

Ray_Hart_Fall 2011

This interview was conducted by Debo Powers.

Debo: My name is Debo Powers and today's date October 13, 2011. I am interviewing for the first time Ray Hart and this interview is taking place at 13750 North Fork Road, which is North of Polebridge, Montana. This interview is sponsored by the North Fork Landowners Association and is part of the North Fork History Project. So Ray, tell us about your early background. Where and when you were born and a little bit about growing up.

Ray: Okay. Well I was born in 1929, March 22nd, so I'm 82, in Deaf Smith County Texas. Deaf Smith that was his full name. I assume he was deaf, was a pioneer in the panhandle of Texas. The county seat of Deaf Smith County is Herford Texas, which in Boston is pronounced Hereford as it is England. Therefore, when I'm in Boston... Well the first time I was in Boston I wanted to find Herford Street. I asked people and no one knew what I was talking about so I wrote it for them and they said, "Oh you mean Hereford." Anyway, I was born on a ranch, the Escavada Ranch about 40 miles northwest of Herford, Texas, which is famous now for miles and miles of feed lots. It's an industrial beef production. Cows walk in one end of a chute and come out frozen at the other.

Debo: Wow.

Ray: Also they had irrigation there even when I was a child and they grew potatoes and some [truck crop], but we were 40 miles from town and our only means of transport was horse-drawn vehicles, wagons and so on, so we went to town maybe twice a year, something like that. Houses were even sparser than here I would say, rarely fewer than 8 or 10 miles because these were large ranches and farms. I went to a one-room school which was in Rhea. There are a lot of classical names there are there are in Montana. Rhea was the wife of Zeus as I recall in Greek mythology. A one-room school, a one teacher in which there were 6 students, who taught all grades.

When I was about I guess 6 we moved off the ranch. My father managed to get a sharecropping deal on a farm and that was about 20 miles. The nearest from where I was born and the nearest town to the place where we moved was called Bovina, Texas which was Spanish for cow. It had the reputation of being the largest cattle-shipping point in the world at that time because it was the western most outpost of the XIT ranch, which was the largest ranch in the world. It covered what is now about 24 counties and was a Scottish combine. Am I saying too much? You may not want to know all this stuff. It was a Spanish Scottish combine that is a consortium and that built the state capital in Austin in exchange for which they were given this huge amount of land which covered really almost all of the panhandle of Texas. The part that sticks up; it looks like a panhandle and that's why it's called a panhandle.

Okay, we stayed there until it got time for at least four of us to go to high school whereupon we moved to this metropolis of Bovina, the population which was under 100. Dad bought a little place at the edge of town, a farm, and that's where all of us went to high school. This time there were 6 kids in my grade.

Debo: So a much bigger school.

Ray: A much bigger school, oh yes, a much bigger school, where we had I think four teachers and a superintendent. An interesting thing is that I think everyone in my class which to college which was a first for that community. I didn't have a single teacher in high school who was a college graduate. None of them had had any education classes therefore they knew their subject matters, so you really learned English, you really learned history, you really learned math and nothing about [00:05:19] and all that. These were among the best teachers I ever had.

I went on from there to a small college, a Methodist college in Abilene, Texas, McMurray, University of McMurray College then, where I had in the entire faculty there was one person who had a PhD and she was the lousiest teacher there. But these were wonderful wonderful people, most of them elderly ladies and in my junior year they called me in and said, "Ray..." they called me Ray Lee, you used both names in those days, but in South generally...

Debo: That's right.

Ray: "Ray Lee we've taught you everything you know. You're wasting your time. You should leave. We want to recommend you go to the University of Texas in Austin," which is what I did. It was a very tough year for me because I had to work on a major. We didn't have major in McMurray, and so I did and overdo everything so I did a triple major in German, which I never had any of, English literature and philosophy. But by the middle of the semester I was reading [00:06:32 Geretos, Faust, and Schiller]. You know when you have to learn you have to learn. Anyway, so I finished my BA there then I went to SMU for a master's and then on to Yale for my doctorate, and that's more than you want to know.

Debo: Well when did the North Fork come in?

Ray: When does the North Fork come in? Okay, a little background. My first teaching job was at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. One of my early colleagues there was Robert W. Funk, who was even then a rising scholar. We became fast friends and he began telling me stories about Montana. He was himself a [Boozier 00:07:15] from Indiana, from his roommate was from the town in Butler, Indiana... No, no – the college they attended Butler University was in Butler, Indiana, but his roommate was from Kalispell, Montana and at

the end of Bob Funk's second year the college doctor called him in and said, "Mr. Funk you're working yourself to death. You've got to take the summer off or you're going to ruin your health." "I can't take the summer off," he said, "I have to work to make money to come back to school." The doctor said, "Okay, I told you. You're going to regret it." So he went home and told his roommate and his roommate said, "Well hell come spend the summer with me; we'll just live off the land." So they came out and hiked in the park all summer and just lived off berries and fishing and animals and so on and so on. This was in the 40s. So he fell in love with the place. After he finished his graduate work he kept coming to the North Fork. He said he loved the park but he loved the North Fork, and the old doc who owned the schoolhouse place, everyone will know where that is, that's just North of Ford Station, the old doc was from South Texas and he was getting very old and liked Bob and offered to sell him the cabin. So Bob talked with me about it and I thought he was a damn fool you know, because this guy wanted \$2,000 for a log cabin and 3 acres of land. And I said, "Bob how long will that take to pay out?" He said, "What do you mean pay out?" "Well what can you make off of it?" He said, "Nothing." I thought he was a damn fool.

