

Oral History Project

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History of Wyoming
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Mary Kay Anderson was born in Linwood, Kansas. She does not remember the formative years any more. Her father owned a merchandise store. As she grew up she helped her father by clerking in the store. She has three brothers but she is the only girl. She says she was somewhat spoiled being the only girl. She was active in music and drama in high school and a member of the 4H club.

She attended the University of Kansas for two years but the depression interrupted her schooling and she had to go to work. She got the equivalent of an associates degree. Then went to teach in a rural school near her home town, where she taught for four years.

Mary's father passed away and she came west with her mother, who wanted to move to Evanston, Wyoming. Mary's older brother lived in Evanston. This was not her first trip to Wyoming. She had been spending her summers visiting her brother and his family before she moved here.

She went to teaching in Lyman, Wyoming. While teaching in Lyman, she attended the University of Wyoming Summer School to get her B.S. degree. At the University she met the superintendent of school's, Mr. E. M. Tompson, who convinced her she should come and teach in Rock Springs. This was in 1941.

She started teaching that Fall at Yellowstone School. There were only five schools in the area when she came, one a junior high school. There was a school staff of about 85 people including the custodians and secretaries. She taught at Yellowstone for two years. While teaching there she met a very nice man, Mr. Anderson.

She married Mr. Anderson in 1946. Mary was married in Evanston by the Congregational minister from Rock Springs. Then they took Mrs. Anderson, her mother-in-law, along with them on the

honeymoon. However they left her in Salt Lake City to visit family and friends while they went on to California for their honeymoon. Having taught here in Rock Springs and her husband a native of Rock Springs, she just fit right in when she married.

She was and is a dedicated teacher and continued to teach after she got married. In 1949 they moved to Salt Lake. She taught there for two years. They returned to Rock Springs and she has been here ever since. She taught junior high school when she returned. The junior high school was in what for many years was the district education building. The district education building is now a brand new building with a large staff on Mountain View. In 1963 Mary was transferred to the high school level where she taught until she retired in 1975. Since retiring she still substitute teaches, is involved with legislation dealing with education, and still very much involved with the educational associations in the area and on the state level. She says she enjoys substitute teaching. It keeps her on her toes. Her students think of her in a grandma image and they are very respectful to her.

When she arrived in 1941, she stayed with the Rapasque's at 529 B Street. The Rapasque's were Czechoslovakian people. They were very hospitable people and she stayed with them for the two years she taught at Yellowstone. The local people of Rock Springs told her at that time that there were 58 nationalities and as many languages being spoken in the area.

She was very lonely when she first came to Rock Springs. She missed the trees and shrubs and game she was used to seeing. However when she told Mrs. Rapasque that Rock Springs was a terrible place to be, Mrs. Rapasque told her that no one had made

her come, it was her decision made of her own free will. She guessed then that she did not have any room for complaints. After being here awhile she discovered the people were as nice as could be. They were also very festive people. They performed their native dances on their native holidays. In the Fall there was a Grape Festival. The Slavinski Dome was decorated with grapes and vines and dancing ensued. The grapes and vines had to be shipped in by the truck load for the occasion. In surrounding areas children were allowed time off from school, for several days, to stomp the grapes for wine. When Mary ask if they washed their feet good first, she was told what difference does it make when it ferments. She said for the longest time this really turned her off to the Dago Red wine. She could not drink it. This posed a problem because this was the wine she was expected to drink at any Italian home she was invited to. She eventually got over it. The Dago Red wine was a very strong wine.

When she came to Rock Springs in 1941 it was a very rugged looking place. It was a small community with very few buildings of any size. There were very few finished sidewalks. Only the main streets were paved. When it rained the streets were a river of mud. It was a dry and barren area. The areas around the town where homes and new businesses are today were bare and open land. The town itself has not really changed she says. A few of the buildings have been moved or torn down but basicly it is still the same. It is the area around the town that has changed. New schools built in the out lying areas, shopping malls, hotels and motels, restrants, and lots of new housing.

Entertainment for a young couple in those days was very interesting. Mary and her husband liked to go golfing. Golfing on

Dead Horse Canon Golf Course could be hazzardous to your health. You had to fight sage brush and rattle snakes to keep an eye on the ball if you got in the rough and the course itself was bare and rocky and just as liable to have rattle snakes on it. You had to really like golf to put up with the wind and dirt blown around and the rattle snakes. AS she said if you could make par on that cuorse then you could play anywhere else and win.

There was a club house at the Dead Horse Canon Golf Course where they had dinner parties, dances, luncheons, and parties of one sort or another. Dancing was usually done at the club or at private parties, or at the Eagles club, or at the Slavinski Dome.

The Golf Course is now a trailer court and new courses have been built which have grass and are well watered. The Slavinski Dome has been used for many things including a union hall.

Another entertainment was the Kilty Band sponsored by Mr. Mc Culaugh of the Union Pacific Railroad. The band wore uniforms of the Royal Stewart ordered from Mr. McCulaugh's home in Scotland. There were 25 people in the band but they were of many nationalities. Their names printed on a program at first were a mouthfull for Mary. They played for many occasions and even in competition where they did very well.

It is much harder to find a place for dancing or social activities of this kind now without going to a bar. There are places to play Bridge, or have luncheons, or fashion shows, or activities along this line at the hotels and some resteraunts. ✓

There was a Drama Club and Community Theater on Front Street, where many three act plays were put on for the community. Now plays are put on at the High School but it is not the same since the theater was torn down. Hopefully there will be a new Concert

Hall and theater at the college when construction is finally finished.

When she arrived here there were only the two Catholic churches, a Congregational church, a Baptist church, and the Episcopal church. Other than the Catholic churches, the churches have shared their buildings over the years with other faiths until new churches could be built as new people came to Rock Springs.

Nearly everything had to be brought in by truck or railroad to Rock Springs, which made many things expensive. Most goods were bought at the company store or the Union Merc. The company store was owned by the Union Pacific Railroad and coal company.

Local people are now relieved that the boom is over and hope that it stays that way. They also feel that the "60 Minutes Show" gave a very unfavorable report of the town. Rock Springs has always had a Red Light District mainly to serve the coal miners. People of those days did not think about it very much. It was there to serve its purpose and ignored by the rest of the community. It has always been along Front Street and still is. At one time during the boom there was a small bar every other door along Front Street. That has now leveled back to the Front Street of old. The local people were once very open and trusting with new comers but the boom changed all of that. They are now very cautious about new comers. New comers also ment problems for Rock Springs in getting enough merchandise, over flowing classrooms, shortage of housing, and serious traffic problems. (There were no traffic siganals before the 50's and very few traffic signs, everyone just watched out for other vehicals. Some people drove then who would not be allowed drivers licenses today.)

When the Spring rains came so did the Indians. They came down from the reservations to sell their bead work, moccasins,

purses, bands, gloves, and clothing to the local people. One Indian in particular named Indian Maggie stayed with Mrs. Anderson (Mary's mother-in-law) each Spring. Mrs. Anderson would make Maggie house dresses (Maggie liked to wear them) in exchange for Maggie's bead goods. Mary has since donated many of those bead goods to the museum in Green River.

Mary Kay Anderson is 74 years old and a very active lady. She taught 34 years in the Rock Srpings school system and still substitutes. She lost her husband in 1963 and lives alone in the house they built just three years before he died. According to her there is still alot she can do for education in this state and as long as she is able she will work towards it. I think she will accomplish much that is needed before her time is up.

My source was Mery Kay Anderson herself.