

THE EARLY YEARS OF
MYRTLE BERNICE HAMBLIN

ORAL HISTORY PREPARED BY
VaLYNNE STODDARD

HISTORY OF WYOMING
CHRIS PLANT
MARCH 27, 1986

Myrtle Bernice Hamblin was born on June 11, 1914 in Urie, Wyoming on the land that is now owned by Ronald Walker. She was the second child of seven born to Cora Roberts and Edwin Rollins Hamblin. Besides her grandmother who was always there when there was a birth, there was a doctor whom she believes was named Dr. Thompson.

Myrtle's Hamblin grandparents had come up from Minersville, Utah, down by Cedar City and St. George. They had heard there was land in Lucerne Valley, in the Manila, Utah area. They didn't like it over there and came to the Lower Bench of Lyman in 1898. The Robert's also came up from southern Utah in 1906.

After Myrtle's parents were married, they bought their first land from Frank Blackner and this is where she was born.

As a child she went to school in Millburne which was about a mile and a quarter from where she lived. To get to school she and her older brother either walked or rode a horse. During the winter is when they rode the horse. Her dad would boost them up, both in the saddle on the same horse. Her dad seemed to be afraid of them getting their legs tangled in the stirrups, and wanted to tie them up under the horse, but then they wouldn't have been able to get on and off. She was five and her brother wasn't quite seven.

Other forms of transportation when she was younger was wagons and buggys, and during the winter sleigh rides. These were not the sleigh rides we think of today, fun and games, it was a means of getting from "here to there."

Myrtle attended church in Millburne. The church and school were about three hundred yards apart on what is now the Carl Hofer development.

Some of the games that were played when she was a child were "kick the can" and "tag." Kick the can is played by someone kicking the can then everyone would run. The person who kicked the can would chase the others, and whoever he caught was "it." The boys liked playing marbles and had their

special "taws". As she grew older, she liked to play hide and seek on horseback back in the trees. The kids used to spend hours on the Black's Fork River bottoms playing their games. "How we didn't get killed, I will never understand, but it was fun." They also had their favorite swimming holes in the Blacks Fork. Their parents would check them out and "steer us away from those they felt were dangerous, but they didn't pay too much attention."

Adult entertainment was usually dances, at the school or church. They had neighbor get togethers. "You were never to anyones house that you weren't invited for a meal." There were evening socials, card partys, pot-luck meals, etc. Myrtle mostly remembers the dances sponsored by Farm Bureau or the Church.

The town of Millburne had the school, the church, and a post office, which did have candy for the kids, but for shopping they had to go to Fort Bridger or Mountain View. Grocery shopping was done in the fall. They bought the basics such as flour, sugar, mush, etc. and lived on what they produced, such as eggs, milk, butter, meat, vegetables and chickens. They raised their livestock and vegetables on a 320 acre farm that her dad had bought from her grandfather and another fellow out toward Millburne. This is known as the Hamblin ranch. Her great uncle George Bradshaw had put a pump in the house, so they had running water after they moved into it in March of 1918.

Myrtle can barely remember before living in this house (she was four when they moved into it) but the well before had been out in the yard. The new house had plastered walls as well as the pump in the corner, the well was under the house and rocked in.

When Myrtle was in the second grade they started running a bus from Millburne to Mountain View, because there was a high school there now. They picked up Myrtle and her older brother and took them to school in Mountain View.

At that time Mountain View had two stores, a blacksmith shop, and a pool hall besides the school. She doesn't remember a bar there at the time, but there was talk of a bootlegger. "People were always able to get their alcoholic beverages, they would talk about going over to Charlie's.

When she was younger and attended dances, there was always a fight or two. Someone would get poked, and there would be a "grand exodus of all male adults outside." There would be a battle then they would come back in and dance. Myrtle doesn't remember ever seeing the "tough cowboy with the gun on the hip."

Her Dad bought his first car in 1926. It was a 1918 or 1920 Model T Ford. There was maybe a dozen cars here at that time, with no roads for them, just wagon tracks. It was an exciting time to have a car rather than using wagons and horses. Cars were very unreliable. There were a lot of flat tires, and since gasoline flowed by gravity, there were times when they had to drive the car up a hill backwards or the gas would quit. There were also times when you had to get a team of horses to pull you out when you got stuck. Going through mud puddles would sometimes drown the engine, and you would be stopped. Their car had a roof on it, and curtains of "izing glass", which was a form of clear substance that you could see through, similar to the plastic that we have now." There weren't any car heaters and dust and wind came up through the floor boards.