He had sense enough to buy it. We met in '57 at Drew. By '63, 1963 I left Drew and went to Vanderbilt University in Nashville where Bob had received his PhD. And once I got there I managed to open a job for Bob so then Bob moved to Vanderbilt. All right, so I'm coming to the point. In 1965 Bob was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, which is probably the most prestigious fellowship in the world and he was going to spend it at Tubingen, Germany and he said, "Why don't you and [Fern] and the kids go out and stay in our cabin?" in the summer of '65. So I talked to Fern and the boys were wild you know to go west so we did, and we came up.

Bob had in his time in Montana prior to that time he had pastured a little First Christian Church in Polson, Montana and developed a lot of friends there and one of them owned the John Deere outfit in Polson. So he said, "You just get yourself to Polson," and I'm sorry I can't recall his name now, it will come to me, his friend just dropped everything and his wife got in the pick-up with their kids and then drove us up to Bob's cabin. Well it was a good thing he did because I couldn't have gotten anything going, the generator or the water system and you had to prime the hand pump and all that stuff. And also introduced us to the dearest people who have ever been on the North Fork Lloyd and Ruth Sondreson who lived down in the old Top Hat house at that time. I'll say more about them later.

So all right, that's how we got to the North Fork and we got bitten by this. I should say that I wanted to come because I had never fly-fished. So Bob called me about four days before they were leaving for German and he said, "Have you caught any fish?" I said, "No, I don't know how to fly-fish." I just had a cane pole and worms and stuff and you don't do that on the North Fork. So he

said, "All right, that does it, I'm coming out. I've got to show you how to fish. I'll be up tomorrow as soon as I can get a plane reservation." All right, now he had called... This is how different things are now, he had called the Ford Ranger Station and the ranger came up and got me and took me down and we talked on the old crank phone. It was a DC line. So he called back an hour or two and then the ranger brought the message that I was to meet him in Great Falls tomorrow afternoon the next day about 6 o'clock. So I drove down to Lloyd's and this is how dumb I was, I said, "Lloyd where is Great Falls?" And he said, "Why do you need to know?" I said, "Well Bob Funk's coming in at 6 o'clock tomorrow afternoon and I've got to meet him. I said, "How long will it take?" He said, "Oh I think about an hour and 10 minutes." So I said, "Fine." He said, "Be here at 4:30 or something like that." So I drove down and Lloyd had rolled out his plane and we got in the plane and flew to Great Falls. And Bob's plane was late and we got back it was dark. I won't go into that.

Debo: But you flew him up here.

Ray: He came out. He couldn't stand it. He had never missed a summer and he never did after that until he moved to California. Well at all events that's how I knew about the North Fork. Now I should say about, and I will just enter some comments here because I know one of the questions is what has changed and all that in the time I've been here. So having come in '65 that's 35 plus 11 is 47 years I've been up here, okay. I would say probably the most palpable change is that this was a much much smaller place in terms of the number of people. Year around people probably weren't more than 8 or 10 at least from Polebridge North to the border. If I can introduce a couple of technical terms from sociology, a great 19th Century German sociologist, really the father of the field, distinguished between a *Gesellschaft* and a *Gemeinschaft*, that means a distinguish between a society and a community. And a community is sort of like a family you know, and a society is where people are discriminated by what they do and their profession and this that and the other. You get a society together because you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, that kind of thing, but it's not a real community. But this was a real community and in no sense a society.

When you went to meetings at the hall, what was then called the North Fork Improvement Association, actually the hall hadn't been built at that time, we would meet in each other's homes. We often met in the MacFarland Ranch headquarters over in the park, and some time up at Helen Foreman's. We didn't meet in the homesteader cabins because they weren't big enough. At all events, when you go to the hall for all kinds of functions, from the first summer I was interested in trying to get a place up here. I never saw a for sale sign for the first 20 years I was up here and people didn't tell you that there was land for sale. Why? They were looking you over. They were looking you over because they weren't going to let anybody in so they're not going to tell

anyone there's land available up here until they decide whether they want you up here or not.

Now in the midst of all this of course there have been forever and from the beginning feuds, constant feuds. They are [landowner 00:15:59] of a society now and people bring their own histories and it takes a long time for people to get acquainted and so on and so on, but in those days it really was a close community. You could come up here. They didn't object to tourists they just didn't want them to stay, they didn't want them living up here.

So let's see, early in '67 I had a letter from Lloyd Sondreson telling me that there was a cabin and a piece of land that I might be able to buy worth the money. He's the first one who had ever...and he's the one who mattered the most because he was the patriarch up here. And I said, "Well how does this land come on the market?" Well he said there's a good guy and a bad guy that owned it. Buzz is the bad guy and of course he's from California and the good guy's name was Hans Anderson believe it or not. He's not the one who wrote the children's story, but Hans Anderson he was a really good guy. He was a retired army guy and he loved his horses so he had corrals and a barn here and so on on the place. The barn I changed into a [rooming 00:17:17] cabin eventually.

