

Idaho Panhandle Oral History Project
Interview with Frank McPherson
October 20, 1979
Senator Creek
Interviewed by David Barton
Questionnaire Information

McP = Frank McPherson
DB = David Barton

Tape 8; Side 1

DB: When did you and your folks come out here to the North Idaho area?

McP: Well, I came here in '16. In 1917 got to Prichard. Come up to pile brush for D.H. Dollar.

DB: And, how long did that last, how long did you pile brush for him?

McP: Oh, I'm not sure--about three weeks. And then IWW gone on strike.

DB: They did what?

McP: IWW struck all northwest woods. I was piling for the Forest Service. And Dollar had to pay for it. That's why we did it. None of 'em liked it. But the Forest Service told 'em. So the strike didn't affect us. About six weeks then we had to, left the stumpage. So the strike didn't affect much. Worked about six weeks. Left one man watching the camp and the Forest Service. I stayed for a while. Course this was before school opened up.

DB: What school was that?

McP: Gonzaga.

DB: Is that in Spokane?

McP: Hm-hm. Before school opened up. So, they didn't need me up there.

DB: When were you born?

McP: 1900.

DB: 1900? And where was that you were born?

McP: Noretta, Nebraska.

DB: When did you move out to Spokane then?

McP: 1910.

DB: And did you move to Spokane because your father changed jobs?

McP: Yea.

DB: What did he do in the Spokane area?

McP: He was a bridge carpenter. Construction carpenter.

DB: What kind of bridges was he making?

McP: A lot of railroad bridges just in that time, it was all wood.

DB: Which railroad was he working for?

McP: Northern Pacific.

DB: Northern Pacific. Did he ever live in Idaho?

McP: Oh, yea. He came here for a year or two. But he stayed around Spokane mostly. And British Columbia; wherever he stopped.

DB: Now, have you always lived on this place?

McP: Since '21.

DB: Since '21. Where were you between '17 and '21?

McP: Well, I was still living in town with my folks. And I worked for the Forest Service in the summer. In the woods, worked in the woods, then what they call the Depression came along. There weren't much jobs. The kid that I came with to this country, Paxton. We both work. Had a string of pack horses. He was riding ahead of me. Got half way to Prichard. He said, "Why don't we buy old Pete out." Not a damn thing doing. He had a little money; I had a little money. Buy Pete out; we had a packstring and a place to stay. That was it.

DB: This is 1921?

McP: I came up here; moved up the 15th of May. He finally got married and his wife wouldn't live here; so I had to buy him out.

DB: How much land do you own here?

McP: I got about 130 acres here. I had 250. It was 160 I bought; then I homesteaded 93 down in the valley.

DB: Who were you neighbors back then in the old days?

McP: Oh, God! It was mostly floaters. Back then.

DB: What do you mean by floaters?

McP: No home at all. Just where they hung their hat.

DB: What kind of jobs did they do?

McP: Working in the woods; got the logs out, driving, logging.

DB: When was the last log drive around these parts?

McP: '26, here. Now the last log drive in this country was down on the Clearwater River about '62, '63.

DB: What was the name of the company that had the last log drive around here? In '26.

McP: Coburn had the last log drive here. Winton Lumber Company on the Little North Fork. They drove logs out of that 'til the 1930s. 'Round the time the bulldozers come up. They started building roads up here.

DB: When did they start building those roads; right about the '30s?

McP: Yeah. The bulldozers started working in here in '33. Little show to what they got now. They started then; 30s got in there along with the bulldozers.

DB: What's the 3Cs?

McP: Civilian Conservation Corps. They recruited kids from all over the country. They'd go work. Got 'em all out here, work for a dollar a day and got 'em working.

DB: Do you know where those camps were located at?

McP: All over.

DB: Do you remember some of the names of 'em?

McP: Riley Creek Camp, Magee, and a camp down there; each one of them had 200 Negroes from Harlem. And one down here at...

DB: Do you think you could find them on a map if I showed you a map later? Or get them in the general area?

McP: Rock City, Devils Elbow, Shoshone Creek. Up here Jordon Creek five miles. One up there. I don't know how many camps. Every place around. A lot of kids. At that time the kids built goat trail roads.

DB: What did they use goat trail roads for?

McP: Well, for movement. Such damn poor trails.

DB: Back when you first moved here, you say you had a packstring. How many horses did you have with you on the packstring?

McP: Oh! Now a government string ran about seven or eight. Gypo string run 13. 12 mules and a saddle horse. And the gypos had to have a 300 pound weight balanced.

DB: Who was your closest neighbor back then in those days? Or did you have any?

McP: Steady neighbors, about 18 miles down, stayed all Winter and stayed on this place and lived there.

DB: What was his name?

McP: Chauncey Young and a fellow from California, I don't remember his name.

DB: Were there any kind of towns around here other than Prichard? Or settlements?

McP: Murray, that was a gold rush town. And Eagle, there was 30,000 people there at one time.

DB: Well, back to when you first moved out here. What was involved in homesteading? What did you do to set up a homestead?