The main churches in Bridger Valley, were the Presbyterian and Mormon. Mountain View had a branch, Lyman and Millburne had wards. The feeling at the time was, "Lyman was those dirty Mormon's, Mountain View was anti-Mormon, and Millburne was predominately Mormon.

After the mill burned in Millburne, and homesteaders that weren't making it moved out the LDS Ward moved to Mountain View and met in an old school house drawing curtains to divide rooms for classes.

The Presbyterians still use the old white building with the steeple on it, but also use a newer building (which is beside it) for their services. They still ring the bell on Sunday mornings that was rung years ago.

The mill had burned down in Millburne, but this was a coincidence. Bern is Scottish for stream and there was a stream they used to run the mill race.

There used to be "Tie drives", this is when they would cut ties for the railroad up in the forest and float them down the rivers in the spring. The men would ride them down to keep them from clogging or jamming up, down to Granger. It was hard for Myrtle and her friends to stay in school when they wanted to be out watching the tie drives.

Bridger Valley was seldom without a doctor, but it wasn't easy for him or her. Myrtle remember's two women doctors during her growing up years. There wasn't any Dr. offices and they came to you when you needed them. This wasn't always as easy as it sounds. If the Doctor was in Lyman and a lady went into labor in Robertson (about 15 miles away) it made for a long horseback ride. Myrtle's great grandmother Hamblin was a Doctor when she lived here and delivered Myrtle's husband, Wilford's younger brother. Another woman Doctor, Dr. Mills delivered Myrtle's three younger brothers. Myrtle's grandma Robert's was at nearly everyone of her brother's and sister's births. She was not at the youngest brother's birth but a Mrs. Dansie took care of her mother. Mrs. Dansie was a woman who hired out for this job, because at the time, a woman stayed in bed for 10 days after delivery. "Whoever came took care of all of us, did all the laundry, cooking, fed the chickens, etc.

Epidemics were especially bad, because there were few inoculations. Myrtle doesn't really remember the diphtheria epidemic, but she knows the Stringer family lost three in two or three days. There was vaccinations for small-pox, but whooping cough, mumps, measles etc. were without vaccines. When an epidemic broke out, people were quarantined until

they were better. There was aspirin, but most remedies were homemade. A drop or two of kerosene on sugar was used for croup. Poultices (mustard plaster on your chest) was for congestion, bread and milk were for infections, and sage brush tea was used in the spring for a tonic to purify the blood.

Myrtle says chicken soup must go back to our past, because recently when she had a bad cold she felt "the need for chicken soup." You could buy liniment and cough syrup.

When there were deaths, funerals were held according to their faith. The old Mormon funerals would last two to three hours, with two to three speakers and songs. "They have modernized them, thankfully." A wagon was used to carry the casket, neighbors dug the grave and the casket was made by a local carpenter, the ladies would line it, and dress the body. In the days before embalming, they sat up with the body, keeping the corpse packed in ice, "...and kept the cats off." There are three cemeterys in the valley, one in Lyman, one in Fort Bridger and a small one in Millburne.

When Myrtle was a young girl, she helped with the chores. There was wood to get in, eggs to gather, pigs and chickens to feed, etc. There home had a pump in the house so they were one of the lucky ones that didn't have to bring in water.

At school you were expected to be on good behavior. You raised your hand to be called on and to speak. To respond to the teacher you stood up by you desk. You were expected to be quiet. "Teachers had full authority to take whatever means he or she needed to see that law and order was kept." The ruler and the buggy whip were both used to keep this order.

The kitchen in the home was the "core of living." The food was prepared on the range, and water was heated. The range also heated the room. During the winter Myrtle's dad put a small heater in the other room, the bedroom, and

took it out during the summer to make more room. Under the window was the table, and along one wall was what was called a "sanitary couch." The sides could be lifted up and made into a fullsize bed. Some of us slept there, the rest slept in the "bed or two" in her parents room, and a crib for the baby of the time. There was a bunkhouse that was just back of the house. The bigger boys slept there, and her mother also did the washing there. They didn't have a clothes closet in the house, but there was a cupboard used for clothes. "Very basic, very simple, nothing extra." This was a frame house with plastered walls. "Dont forget the plastered walls."