Well the story of how it became available is the good guy didn't hunt but the bad guy hunted and he broke all the laws. In the summer of '66 he brought a gang of his California buddies and they got all liquored up and they chased a herd of elk up near the border and simply slaughtered them. They didn't skin them. They didn't take the horns, the racks. They didn't eat them or anything; they just left them to die. Well that was an unspeakable breach of the code up here. You know I never saw a game warden up here for 20 or 30 years, but you didn't... I think the truth is that the old homesteaders when they would get hungry in the winter they would go out and shoot a deer and no one ever said anything. But to slaughter a herd of elk and just leave them, so Lloyd organized a posse, didn't have any trouble getting them together and they chased Buzz and his buddies to the Idaho border and didn't catch them. But then Lloyd wrote him a letter and said 'Buzz if you ever show your ugly face on the North Fork again you're a dead man. You don't believe it you try it. So that's when he said, "I think you can buy that land worth the money." [Laughs]

So I couldn't afford to do it myself so Bob and I went in together and bought this place and then ultimately I bought it from him. So that's more than you want to know.

Debo: That's great. What a story.

Ray: That's how I got up here and I don't think I've missed a summer since.

- Debo: When you first lived up here you lived in the little homestead cabin?
- Ray: The homestead cabin. Yeah, that was all there was. Well there was what they called the bunk house. There was an ice room and a wood storage room and a general catch-all place next to it. This place was the southern quarter; it was the South 80 of a half section. The homesteaders were Harry and Lena Holcolm who have the green house just North of me, the next one up from Barnes' on the right. In Barnes' place there was an old...as we call them the widow woman – what was her name? I'm sure Larry Wilson can tell you. At all events Harry and Lena were wonderful people and their daughter Esther, she was sparking Walt Hammer. We will come back to Walt Hammer and Harry did not like Walt Hammer. He joined a large company. Harry was a German ex vet. We'll talk about him later. Harry did not like Walt Hammer but he did like Ralph Day a lot, so he said to Esther, "Now it's your business. You pick your husband, but if you pick Ralph I'll give you the South 80," so she was smart.
- Debo: She was smart and did that.
- Ray: She got the South 80 and we bought 40 of that, okay.
- Debo: So that little homestead cabin was where they lived?
- Ray: That's where they lived yeah, and they built it I think it was in 1914, so in three years it would have been 100 before we moved it up here, yeah. Harry and Lena farmed the meadows as did Ralph and Esther this here and that's made a living somehow or other. And I know you're interested in roads and that sort of thing and I'll come back to that when we talk more about Harry.
- Debo: You knew a lot of the homesteaders up here then.
- Ray: I knew all of them who were alive at that time. I believe I did. I knew the ones on the South end less well than up here. We might just if you want to transition to think.
- Debo: Yeah, I would like to hear about the homesteaders.
- Ray: Well, mind you it was difficult to get around up here. I thought we would never get up here. It took us three hours from Columbia Falls to get to Ford Station and that with a guy leading us. It was a one-way road.
- Debo: That was in the 60s?
- Ray: Yeah, this was in '65. It was a one-way road and of course they were logging the piss out of this country up here, so you had to be prepared to meet a logging truck every 20 minutes or so. They would just come and they never slowed down. Well it was a one-lane road so when you saw one of these guys

coming you got in reverse wherever you were going uphill or downhill and you backed until there was a little place aside of the road you would get off so they could barrel on past you, so there wasn't a lot of going up and down the North Fork Road. In fact, the mail carrier, in those days Fred [Boss] was a wonderful man, and the store, Ted Ross was the owner of the store, the merc, and unlike today most people bought their groceries at the merc because going to town was such an ordeal, and of course you couldn't carry a lot of stuff but you would just give Ted a list and the next time he went down he would buy you groceries and just charge you what he paid for them. And Fred would take, I mean we didn't know anything about this road, we sent probably of average of two tires once a week down with the mailman to get them fixed and he would get them fixed and you would just pay him what it cost and so on.

So, why don't we start up North and I'll try to work South about the homesteaders? I guess there was no one at the border at the time. Well, George, the guy who writes for the Interlay, George what's his name, he wasn't a homesteader but he's an old-timer, let's see, I guess the first people I'll say something about South of the border would be Helen Foreman, and I don't recall her husband's name. He was an attorney. They were from Illinois, but she was sort of the matriarch of the North Fork, and Richard Hildner is either related to her or is the executor of the Foreman estate I think. I think that's the connection, but Helen was a grand lady. She was, she and Fern, my wife, became very good friends because Fern was working in the League of Women Voters here once we moved here and got very active in the State League of Women Voters, and Helen had been National President of the League of Women Voters. But they were staunch republicans and she was in fact I think chair of the Republican National Committee one year. They were very sophisticated people, but they were also really down-home up here. And as I think I may have indicated we held some of the North Fork Improvement Association meetings in their home and they had a big barn which we also used for square dances and stuff. I haven't been up there in years, so I hope that barn and so on is still intact.

Then in that area not a homesteader but a wonderful old-timer was George Walters. He was dean of the college at Macalister in Wisconsin if I've got my schools straight, and he and his wife were wonderful people. Their son David grew up up here and her became head of the Montana Historical Society. And his daughter Emily still has a part of the place and her siblings.

I guess among these the first real homesteader South that I knew was Ralph Thayer on Trail Creek and was a gentle soul, a bachelor his entire life, worked for the forest service. I forget his technical title but one of the things he did was the surveying. He did all the surveying on the North Fork and did it badly. He did it as well as you could do with chains and chains and whatever else they used. For example, on my place I went by his survey. When I developed my spring box and according to his survey it was on my land. But then when the

forest service came through with their geo-physical instruments and helicopters and all their positioning where it's infallible or they claim it is, it turned out I was 150 feet over in the forest service land. But when I found that out I went to the head ranger and said, "You know about Ralph Thayer's surveying." He smiled and said 'yes'. I said, "Well I'm another victim of it." Anyway they gave me a permit. Ralph was in addition to surveying he was I think they call it a timber cruiser for the whole North Fork, and it did it on pear paws, snowshoes. At the auction I bought his bear paws.