McP: Well, you filed on a piece of ground. It'd be open for filing.

DB: Who'd you file with around here?

McP: Government Land Office in Coeur d'Alene. That's federal, you see. This homestead that I got, I filed back in '22.

DB: What was your first house like? You built here on your homestead?

McP: It's over there.

DB: That one? What's the name of that? "Tinderbox"? There's a name on the front.

McP: Turnipseed.

DB: Turnipseed. How'd you get that name for it?

McP: Well, the fellow who bought it, that's his name.

DB: That's a good reason.

McP: Well the house itself was only 16 by 16. It was built in 1910 after the fire. When I homesteaded I had it moved down below. I liked that, a better place to live. This place was built in the '30s. Another place down the creek. I could get running water up here.

DB: How big was the house down there?

McP: 20 by 20.
DB: How many rooms were in it?
McP: Two.
DB: What did you use each room for?
McP: One room bedroom, and kind of a living room, and there was a kitchen. A place for a fire.
DB: Where did you get water down there?
McP: Well. Just put a hole down seven feet and got water.
DB: Was it close to a trail?
McP: Well, yes and no. I built a trail coming from the well to the house.

DB: What kind of material was the house made of?
McP: Logs.
(BREAK IN TAPE)
DB: Where would you get your mules at?
McP: They weren't mine, because I was packing for someone else. Herb Stone, we came in here together, in '17. We picked up a few strings and we gypo-stringed. And they got bigger and bigger. We went down to Lewiston and bought 33 head, two year olds.
DB: Back in those days, how much did a mule cost, a good one?
McP: Oh, \$250-400. A good horse was \$7-800.
DB: And how long would a mule last you?
McP: Wouldn't last any longer than a packer. If you gave him a chance.
DB: That old house you were telling me about. The one you made down there that didn't have any water, when did you build that?
McP: '23.
DB: Were you living in it by yourself at that time? And then you lived in that until you built this one?
McP: Hm-hm. In '36.
DB: Where'd you get your logs for building this one?
McP: After the 1910 Fire, before it had been solid forest. After it, everything was killed. And there they stood. All over.
DB: Where'd you find them. I mean what part of your land were they on?
McP: Across this hill over here.
DB: Is this the original stove you had in this house?
McP: Oh, no. I burned out several of them. I don't know, but I'm a pretty tough customer.
DB: Did you settle here before there were roads in this country?
McP: Well, yes. There was no road in here until after '34. I was up here packing for the Forest Service in '17. Come in. They put a pack trail up here. Half the time it was in the river. You go along some of these creeks, you'd be belly deep to the horses.
XM: When did they put the suspension bridge down here near Bret Creek? On the flat down here by Bret Creek?

McP: Oh, that. The year before we got into World War II. About the last thing the CCs did. Put that bridge across there so they could work on the area burned by the '38 Fire.

XM: Government tax dollars. They'll do anything.

DB: There are a bunch of burned out stumps up there near Cataract Creek. What were the big fires they had around here? What years did they have the big fires?

McP: 1910 was one. 1919 was another one. 1923 was one. And 1926. '31. The last big one.

DB: Did they ever affect you here on your place?

McP: Scared the crap out of me. In '31, 28,000 acres. '26 Fire was 56,000 acres.

DB: How about the '36 one?

McP: No, '31 had 28,000 acres. A slow process to clean it up. No roads and bulldozers. Did it all with pick and shovel, hodags.

DB: Who did the work?

McP: Any one they could get.

DB: Did they just take people and put them to work?

McP: Hm-hm. Two bits an hour. If it got bad enough then they shipped in soldiers.

DB: Did your barn burn down out there? The original one. What happened to that?

McP: Got too old. And the snow broke it down.

DB: Did you ever have a root cellar out there, or anything like that? What did you store in that?

McP: Well vegetables and canned goods.

DB: You say vegetables? What kind did you grow around here?

McP: Oh, spuds, rutabagas, turnips, onions.

DB: Any corn?

McP: No. Too short for corn. No corn, tomatoes or beans. Hit by frost.

DB: Where did you throw away your trash when you were done with it around here?

McP: Oh, across the road over here.

XM: In them days, nothing was trash, this far from town. You kept things. No sir, you don't throw away a bent nail.

DB: Speaking of that, when something broke down around here, what would you do back in the old days?

McP: Well, that all depended on how broke it was. If it was bad enough and you had to get new, that's what you had to do. And sometimes you didn't have the money. You just couldn't go out and borrow a \$1,000 like you can now.

DB: Where would you go to town to buy parts, say if your tractor broke down?

McP: Weren't no tractor. They was horses. Go to the stockyards and buy some of them.

DB: What kind of equipment did you have? What kind of motorized stuff, if any?

XM: Mac's the only, excuse me for interrupting, something you don't see, a horse-powered baler over there. This is the

only one I've seen in this country. There's one in Boise at the Idaho Fair. I was trying to get our Kootenai County Fair to get this one from Mac, re-wood it, and get it working down there. That's the only horse-powered baler, the rest of us went to scrap iron. By the barn, unless it's gone from two years ago.

