

Kathie Roghair

Oral History

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When Dick's parents arrived in Eden in 1921 it was a new country. The irrigation project was just getting started and the land had not been developed. Dick's dad had to plow up 20 - 30 acres of sagebrush every year with horses, in order to be able to plant crops. Eden was not what he had expected. The Land Development Company in Omaha, Nebraska had shown him pictures of corn being raised out here, so he had expected it to be more like Nebraska.

Dick's mom came out from Colorado to teach school. They met while she was boarding at Ivan Dirth's place. After they were married she tried to raise gardens. Over the years she became discouraged since the gardens freeze out so often. During the depression though, they grew and ate a lot of turnips and managed to get throughly sick of them.

The economic conditions for them have not been that good over the years. The depression did not affect them as much as people in other areas since they were always so poor anyways. At one time they ran over 300 sheep, along with the dairy cows. It was the dairy cows that made them the most money even though they weren't always reliable with their check and eventually folded up.

Socially, the valley revolved around the school until the community hall and the churchs were built. They held dances once

or twice a month. The family was very involved with these since his mom and dad were members of the band.

Dick had hoped to use his place as a stepping stone, of getting out of debt and moving on to a better place in Colorado. He never managed to do so. He says he is too old to change now and that he's been here so long, it's home.

Gypsie and her family arrived here in 1982. They had been out the November previously, so it was not a surprise to them. Gypsie loves the fresh air and low humidity. She does have a problem with not being able to grow things since it is something that she enjoys. She can't get flowers or trees to grow and has decided that it's cheaper buying canned goods than trying to grow a garden in Farson.

The reason they moved out here was because the economic conditions were so bad back in Massachusetts. Her husband was able to get a job here driving truck for construction. Since then he has changed jobs, but is still working. When they first moved to the trailer court, a lot of people were moving out. It was near the end of the boom and it scared them into thinking maybe the economy they had just left back east was just starting here.

Socially, Gypsie had a difficult time adjusting here. She doesn't feel that the valley people accepted newcomers very well, though now she thinks that they are accepting them easier since people are staying longer. Most people around here are related and tend to do things as a family unit. Holidays are hard since

family and friends are so far away. Since there is not much to be involved in around here, she has taken up hobbies to keep her sanity.

Gypsie feels that Farson is a much better place to raise kids than back east. She feels safe living here, there is not so much crime as back in Massachusetts. Because of job security and owning their own property, they have stayed in Farson. She is not sure what they will do in another five years after her husband has retired.

In comparing my findings to those of the others in the class, I have found many similarities. Many people love the fresh air, the wide open spaces with the mountains nearby. Some people find it hard that there are very few trees around, but we certainly have no lack of sagebrush. Brown is the color associated with this area, but as one lady put it, things don't have to be green to be beautiful. A lot of people in the Farson area mentioned how discouraging it is to try to grow a garden. Snow in June is often quite common. Depending on your occupation, the weather can be an important factor in your life. It can be quite miserable with rain, snow, and wind while tending 5000 - 7000 sheep out in the desert. Those that came out in the earlier years had a lot of hard work, clearing sagebrush with horses. Several people had misrepresentation from the Government or Land Development Companies. Some of the narrators did come out before they moved, so the landscape was not a shock to them. Sometimes it was not

what they had pictured in their minds since names can be misleading.

Most of the people moved out here because of job opportunities whether it be farming, teaching, mining, or construction. The economic conditions here seem to be a lot better than other parts of the country. Though it was a lot of hard work and being in debt for those who chose to farm and ranch. Some are fairly successful now. Most people still have the security of a job or of owning land.

Several narrators mentioned that this area was a good place to raise kids, although one person mentioned the violence her kids had encountered at school in Rock Springs. Depending on what part of the country a person was from, some people felt that we have a safer environment, not so much crime. For a lot of people many adjustments were made after their move here. A few even had to learn a new language in order to be able to cope better with their jobs. They are both well established families now.

One lady didn't feel accepted in the community until she got involved in the local history in Rock Springs. Another feels that it is very difficult socially living here. People didn't accept outsiders very well. Also, there is not many opportunities to be involved in around Farson. Another person mentions the friendliness of the people in Rock Springs. What I liked most though, is what one family said about life in Farson; they have the ability to follow their dream and the freedom of being their

own boss.

Some attitudes depended on the length of time living here. Some loved living here right from the start, others hated it. A few of those who hated it, grew to love the environment and the people over the years once they became involved in camping, fishing, or being involved in the community as a teacher, historian, or whatever. I think most people who stay here are persistent, they don't give up. They have a dream that some year it will not freeze in June and they will have the best garden ever. Eventually they will have a pretty yard with flowers. The sheep market will go up and they will make a profit. Without this hope and the ability to make the best out of a sometimes bad situation, it would be a very depressing place to live, and it's not.