Debo: Oh you did?

Ray: Yeah, so I have Ralph's bear paws. I was terribly interested in that cabin of his on Trail Creek and I asked him about it once and he said – I guess I shouldn't say this, he said he was going to sell it to someone local. I wasn't local. I hadn't been here 50 years. That person has done a lot of subdividing which I don't like, but anyway, as you know Nancy and John Hubbell have that place now.

Okay, working South. The next couple would be Frank and Ella Wurtz, and they had like most couples they had a half section because the husband or one of them could file for one quarter and the other one could file for another and you had to live on them X-amount of time and all that stuff so it made sense to try to get as much land as you could which would be 320 acres. Well, Frank was said to be a full-blooded Cherokee and evidently had a mean streak in him which Ella discerned early on. So on her quarter section she got all the water rights to the whole half section and when Frank got mean, this gives new meaning to cutting somebody's water off, she would cut his water off.

Debo: [Laughs]

Ray: Until he straightened up. That was her way to handle spouse abuse. [Laughs] That place...but they were wonderful people; they were wonderful people. One winter he got bored so he undertook to hue all the logs inside this two-story house, and to do that and to get the corner trued up he must have been really bored and he must have made a terrible mess. I could see why his wife might have gotten a little [sissed 00:30:20] with him. That place was bought by the Jokersts, J-o-k-e-r-s-t, Jim and I think his spouse's name is going to escape me although she and her family were from Amarillo, Texas where Fern is from and Fern and her dad knew this woman, girl, and her dad very well. Her dad was a tycoon who owned a chain of international hotels. Jim was an artist, a painter and a wildlife biologist. They were wonderful neighbors. And I also wanted that place. [Laughs] But at that time my boys, Morgan and Bracken were getting ready to go to college and I had to decide between sending them to college or buying some more land and it's a good thing I didn't buy it, except it would have been a great thing to have and to hold onto and sell as was proved by the people who bought it from the Jokersts, namely Dick and

Barbara Lawrence who subsequently split, but their daughters Tina and Karen and what's the boy's name? It's not going to come to me. All the kids are now in Montana, though Barbara and Dick owned a chain of camera and photo and hi-fi equipment stores from Jackson Hole to Seattle and Barbara has kept those. Dick I think did construction after he left. But Barbara was German and so she kept milk cows and they had a big garden and they had chickens, so we had milk and butter and eggs and fresh chickens as long as they were around. Of course we bought them. They also had horses.

Okay, moving south, okay. Wurtz's, then there would be the Raders. I forget their given names. They were Dutch and people would know it now because John and Pat Elliott bought their place, and it was the showplace up here. The woman, Ms. Rader was a wonderful gardener and she's responsible for all those wonderful flowers in the garden and on the property. John and Pat owned a wood stove store in Columbia Falls. John was a professional surveyor and did surveying after Ralph quit and John had equipment to...it was right. That is to say it was within 100 yards of being right, something like that. I mean Ralph was within 100 yards of being right but not exact. So the Raders I knew them but I met them only after they moved to Missoula and lived in a double-wide. I didn't know them when they were up here. The Elliots had the place when I bought here.

There was another couple from Great Falls down on the river but they were not homesteaders. I'm trying to think. Stonestreet Trudy and John Stonestreet had the place on the left immediately North of me. Trudy Stonestreet was the sister of Hazen Lawson. Hazen and Ruth Lawson had the Square Peg Ranch down by Polebridge which is owned by John Fredericks now and Trudy's sister, I mean Hazen and Ruth, Ruth's sister was Trudy Stonestreet. Now you know I'm uncertain whether Hazen was a homesteader or not, Hazen Lawson who had the Square Peg Ranch. I'm just not sure about that but they were certainly wonderful people. Hazen was a small-town school superintendent in lots of places in northwestern Montana, Eureka and Libby and Sunburst and places like that.

Okay moving south now. Of course across from Stonestreets was Harry and Lena Holcolm who are our nearest neighbors, homesteaders. Harry always won the blue ribbon for his rutabagas, the biggest rutabaga at the Flathead County Fair. And one year it was so big he put it in one #1 washtub and another washtub on top of it and tied the bales together and that's he got it down to the fair. They were hard scrabble homesteaders. A story or two about them. As you know that house has got a front room and then a kitchen in between and the bedroom at the back. One night Harry heard a ruckus in the front room, the living room, the sitting room and grabbed a flashlight and his shotgun and opened the door in the living room and there was a grizzly up on his hind legs like that. So he shut the door and went back in the bedroom then

he heard him break through into the kitchen, throwing pans and raising hell. Then he knocked down the door to the bedroom.

Debo: Oh.

Ray: And Harry was standing there with the shotgun and he reared up again fortunately and shot him in the heart and dropped the grizzly at the foot of their bed. He was just sitting up in the bed when he shot him. [Laughs]

Debo: That's a good story.