McP: It's in my pile of rubbish over there.

DB: Where did you get the baler?

McP: It was here when I moved onto the place. A baler, mower, and rake. And a plow.

DB: ~~If something on the baler would break, where would you get a bolt for that? Were there any blacksmiths around here?~~

McP: Nothing much to break on that. She was built.

XM: You got a forge out there in the barn, don't you? This man can do it all. He doesn't have to get somebody else. The forge is out there in the shop.

McP: There's a lot of hay out there. But the forge is sitting there and the anvil. Well, there's a whole shop there, practically.

DB: Was that here when you moved in?

XM: I've got a sewing horse at home. Everything on it Mac made. It's cut out of cottonwood or tamarack. And I sewed on that thing just before hunting season fixing a packsaddle up. It really works. He give me that five years ago. Everything on that is cut out with a hatchet or a drawknife or a jackknife.

DB: What kind of tools did you use in the blacksmith shop?

McP: I had at least 8 or 10 different sets of tongs. For different handling to pull things out of the forge. And a hammer and cold cuts and anvil and vice and drill press.

DB: Did you pick things up little by little over the years?

McP: Yeah.

DB: I'm real interested, I read in the Kellogg paper. It said that one time you got caught without enough supplies in the winter. When was that?

McP: I don't know. A lot of winters like that.

DB: What I'm really interested in is when you go into town, what do you buy? For winter stores?

McP: Well. You buy everything. Of course you buy it in case lots. It'll take 7 to 8 cases of milk, tall 48 can. Condensed milk. I tried powdered milk. Found, get a five pound can of powdered milk, make five gallons. When you got done mixing it, it'd be all gobbled up or it'd taste like water. Got caught in the winter, didn't have enough. I got Carnation.

DB: What other kind of standard stuff would you buy?

McP: Well, buy flour by the 100 and sugar by the 100. And fruit, all dried fruit, 25 pound boxes of that.

DB: How many of those would it take?

McP: Well, I'd buy 25 pounds of prunes, 25 pounds of raisens, and apricots. A few apples.

DB: What kind of baking powder would you use?

McP: We didn't do this sourdough.
DB: What were the common meals in the Wintertime? What would you eat in the morning?
McP: You'd have fish and hotcakes and hashbrowns and coffee.
DB: How about lunch?
McP: Pretty much the same thing.
DB: What was a special meal back then in the old days?
McP: That would be, it was all about the same. Not much difference. Course at that time, too, I used to like to eat sweet stuff; cakes, and pies, and cookies and the like.
DB: And then you'd have stuff out of your garden too, wouldn't you? What's the growing season up here?
McP: From about June, the first of June to October?
DB: I've had venison, but I've never had elk. What does elk taste like? Is it close to venison?
McP: I couldn't tell you what it tastes like. You got two venisons here, the white tailed deer and mule deer. White tail has a better flavor and fatter. Mule deer is good in soup. I'm not too particular about these things. It's something to eat. Eat what you have.
DB: When you butchered an elk, would you butcher it like you butcher a hog?
McP: No, skin him, you don't scald him. Skin him just like you would a beef. Get him down, open up the belly, open him up and take the hide off of him and take him down, take the guts out.
DB: Do you salt him down with brine?
McP: Sometimes, yeah. Make jerky.
XM: Mac's snowshoed more than all the way around the world. He kept track of it, went around the world once or twice and then he said, "To hell with it, I ain't keeping track of my snowshoeing no more."
McP: I figure 73,000 miles. Over these mountains, not on the roads.
DB: You make your own snowshoes?
McP: No. You'd wear out a pair a year. You could buy a good pair of snowshoes for \$7.50. Now they cost you \$70.
DB: How much did cork boots used to cost?
McP: A dollar a inch, a boot like that. 8 inches, 8 dollars.
DB: We're talking about shoes and food and stuff. Where would you buy all these supplies, boots and clothes and things?
McP: Well, down at Prichard, a general store down there. They sold groceries, they sold food, clothing. They'd just be a lumberjack store down there. You wouldn't find any women's dresses or fine shoes. Mostly gloves and boots and staggd shirts and hats and that kind of stuff.
DB: What was the name of it?
McP: Old Billy Lawrence had it to begin with. Billy Lawrence and the Blue Ox. The Blue Ox was a hell of a good looking gal. She was about 250. A lot of her. Had beer kegs for legs.
DB: Did they run the store together?

McP: Billy ran the bar; she ran the store.

DB: Is it still there?

McP: Yeah. Just a tavern now. And it's the only building in Prichard. All the rest of them burned down.

DB: From a forest fire?

McP: No, someone with a match.

DB: What kind of clothes did the people used to wear back in the early days? Lumberjack clothes.

McP: Well, a pair of overhauls in the Summer. Practically year round where it'd be wet, they'd wear wool pants. Keep dry in wool. Water run right out.

(END OF TAPE 8; Side 1)