I dare say I'll have great-great-grand-children that will." She's proud of the school and the community and says "We have nothing to apologize for." She feels the community is close with no religious bias that she can see. "When a neighbor is in trouble a neighbor is there to help." People don't think of politics or religion when it's a friend across the street. "That's the way the community has been to me, and it's great."

Myrtle would like to tell her grandchildren that she knows she mouths off a lot and tells them what to do but that she hopes she doesn't interfere with their free agency. She says she hopes that "they will stand tall, and be proud of who they are, and be a darned good citizen. I see no reason why young people can't make a good life in Mountain View, but they have to be Mountain View minded." She says they need to concern themselves with the welfare of the community, their religious affiliation, school, and become a part of it. "Make things happen, and not let things happen to them."

This brings us up to the present. Myrtle still lives in Mountain View and enjoys living close to most of her children and grandchildren.