Ray: I asked him how because when he homesteaded here there was no road. I don't understand this because I don't know how people got up to Moose City which was a thriving population. At least the road was not usable in the winter; maybe that's the way to put it. I asked him how do you live up here in the winter? He said well you make two trips to the store. You wait until the North Fork freezes over and you hitch up a team and you put spikes going down out of the horseshoes. Of course you've got spikes to go up to nail in the shoes and then you put some down. You have a big sleigh and on a winter day it will take all day to get to the store and then spend the night with Bill O'Dair or whoever was running the store at the time. O'Dair had the saloon; I think he had the store at that time, and you'd go down and you would get barrels of flour and kegs of salt and pepper and sides of ham if you hadn't raised enough hogs and you would get all your staples and you would spend a day or two down there and they'd play cards and drink whiskey I suppose. And then they would come back up and in the winter you would go out and saw big blocks of ice out, take your ice tongs and bring them in and everyone had a meat room. We did here. He had built one for Esther here. You would have these big thick walls filled with sawdust and you would just set these blocks of ice and then you would hang your deer and elk and meats, whatever you're going to eat for the winter.

I told you about the rutabagas, told you about the bear, told you about how they got to town. I think that's probably enough on Harry and Lena. I don't know what their religion was. Their kids and grandkids all became Mormons. I don't think Harry and Lena were Mormons. But anyway, Harry was kind of crazy about his property. For example, this widow woman I referred to living where Barnes now is, she had a little cabin over there and she had it because he had just let her build a cabin on his land. But then...and she had a cow which she was absolutely dependent on for milk and she had chickens, so he took pity on her and just gave her a 10-acre slice between his place and Ralph and Esther's place, and that's why Doug's place is there because there was no zoning and no one ever thought about anything like that.

Okay, his boy Bud never had an interest in the North Fork so he didn't leave him any land, but an interesting thing, much later he decided he wanted to be up here after all. When Ralph was on his death bed, and I don't know whether

I should tell this or not but I think it will tell you about someone that I missed that are not homesteaders but wonderful people, Baird and Esther Chrisman who live up in the area where Larry lives and near the Foremans, they were very close friends, because the Chrismans were also from Illinois and they knew the Foremans back there. Baird was a big fertilizer dealer in Illinois in the farm country. Anyway, when Ralph was what came to be his deathbed they were close friends of Ralph and Esther Day too, so Ralph went in to see Baird. Actually Esther told me this story. Baird went in to see him and asks Bud Holcolm if there was anything he could do for him, anything at all, just say it. And Ralph said, "Well I'm ashamed to say it Baird but I don't have money to pay this hospital bill and we don't have enough money to bury me, so if you could loan me some money I would appreciate it." Baird said, "Anything you want. I'll write a check." He said, "Well since I'm probably not going to live anyway the only way I'll take it, absolutely the only way is if you will let me sign over the South 40 to you," and Baird said, "I don't want your land. Besides that's too much for what you've asked me to lend you; I mean it's not enough." And he said, "I won't take any more and I won't take it if you won't let me sign it over," so he signed it over. Well Baird didn't want it so he put it up for sale and it's been through several hands. But Bud bought it actually. The guy why didn't want to be up here. When his brother-in-law died [laughs] and it came on the market he bought it. That's the kind of thing that happens up here all the time.

Well let's see, moving south, of course Ford Station. Ross Wilson who had owned the Kintla Ranch up North that had been disposed of. I don't know where it went. I know that Larry bought some of it back. Ross and what was his wife's name? I'm sorry I'm having trouble with spouses' names here. It wasn't Mary. Anyway, they bought I think it may be a quarter. It's what [Holy Cross 00:43:40] is now and they lived in a double wide down there. I'm just working south. Ross he had been county sheriff. I may have said that. I don't think there's anything else about them.

Working South, Lloyd and Ruth were living in the old Top Hat building. That was a sign off of a joint, of a dive in Missoula and someone got it up here and put it on a house. It wasn't on there of course with Lloyd and Ruth. But Lloyd and Ruth finally got enough together to build their big A-frame down on the river.

Debo: At Sondreson's meadow.

Ray: At Sondreson's meadow, which is now forest service; forest service bought that. I should say that Barbara Lawrence you know held on to that property and finally sold it to the forest service, so that whole half went to the forest service. And Lloyd and Ruth they built the A-frame and the community then got together to build them a barn and actually built it in two days and that was a great event. And of course they were committed to getting a place for the hall,

so we had another barn-raising so to speak for the hall. But it was not until after Lloyd died of Lupus, he had a terrible skin disease, and it was only after he died that the association voted to name it the Sondreson Hall.

Now they were a wonderful couple. He was a lawyer and his first sawmill, I expect Bert Edwards has stories like this too, he had a little jackleg sawmill that he was running off...he would just jack up his Model A and put a belt on the wheel that would turn the sawmill and he was hand feeding logs through there and so on, lumbar and so on. Well I didn't know him at the time but Bill Gallagher in Missoula owned Caterpillar for the whole state of Montana and was a marvelous man a very generous man. He owned the Kalispell Caterpillar dealer too, of course the one in Montana. He's one of the wealthiest men in Montana. Lloyd went in to talk to him about something and he said, "Have you got a sawmill up here? Can I come up and see it?" And he did. He said, "Lloyd I know your reputation. You're a damn fool. Why don't you have a real sawmill up here?" He said, "Lord I couldn't pay for it." Gallagher said, "I'll back you. You just come down and buy what you want and pay it off," so he did.