While growing up she and her brothers and sister were expected to mind. They had their chores and if they didn't get done "We got a spat on the behind." Her dad used the boot in the pants, her mother used a willow. The help of the children was important. For two years all seven of the children were in school, there were 20 to 24 cows to be milked, by hand. If the children weren't up to help before school, her dad would be milking until noon. After school was time to milk again, but if they got right to it and did their job, it was no big deal. It was a disciplinary thing, because it was something that had to be done. "I am a firm believer in work that has to be done. I don't think work for works sake does much for you, but I think part of discipline the world needs that it doesn't have is to learn the value of work - (accomplishment)."

Myrtle's mother would make a cake and try to make it a special day on birthdays. It was usually just a family affair, because it was hard for children to get to each others homes for partys, and there usually wasn't any gifts. For Christmas they didn't always have a tree, but they always had a lot of fun. Myrtle and her brothers and sister always hung up their stockings and decorated the house. There was popcorn, and cranberries to string, and paper chains. Her Mother would cook ahead, the plum pudding, mincemeat, and fruit cakes were made in the fall when they harvested and got

fruit from Utah, and butchered the meat.

In the community there was usually a play or cantata. The L.D.S. Ward had a lot of activities at Christmas time. Other celebrations while growing up was the 4th of July which was a big celebration, and for the 24th of July we went to Lyman. The 24th of July is a Mormon holiday, commemorating when the pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley. There was a fair every fall, and it lasted two days at least. There were horse races, contests, kids races, and a rodeo. Animals and produce displayed and it was a good time.

On Tuesday night was Mutual (an L.D.S. organization for youth ages 12 to 18) This was where they learned dances. They went to stake dances, music, and drama festivals and then on to Salt Lake. Marie Cross's mother was president of the Y.M.M.I.A. (Young Womens Mutual Improvement Association - LDS) She taught the youth "every dance there was to know", the polka's, highland fling, square dances, round dances etc. They put on plays and did a lot of fun things. "We didn't lack for entertainment, it was all right there."

Dates were more group activities rather than one on one. Myrtle doesn't remember too many at all until she began dating her husband to be (Wilford) in 1934, when she was 20. Everyone was all together and there wasn't transportation for one on one dates. "We would take sack lunches and head for the river bottoms and find wild strawberries and pick currants, etc."

Family outings were often going up to get firewood. This was usually overnight. Sometimes two or three families went and then they had a bunch of cousins to play with. Another thing they would do is pick wild currants or gooseberries.

When very young she would go to dances with her parents. These dances were for everybody, and lasted until 2 or 3 A.M. with a pot luck dinner at midnight. There was usually a fiddler, maybe an accordion, and piano. Once in a while a drummer, but not often. When Myrtle got sleepy, she climbed into the coats and went to sleep. These dances were a family

affair. They would announce what kind of dance it would be, two step, waltz or Virginia Reel. You would dance with everybody, reserving the opening dance, intermission, and last dance for your date. There wasn't ever any famous dance bands, just local ones.

There was once a famous person to the Mormon Community who came to Fort Bridger. This was George Albert Smith who was President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They were celebrating the centennial of the Mormons arriving in Salt Lake City in 1847. They depicted the 147 people in the first wagon train. They didn't have oxen and covered wagons, but had a motorcade with carved out oxen mounted on the sides of automobiles.

Myrtle graduated from high school in May 1930 and turned sixteen in June. The depression was in force, and there was no money, and no jobs, so going to college would have been hard. They were "lucky to hang onto the family ranch. Times were really poor." There was an Advanced Normal Training course offered at the high school. Elementary education courses were offered free. Myrtle and her older brother Ted took these courses and earned 36 college credits. Then they borrowed \$100 each from a bank in Kemmerer and went to Laramie for 6 weeks of summer school. This enabled her to receive an elementary permit that was good for three years.

Myrtle turned seventeen while at summer school, this was at the University of Wyoming. Myrtle says you can get what you want out of education. If you're the partying type, it's available, and it was at U. of W. She says it was a good school then, and "I think it is now". The parties were there and if you wanted to "booze it up" you were able to booze it up.