Most people moved out to Southwestern Wyoming for economic reasons. Because of oil, coal mining, construction, and teaching, job opportunities are a lot better here than in other parts of the country. A deeper motive for some people for moving out here was to escape a situation from where they had lived previously. Just to be able to get away and start over, to become your own person.

I think it is important to understand people's motives and responses for moving out here. Southwest Wyoming is unique in a way that this is a part of the country where we have many people who have moved here from other areas during different times, whether it be boom or bust. A lot of times there are big cultural

differences and many adjustments are needed to be made if a person is able to fit in. When we are able to understand people's motives and responses who have moved out here, who have become a part of the community, I think then maybe we can begin to understand the community more as a whole.

Field notes

March 2, 1992
Dick Nelson

Dick agreed to let me come back since a lot of what he said the last time didn't record very well. He seemed to be more relaxed this time and talked more. I had a problem with a heater vent on the floor which was making a very loud noise which you can hear clearly on the tape. Other people that were present were Dorthy, Dick's wife and Carl, Dick's son. After the tape was shut off, Dick started talking about how his parents had played for the dances at the community hall, his mom played piano, his dad a mandolin. They mostly played fox trots and waltzes.

They also had a lot of pie socials (which he hated.) Girls would make fancy pies and boys would pay a lot of money for them.

Dorthy, who had been listening, told me that a lot of what Dick had said was new to her. She had never heard him talk about it before.

Field notes

February 18, 1992
Dick Nelson

I interviewed Dick Nelson in his house, at his kitchen table. He seemed to be very nervous of the tape recorder. During the middle of the interview he started coughing and choking a lot. Finally, I shut the recorder off for a few minutes. The interview went by very fast. After I shut the recorder off, he seemed to relax and started talking quite a bit about the school, the house and the dairy truck. He agreed to let me turn the recorder back on but for some reason this time the plug didn't want to stay plugged in. The tape cuts out a lot during this part and eventually cuts off altogether.

Summary

Project title: Sweetwater county, Wy. Migration Stories

Narrator: Dick Nelson

Address: Eden, Wy.

Interviewer: Kathie Roghair

Address: Eden, Wy.

Date of interview: March 3, 1992

Other persons present: Dorothy and Carl

Description of interview and content:

I interviewed Dick Nelson in his house, at his kitchen table. He talked about how his parents came out to Eden, Wy. in the early 1920's. He also talked about life in the past and about some of the changes that have occurred. During the taping of this interview, the large heater vent on the floor was making a lot of noise coming from the coal furnace in the basement. This created a dull roar on the tape so it is very difficult to hear Dick.

Dick's dad had not visited here before he moved to the valley. It was not quite what he was expecting since they had shown him pictures of corn being raised out here. He was expecting it to be more like Nebraska. He was able to raise small grain and alfafa. He plowed up twenty to thirty acres a year. He had to pay for the irrigation water. Dick thought it might have been around forty cents an acre in the beginning and a dollar an acre just before they turned the old system into the new.

The valley revolved around the school in the early days even

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more so than now since there wasn't any churches in the valley. They had a community Sunday school, Christmas programs, plays and dances at the school. They built the community hall during Roosevelt's term during the '30's. They had school plays there after that.

He explains how the school looked and how they would have the plays. The first church was the log church in Eden, built in the 1930's. The Baptist, Catholic and Mormon churches came later.

They had a lot of dances here in the early days for entertainment. Dick's parents, along with a couple of other people, played in the band. (After the tape was shut off he told me that his mom played the piano and his dad the mandolin. They mostly played fox trots and waltzes.) They would have dances every two weeks or once a month since they didn't have T.V. or other forms of entertainment. The American Legion would sometimes sponsor the dances. Everybody would go to them; the kids would sleep, while parents danced. They didn't serve whiskey or alcohol though some people may have had some in their cars.

The Eden Valley Dairy was started by members in the valley who bought stock and built a coop deal. His dad was not a member. It wasn't making much money. Sometimes they were three or four months behind in their payments to the farmers. He tells where the dairy was located in Rock Springs. The dairy ran through the

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1930's and 1940's. At one time Dick's dad raised 300 sheep along with the dairy cows. The dairy made the most money even though the coop was often behind in their monthly checks. The best years were when Cream o' Weber owned it. It went downhill after they moved to Denver.

They shipped milk in 5 and 10 gallon milk cans on the dairy truck. He describes the milk truck and how they stored the cans so they could haul coal home. He also described how they used the dairy truck as a bus to get to Rock Springs. They built the new highway in the 1960's in order to shorten the distance.