When I came up here Lloyd had the sawmill in Canada just across the river. No, it was this side of the river but he was hauling logs out of Canada. That's how different it was. The border was open. In fact once a year we always drove up to Fernie and I really miss that. That was great, great fun. So had a sawmill up there and then he subsequently had another one. He kept that one going but he had another one back here on the back Teepee Lake Road and everybody up here knew that at 4:30 in the morning you were always welcome for breakfast at the Sondreson's mills and Ruth cooked and they were fabulous you know. Ruth she loved to bake.

Debo: At 4:30 in the morning?

Ray: Yeah. That's when they ate. You can imagine when she started to cook. You know her biscuits, her flapjacks, her bread, she would use nothing from Montana hard wheat and when she couldn't get that she would drive to Canada to buy hard wheat up there, because she was a real stickler. They were Scandinavians, Norwegian. They didn't have an accent. But anyway, you would get up there and there would be hotcakes and ham and bacon and steak and eggs and hash browns and syrup and jellies and that sorts...and you never paid anything. If you were up moving around the dark and wanted to eat a real breakfast you could always stop by the Sanderson's. They were like that with everybody. And he's a guy who would stop his sawmill and go fix your power or whatever. He was the Mike Eddie except that he would never take any money. They were the most loved people up here I think. I mean I was such a green horn. I had never seen a pine tree, hardly a tree at all.

Anyway, so we're down to Sondresons. And let's see, I guess the next would be Frank and Ethel Newton down on the river. Frank had worked in the park. I don't know Ethel's background but they had a homestead down there and I think they homesteaded in 1910. It may be the earliest one that I know about. Maybe the Holcolms were. But when Frank and Ethel got married they didn't have a cabin yet, they had a tent. They got married, got on their horses right after the ceremony and rode across the river and spent two weeks in the park camping on their honeymoon, in the park. They took their horses into the park then they rode them back and slowly from the tent began building their house on North Fork.

Ralph built his own boat which was a McKenzie River keel boat, like that. That's the only thing he would get in the river on. He thought canoes were silly and rafts in those days – never get in the North Fork River in something that you can't control yourself, one person controlling it, because two people nobody obeys orders. [Laughs]

Let's see, Bert Edwards, that was the old man's name, right?

Debo:

Hmm.

Ray:

Thelma?

Debo:

Thelma.

Ray:

I bought my first 2 x 4s from Burt. 2 x 4 x 10s for a nickel apiece. I think I bought 300 of them. I've still got a few of them. They were strong of course, but can you imagine a nickel apiece for a 10-foot 2 x 4 now? Which is a genuine 2 x 4s. Then of course Tom was his son, right. Tom I knew when he was manager of WBC in White Fish. The old man on the right just before you cross Red Meadow Creek going south. Why am I blanking on his name? Oh and I had forgotten the Ramones, Helen and... what was her dad's name, Mr. Huck. The Association used to be meet up there on Sunday afternoons for skeet shoots and things that took outdoors with fish fries and dinner on the ground sort of picnics up there, Helen Huck. Yes, her father's name was Huck and I think the mailbox may still say Huck on it as you go down.

But I got to that by forgetting the name of the family that lived there at the end of the Chamino property just over across the road by Red Meadow. I'll try to think to ask Morgan and maybe you can write it down and add it. He has a nephew who still comes up here, a nephew, a grandson who still comes up here. South of Red Meadow, I don't think I knew any homesteaders in that area. As you come to the outskirts of Polebridge I've already said a little bit about Hazen and Ruth Lawson. And the other one of course would be Frank Evans, who I think was not a homesteader but he was up here as long as a lot of the homesteaders. He knew all of them, absolutely all of them.

And I might say parenthetically that really the most precious thing you could get would be a recording that Bob Funk did one night. We did it at the hall. It was after the hall was built and he took several bottles of Jim Beam down and we got all of the then-living homestead men together and after they were sufficient liquored up they talked for maybe two or three hours and Bob recorded that. He is dead now but his wife has it and I'm going to see if I can get it because we ought to get that transcribed on a tape or digitally or however this works, probably digital now and get a typed script made of that, because this was the homesteaders themselves talking about the early days, and you can probably tell from that how much of this I've made up. I told it the way I remember it, but that needs to be done.

I should say also about Bob and Mickey Funk how heavily they were involved in this community. Bob was then at the University of Montana. See I came to the University of Montana in 1969. I had a place up here. Both Bob and I had places up here before we both went up to the University of Montana in Missoula where I was brought there first as a consultant and from Vanderbilt to advise them and then I advised them and the president called me up and said 'you're so damn smart why don't you just come do it?' And I said can I bring a colleague and two or three others? He said, "I was just asking you," and I said, "Yeah, I'm telling you my price."

Debo: So you all got jobs because of that?

Ray: Yeah, yeah.

Debo: That's great.

Ray: I got one senior person and two junior persons and I had a commitment for a PhD program and so on which is damn foolishness and the state couldn't deliver on all of it. That's after I got to be a Montanian and understood how poor the state is. [Laughs] It's a great place to live; it's a hard place to make a living. Anyway, up here he fought very long and hard to get wild river status for this river and he was put on a prestigious commission. I'm sorry I'm not going to come up with his name, a famous ecologist environmentalist who was at the University and then went on to head some big regional thing about the use of rivers and so on. Anyway, they managed – they didn't get wild river status but they did get wild and scenic and that would never have happened without Bob Funk. He would not have happened. He was really dogged about that and his name should be remembered for that if for nothing else.

Debo: Definitely. Now that caused a little controversy up here.