She started teaching in September, 3 months after turning 17. She taught in the Newfork School south of Pinedale. The address was Boulder, and she lived at the home of one of her students. She taught seven students her first year. She had one in the first grade, two in the second, one in the fourth, one in the fifth, and two in

the sixth. It was run by the school board with three schools in the district. The school board did the paying, and she earned \$90 a month. She was not expected to send the money home, it was hers, after paying the \$100.00 back to the bank.

The school was a one log room with a stove for keeping the room warm. The man who took them to school would go in and start the fire. The local people kept the school supplied with wood and other needs.

As a teacher, Myrtle says she never laid a hand on a student, but she did demand obedience. "I didn't tolerate kids running around and making noise." Her oldest student was a 12 year old boy who was real nice and wanted to learn. She had a fifth grader though, who was a real stinker. One day he called her a G.D.S.O.B and she handed out her worst punishment to him. She said, "Well, Henry, I'm not going to do anything about this, we'll just walk over and you can tell your Mother what you said." He begged her on the way to his house "do what you want to me but don't tell my Mom."

After her first year of school she didn't teach for two years, then Myrtle went back to teach in the fall of 1934. The depression was taking its toll and instead of \$90 for 9 months that she had made her first year of teaching she now made \$70 for seven months.

The second year she taught, her father built her an 8' by 12' plywood home. The inside was sheep camp style. There was a bunk bed with a table that pulled out from under it. There was a cook stove in one corner, a dresser and wash stand in the other corner. Myrtle says "I was cozy, it was nice."

The parents wouldn't let her put it in the school yard, so she stayed in a neighbors yard. The school board had had trouble with a teacher before, so they wanted the "school daddy" as they were called, where she could be chaperoned. Myrtle says she would've been too vulnerable in the school yard and preferred being in the family's yard.

In school she liked reading and writing. She didn't like math as well and she hated history. "I hated History!!!" "However I have eaten those words later because I have learned to appreciate it." She blames her teachers, because she didn't see the need for memorizing dates. She can tell you about Paul Revers's ride, or Washington's crossing the Delaware and says "forget about testing me for times. I hated it."

Myrtle taught for two years, with a two year break in between. Her last year of teaching was 1934-5. She was Married on June 22, 1935 to Wilford Stoddard. The law did not allow a married woman to teach because it was during the depression. The husband was to support his wife and leave the teaching jobs for those who were not married.

This ends Myrtle's growing up years. Her married years are another chapter in her life.

NAME: Myrtle H. Stoddard

PRESENT ADDRESS: Box 206, Mountain View, Wyo 82939

1. Present profession or occupation: retired
2. Occupations followed in the past (give dates): Billing Clerk, ^{Bridger} Valley Electric, Business Mgt. Asst
3. Date of birth: June 11, 1914 Place of birth: U.S. Forest Service, ^{U.S.} Urie Co. Wyo.
4. Date of moving to Wyoming: Born here
5. Full name of parents (give mother's maiden name)
Edwin Rollin Hamblin
Cora Roberts
6. Names of brothers and sisters (and to whom married):
Edwin Wallace md. Winifred O'Hara
Jack md. Carol Kidman Spencer md. Eileen Ferguson
Vivian md. Harold Hopkinson Louis md. Margaret Allen
7. Schools attended (give dates): Darwin md. Dorothy Jarvie
Mountain View Elementary & High School
University of Wyoming
8. Places of residence in Wyoming (give dates):
Ranch 3 mi. south of Fort Bridger
Mountain View, Wyoming
9. Military service (dates, awards, area served, rank, etc.):
n/a
10. Political offices held (give dates):
none
11. Political affiliation:
Republican
12. Religious affiliation:
L. D. S.
13. Marriage (spouse's name, date and place of marriage):
Wilford Stoddard 6-22-35
Salt Lake City, Utah
14. Children (names, dates of birth, grandchildren, etc.):
Lois 9-25-34 Wilford Robert 11-27-44
Louise 11-16-38 Leland Jay 11-19-49
Coralie 07-06-41 Ruth 08-27-55
Elaine 02-25-43 35 grandchildren, 7 gr. grandchildren
15. List of clubs and societies of which you are a member:
Relief Society (L. D. S.)