

HISTORY OF WYOMING

BIOGRAPHY

Steve Sekerak Interviewed by Mary Reeves

Steve Sekerak was born in 1932, on a small dairy farm in rural O'Claire, Wisconsin, which is located near Madison. Steve remained there until he was seven years old, at which time, his father chose to relocate. Steve's father, whom I will refer to as Mr. Sekerak, rode a train back to his own native Rock Springs, Wyoming, where he and Steve's mom, had been married many years before.

Mr. Sekerak, took on a job as rancher, for the Carrie Gottsche Sheep Company. Later, Mr. Sekerak sent for his family, which consisted of his wife, and three children, where they joined him on Currant Creek Ranch.

Steve started school in the first grade, because they did not have kindergarten, as we know it today. The classes ran from the first grade, through the eighth grade, with approximately sixteen children in attendance.

The teacher was a very nice person, and used to hold Steve on her lap, but she did not do a very good job of educating the students. Many times, she would write a problem on the board, and the older children would have to correct her errors, and show her the proper way to do things. One day, the county superintendant, came to give a test, to see how well the students were doing. Steve, along with most of the other pupils, failed miserably.

However, the teacher remained, as there was not much criteria to be a teacher, back in those days. Especially, in a poor community, where most of the children went barefoot in warm weather, and only owned a pair of Sunday shoes.

Mr. Sekerak earned twenty-five dollars a month, which seemed like low wages even in those times. The ranch owner furnished the food, so there was room and board to compensate for the meager pay. Baby lambs were born in May, which began a full season of ranching, that would not end until somewhere around mid-September, and would employ about forty people.

The rancher was overseer of the ranch, and assumed many responsibilities. The wife of the rancher was expected to do the cooking, and dishes for the other workers.

The owner of Currant Creek Ranch, built a schoolhouse, for just Steve, and his younger sister. They went through elementary school up until the early part of fifth grade, when the war started and teachers were very hard to find. They then had to go live in town with a married sister, which was a very hard adjustment on both of them. They were shy, and had not been around people very much. Steve did not even know what a football looked like.

Being the only two students in the classroom, was a very unique situation, and Steve and his sister, benefitted by all the individual attention each of them received. Of course, top notch educators, would not want to go to a country school where there were only two pupils, and no social life.

Steve had his own horse that his dad had bought him, from Eden valley. One evening, while they were all eating dinner, one of the ranch hands rode Steve's horse right into the kitchen. Needless to say, this caused some excitement.

There was no indoor plumbing on the ranch. A creek that ran in front of the house, provided fresh running water. Someone had shoved a pipe into the creek, and that's where the water came from, until the creek froze over. In the winter time, the ice had to be chopped, and buckets were filled with water. When there was snow on the ground, sleds were used to haul huge washtubs of water to the house.

There was no electricity on the ranch, but there was an old generator, that would take two or three days to start, and then it would only run for about half a day, and shut down. It was more trouble than it was worth, to keep it going.

The women would heat the water, in copper boilers, on the flat-topped, wood-burning stove, to do their laundry with. They had sticks that they would use to slosh, and to poke the clothes with to get them clean.

Also, these copper boilers were used to heat water in, to fill huge washtubs, so that Steve and his family could bathe every Saturday night in the wintertime. During the summer months, he would get a bath every day, as he and his sister would play in the creek.

Most of the chores on the ranch, were done by work horses. There were saddle horses for the shearers, teams to pull the sheep wagons with, and very few trucks or tractors.

Currant Creek Ranch was a good size ranch, boasting a herd of about forty thousand sheep, before lambing season, a thousand head of cattle, and about two to three thousand horses. Many of the horses were kept for the sole purpose of breeding stock.

With all of this livestock to support over the years, there was still ample game in the area, and an abundance of food for them. Steve was raised around sheep most of his early life, and feels very strongly, that the sheep did not hurt the country.

it is a question that no one seems to have the answers for. In the present day, the Bureau of Land Management is rounding up the wild horses, to provide food for the wildlife. Steve knows that something happened to the land, but he doesn't know what, as there are no sheep grazing consistently in that area.

Christmases on the Currant Creek Ranch were always lots of fun. The whole Sekerak family would go to White Mountain to cut their christmas tree. The christmas tree was decorated with pretty glass balls, and plenty of icicles. There was always unshelled nuts, and probably an orange, in the stocking on Christmas morn. Sometimes you would get a stick if you had been naughty. Other times, the stockings were filled with coal to make it look like you had more than what you really did.

Steve's mom and dad were convinced that it was very important for Steve and his sister to believe in Santa Clause. They kept this tradition alive, by tricking they're children. This was achieved by Steve's mom, waking them at six o'clock in the morning to hear the hoof beats. Steve's dad would be outside ringing cowbells, and pounding on the roof with a broom. They would then go to the family room, where sure enough, Santa had left presents. They're father would come in freezing, because he had been to the outhouse and had seen Santa Clause leaving. Steve later used this technique on his own two sons, and kept them believing in Santa Clause for another couple of years.

Games were scarce, and children had to entertain themselves. They did this by playing hide and seek, riding horses, and making darts out of broom handles and turkey feathers. These were really good darts. You could throw them about a hundred feet.

One spanish boy on the ranch took an old rim off of an old wagon wheel, and rolled it around with wire. He could make it do all types of things. They also had stilts. There was an old radio on the ranch, but they only listened to it when Joe Lewis was fighting, or when the news programs were on.

Steve does not remember it being particularly hard during the depression. Although, he remembers the gasoline, and tobacco ration stamps.

Only about half of the residents in Rock Springs owned automobiles, Steve's family was not fortunate enough to do so. Everyone had little pushcarts, or wagons, that they would take shopping for groceries. People were not very mobile, and did not go many places.

On the fourth of July, the Sekeraks would go to the country for a good old fashioned weenie roast. Nothing fancy, just a nice family picnic.

Steve was eight years old when he had his first job. He got paid thirty dollars, for a month and a half's work. When the lamb's tails were docked, it was Steve's job to put blood stopper on them, to keep them from bleeding.

Steve's fondest memory of Sweetwater County, are the people and the unique hospitality they show. "They would make you feel special, and people would accept you at face value, you had nothing to prove."

Steve would like to say to his grandchildren, and heirs, that he wishes that they could grow up in the country and experience the times when a family was closer knit. He believes that people would enjoy the old way of living, much better, as opposed to now.