Ray: Oh of course, of course. We have all kinds of people up here who didn't want a thing changed but they didn't want anyone telling them what to do with their land you know. Well you can't. Things are going to change unless there's

some restrictions on changing things. I mean that's it. It just comes down to that; that's all there is to it. So you know you had the predecessor of property rights people up here from the get-go, and that just meant they were old-timers and nobody never told them what they were going to do and they weren't going to start now. They're not going to start now letting somebody tell them what to do. Well, if we don't all agree on this then anybody can do anything. Well, you've just got to make sure you get the right people up here then boy. And they did, and they could do that for a while but then you can't do that forever. That's all there is to it.

Well you know Tom Ladenberger was one of those kind of guys. Now he did wonderful things with his land and since I was on opposite sides with him on every zoning issue and so on, I went up to him one night after a zoning meeting in Kalispell and I said, "Tom I just want you to know we've had our differences, but I think you did a wonderful thing for the North Fork in putting your land in the Nature of Conservancy." He said, "I didn't do it for the people up here. I don't give a good God damn about anybody up here; I did it for my elk!" And that's okay.

Debo: That's okay. He did it for his elk.

Ray: He fed more hay to the elk than he did his cows because he loved them and he wanted them to have a place to come across the park, which wasn't elk [season]. And I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't stipulate that whoever owns the place now had to feed the elk because that's the way he felt about it.

Okay, well let's see. Frank was a very dear friend and it blew me away when he blew himself away. I think he's the one up here who created the attitude adjustment hour. He would show up every other day with a half gallon of gin and say, "How is your attitude? Let's work on it."

Debo: [Laughs]

Ray: Ted Ross. I knew everyone who owned the store from the time I was here and it's gone up, it's gone down. It's on an upswing now. It's too late for the O'Dair's. Ann Hanson you knew her.

Debo: I did.

Ray: You know I don't remember her husband at all. I don't think she talked about him. [Laughs] Maybe that's why I don't remember. Was there anyone else on the loop, the inner loop? I can't remember. There's several houses in there.

Debo: So when you started coming up here it was mostly in the summer time?

Ray: Yes.

Debo: You brought your whole family?

Ray: Yes, yes.

Debo: You fished and hiked?

Ray: You know one of my major reasons for coming to Montana was so I could spend my summers up... I came up...well '67, '68; I came up before I got moved to Montana. In fact when I was called and asked to be a consultant I happened to be at the store when the call came through and it was a Professor Bugby at the University of Montana and said the faculty senate had set up a special committee to look into whether or not the university was acquitting its responsibilities in the academic study of religion and would I come and advise them. I said, "Well I'm favorably disposed but I'm really sorry to have to ask this question, where is the University of Montana?" He said, "Oh it's in Missoula." I said, "Oh well I drive through that every year when I come up to my place on the North Fork," so I knew where it was once I found it out. [Laughs] I felt a little foolish about that.

Well see I thought I would spend more time here on the North Fork you know, mid to late September because the University then was on a quarter system. But the truth is I couldn't spend as much when I came from Vanderbilt because there wasn't a phone up here except the forest service phones, and mail was two days a week, same as it is now and you didn't have an internet or anything like that. At Vanderbilt they just assumed they couldn't get in touch with me so they didn't even try. Well Montana would close up if it was assumed that you couldn't get in touch with anybody because they were at the cabin because you know everybody's got a cabin and so people knew how to find you, and they did find me. So that part of it – yes, we moved up. And if I had to go away for a few days why Fern and the kids would stay here. Yeah, the kids grew up here, yeah. And then Fern got involved in politics in Missoula and to on.

Fern hasn't come up much since she got involved in government. You know she was first Treasurer County Clerk and then became Commissioner, so for 25 years she would come up you know on holidays, 4th of July and of course it's only recently that I've been able to be up here in the falls.

Debo: So when you were up here in the summer time with your family how was your life different up here than it was back in civilization?

Ray: Well, unlike now the boys and I, of course I had a garden and you will not believe this and I don't believe it either except that it's true, I gardened up here for 20 years without a fence. Rabbits, gophers, nothing. The only bother I had is when Barbara Lawrence's horses would get out they would want to come down and tromp in my garden, that's it. The other thing was there was very

little game here. I never saw a bear when we were in the old cabin. Of course all this up here where I live now we never came up here. A lot of it was under water because the beavers had diverted the creek back in here. It was just a mass of grass and so on so we never came up here. We rarely ever saw a deer. The comeback in wildlife in the past 20 years has been amazing, as the decline in fishing has. I mean the boys and I fished every day, every day. I usually would try to work at my desk until 3 or 4 in the afternoon then we would fish until dark every every evening.

And weekends you always went to the hall. We had a square dance. Business meetings, I don't know why we had business meetings. There really wasn't anything to do and I was president one year. In those days the president had, I think it was mostly a joke, Mayor of Polebridge, which I have on my CB.

Debo: The president was the Mayor of Polebridge?

Ray: Yes. I had that on CB and everybody is so impressed with that in the academic world. You're a professor and you were Mayor of Polebridge Montana, now that's something nobody gets. Yeah. You don't want it either. For the kids I think the most important thing was square dancing. And there were a lot of kids up here then. That's another thing that I've missed. And I'm glad to see some babies up here now and some younger kids.

Oh I forgot Paul and what's her name, Moss up North and their daughter or granddaughter is living up here now.

Debo: Karen McDonough.

Ray: Karen McDonough, exactly.

Debo: That's their daughter.

Ray: What was Paul's wife's name?

Debo: Pauline.