Dick's dad built the log house by going up to the mountains with a horse and wagon. It would take a couple of days to get up there, a couple of days to get back, plus a few days to cut the logs. His dad's logs were more like poles, though his grandpa's were bigger. They would get them from a place called Bear Trap, up in the mountains. They also hauled a lot of logs for a log dairy barn. The barn had a straw roof so when it rained, it leaked.

They heated with coal back then and still heat with a stoker coal stove now. They got propane in the late '40's and didn't get electricity until the '50's. They had a light plant in 1949 for the dairy. After a couple of years of that, R.E.A. came in. Then they had running water in the house for the first time.

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They had a bad winter in 1927, the year he was born. The winter of 1936 was the earliest one he can remember. Dick went to school on a horse sled. Once they had to stay the night at Van Meter's house. Another bad winter was in 1949. In 1936 his dad was in the hospital and his mom and the kids were there alone. The winter didn't start till February, but got bad in a hurry.

It's easier now to cope with the bad weather since they have big tractors and cars. Before, the heaters wouldn't work on the cars very well so they would have to use salt bags and throw salt on the windshields so they could see.

Dick describes different cars they had in the past and how they ran. He talks about hauling coal on the dairy truck again.

Dick talks some about the stores that were around here, the Farson Merc., Harrison's and Dill's. People still liked to shop in town most of the time. You could trade eggs and grain to pay for the grocery bill at the Merc. Most people had their own milk cows and chickens so they didn't have to buy milk or eggs.

His mom tried to grow a garden when they first lived here but got discouraged since it freezes out most of the time and isn't worth the effort. During the Depression they grew a lot of turnips and got so sick and tired of them that they wouldn't eat them any more.

Summary

Project Title: Sweetwater County, Wy. Migration Stories

Narrator: Dick Nelson

Address: Eden, Wy.

Interviewer: Kathie Roghair

Address: Eden, Wy.

Date of Interview: Feb. 18, 1992

Location: Dick Nelson's house Length: 17 minutes

Other persons present: Carl, his son

Description of interview and content:

I interviewed Dick Nelson in his house, at his kitchen table. He talked about how his parents came out to Eden, Wy. in the early 1920's. He also talked about life in the past and about some of the changes that have occurred in the valley in his lifetime.

Dick's dad first heard about Eden from a land development company in Omaha, Nebraska. His dad was from Nebraska and his mom from Colorado. His dad came out here in 1921. His mom moved out a year or so later to teach school. They met each other here in Eden.

Their first impressions were that it was a new country which they had to plow up one section at a time in order to farm. His grandpa bought land out here first. His grandpa bought 80 acres and his dad bought 160 acres. His dad came out to protect

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his grandpa's interest in the land and to help him get started.

It was mostly all sagebrush when they first moved out here. The old Eden Valley Irrigation District was already started, so there were a few farmers here when they came. His mom taught school up at the little log house by Van Meter's house. The building was moved up to Farson when the schools were consolidated.

While Dick was growing up, it wasn't much different than what it is now. They went to school on a bus like kids do now. He describes the bus route and the school bus.

Dick's dad plowed up the sagebrush with horses. They farmed and hayed with horses for years. They didn't start haying with tractors until 1939 when his dad bought his first Ford tractor. They had an irrigation system but different canals than those that exist now. The system was redone after World War II.

(Dick had a lot of trouble with coughing so I shut the tape off for a few minutes.)

Dick's dad built a new house in 1928. Dick was born in 1927 so he lived one year in a one-room log house. It had a cave in the middle of the floor for food. He has one brother, Carl.

Some of the changes he has seen are that the government came in after World War II and developed a lot of land. They cleared sagebrush and built a new canal system and reservoir. They also consolidated the schools. The biggest change he has seen is

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people buying smaller acreage, living on the farm but working in town. It used to be just farming.

Dick decided to stay here because he always figured this place would be a stepping stone for getting out of debt and moving on, but he never did get out of debt enough to do so. Now he doesn't care to move because it has been home for so many years.

He talked a little about the Depression. It didn't affect them as much as people in other area's because they always were so poor anyway.

The school had four rooms, with two high school teachers and two grade school teachers. His mom got called back to teach school during World War II since there was a shortage of teachers. She had quit for years, so she took a correspondence course to get refreshed. She taught 4th - 8th grades and enjoyed it very much. She was still teaching in 1945 when Dick went into the Navy. When he got back he went to college.

They didn't get R.E.A. until around 1950, so they didn't have running water in the house till after he got out of college.

His dad built the house they are now living in for \$1500. His mom was boarding at Ivan Dirth's when she first moved up here to teach school. His dad came up here from Omaha in a Oldsmobile

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touring car with a canvas top, which he was very proud of.

They would ride the milk truck into town in the morning, do their shopping and ride back in the evening. They did this all through high school.

They owned fifteen milk cows which they milked by hand.

(Technical difficulties caused the tape to end unexpectedly.)