Ray: Pauline, of course. That always occurs to me and then I say that's too obvious. I couldn't be in doubt if it were Pauline, but of course it is, Paul and Pauline. So square dancing was very important.

Debo: Was it every week?

Ray: It was very nearly every week. You know how those old records have survived I don't know. They must have been played a million times. The square dances were before the hall was built, as I said we would move around, usually to someone who had a big barn, or the MacFarland Ranch which was a dude ranch so they had large areas that would accommodate a number of people.

The square dance, the skeet shoots, the midday dinner on the ground parties, occasional fish fries. If there was a fishing limit I don't know what it was. People would just bring what they caught that day or the day before and you would have a trout fry.

Debo: So there was a lot of fish here.

Ray: There was a lot of fish.

Debo: But not much game.

Ray: Not much game, not much game, no. You know you didn't see hunters up here in the fall. People didn't come up from town. I think there just wasn't the game here. The same thing has happened of course in the eastern part of the United States. I mean there's so many deer in the east that they are pests, they are dangerous. And Missoula is a remarkable story. Missoula was...well you had teepee burners all over the place. It smelled like rotten eggs. You couldn't fish in the river. The river ran red. The Clark Fort is now cleaned up. There are deer all over Missoula. We have bears in Missoula eating apples and getting into garbage cans, bobcats, wild turkeys and so on. The whole game situation has just totally changed and it's all for the better.

Debo: Yeah.

Ray: It really is.

Debo: But really there were no ground squirrels in your garden?

Ray: No. I never saw one.

Debo: Wow.

Ray: Where were they? I guess the coyotes were getting them. I think you have to build a garden so the [Columbian] ground squirrels have got something to eat. [Laughs] Some things change for the better and a lot of things change for the worse. I can't remember anyone ever discussing paving the road, ever discussing it.

Debo: Really?

Ray: No. It never came up in the North Fork Improvement Association, never came up. No one was for it so nobody had to be against it. It just didn't occur to anybody. Why would you want the road paved? That was part of the charm of the place and it keeps the flat lenders out. [Laughs]

Debo: So there have been a number of fires up here.

Ray: Lordy yes. I'm not sure I can identify them all. I think the first one I remember was the '67 fire that was worst around Canvas Creek. I remember there was a big fuss that went on for two weeks between the park service and the forest service. My recollection is that it started on the forest service side, jumped the river and the worst part of it was in the park. Then it was threatening to come back. Lloyd was checking in every day with the park service and the forest service. And he would call the park service and they would say, "It started in the forest service, call the park service. It started in the forest service; it's their responsibility to put it out." "But it's threatening to come back over here and we've got a wind coming out of the South and it's going to come up and burn us up." "Well..." He would talk to the forest service and they would say, "Well the park's got to do something about it." After two weeks Lloyd just fired up his D6 [CAT] and went down and put the bastard out. This infuriated the park, so they came over with a big bill and he had to go and cover up all of his [scar] tracks and all that stuff and he said, "If you do that buddy I'm going to sue you and I'm going to sue you not only for legal expenses but for the hours and equipment expense I spent putting out your goddamn fire." Lloyd didn't mess with people.

So that's what I remember from the '67 fire and after that I don't know, the Red Bench fire that was in '88 and I was the last one to leave the North Fork because I didn't know it was happening. I was around there; it was about this time of day. I was around there painting sash on [core]. We didn't have windows in it but we had plastic over it and I was painting the sash. Elliot drove up and came around and said, "What are you doing? Are you trying to paint this place before it burns down?" I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Have you been around to the other side of the building?" Well he took me around and I could see this wall of smoke back there. He said it's down by Red Meadow Creek and it's coming this way and everything is closed. The road is closed, Red Meadow is closed, North Fork Road is closed. Your only way out in Trail Creek and you get your ass out of here. He said, "We're out now." So he turned and left.

Well, I got to thinking about that and I thought well no, what about the old cabin down there? So I went down and turned the pump on. I was pumping out the creek and I began hosing down the old cabin because it had cedar...large shingles on it, split shakes on it and so on. So I hosed it all down and by nightfall I could see above this hill I could see 200 feet of flames down there. So I decided I better get out and I drove up to Trail Creek. You know you come in just South of is it Eureka or Libby? It's the longest road from there to Kalispell. I got to Kalispell about 2:30 in the morning having left here about 10, something like that, and was exhausted and rented a motel and went to bed. I didn't call Fern, a damn fool. Meanwhile Bracken, who always shows up in an emergency had come to Missoula and no one had heard from me so he said, "I'm going to go find him," and he headed North and got to the roadblock and talked his way through the forest service people and got up here and didn't find

me and then really got worried. So then he went back down and helped fight the fire. I mean he works in the woods all the time anyway. He fought in the fire and finally after I got to Missoula and got Fern quietened down we got word up to the forest service to find our son and tell him that I was alive if not well. [Laughs]

That's the Red Bench fire. The Wedge Canyon Fire the kids and I were on a horseback trail, a backpack trip into the Bob Marshall. Now the fire had started before we left. But come on, it was 15 miles away and it was an acre or something like that. Oh we've got a week at least. Yeah. So those are the fires. There were other smaller fires, but those three I remember – '67, '88, 2003, right. Those are the ones that stick out. Of course I wasn't up here when some of the fires were going because I was in Missoula.

Debo: Well, I think we should put a stop to it right now.

Ray: I think we should too.

Debo: Okay.

01:13:55

[End of recording]