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Interviewee: Forrest H. Poe
Interviewer: Gladys Peterson
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Forrest Poe’s wife, Flossie Poe, contributes occasionally during the interview.

Gladys Peterson: That’s what I’ll do. This is an interview with Mr. Forrest Poe. The date is January 14, 1988. My name is Gladys Peterson. Forrest, I see you have a middle initial out on your door. Forrest F. Poe, is that your name?

Forrest Poe: Forrest H.

GP: Forrest H. Poe.

FoP: H stands for Hall. That was my mother’s maiden name.

GP: I see. Well, I know that you grew up in the Rattlesnake—way up, your wife tells me—three to three-and-a-half miles up to your place.

FoP: That’s from the gate.

GP: Yes, from the gate. I’d like to go back and find out about your life up there and about your parents and why they settled there. So why don’t we just start. Did they homestead up there in the Rattlesnake?

FoP: Well, my dad thought he was homesteading. He went up there first in the year 1900. He’d been working in the logging camp as a stake scaler—scaling timber. Loggers were cutting it on state land. He was working down at Nine Mile and he got typhoid fever down at that logging camp down at Nine Mile—it was called McQuarrey at that time. So he came up and he went to the old original St. Pat’s Hospital here and spent some time in the old original St. Pat’s Hospital, and while he was in there his friend, Jeff Ferguson—who ran a cigar store and small business in Missoula—got to talking to him and they decided that there was a place up the Rattlesnake that had a very good potential dam site to put a dam in and there was a piece in the New York Times, I think it is, anyway, one of the New York papers, saying that someday Missoula would grow big enough where it would need more water and they would get it out of the Rattlesnake Creek at that time, and there would someday be a dam site there to store water in high water season to save it for the low water season. So they got to talking about that and decided that dad would go buy out the people that were there—he thought he was buying out homestead, but come to find out the land hadn’t been surveyed yet so there were no homestead rights. You can’t really homestead un-surveyed land.
GP: So what would you call those people? Squatters?
FoP: He just called them squatters’ rights and said that was what he had bought out. There was a house and some buildings on the place. So they bought the property.

GP: Could I ask a question. Do you happen to know the name of the people who lived there that he bought from?

FoP: It was two families involved. One of the families name was Wietman—W-E-I or else I-E, I’m not sure of the spelling. I’m not sure what the other party’s name was, but he bought out their claim and their tools in the buildings and everything. I know he told me afterward that a lot of things he thought he did—one of the smartest things he did—he gave them ten dollars extra to include all tools and miscellaneous items, so that this neighbor and that guy and so forth couldn’t come back later and say oh, there is that; that’s my tool and I loaned that. He did that. Got a bill of sale for all the tools and loose pieces of different items, furniture and anything else that might be there.

GP: I have a lot of questions that come to my mind. First of all, do you have any idea what he paid for the land?

FoP: Well I believe it was somewhere near 500 dollars, but I’m not sure.

GP: And how much did he get? Do you know that?

FoP: Well he thought he was getting 160 acres.

GP: That’s quite a bargain, wasn’t it?

FoP: Well in those days that’s like when the Northern Pacific Land Grant was given. Congress put a ceiling price on that land. They could never sell it for more than two dollars and half an acre. So a lot of the land out here in the west was sold as low as 25 cents, or 50 cents, or a dollar an acre. So this would have been about two dollars a half an acre. Five hundred dollars. Well that included the buildings. They were log buildings, did represent somebody’s work, but (unintelligible).

GP: Where did your dad come from?

FoP: He was raised in Minnesota. The town he was raised close to was Cannon Falls, Minnesota. The county seat of the county he was in was Redwing, Minnesota.

GP: Oh yes, that’s southeast, isn’t it? The southeast corner.

FoP: Southeast of Minneapolis.
GP: Yes, I’ve been through Redwing. It’s not far from the river, I believe—Mississippi.

FoP: No, not too far. I’ve never been there.

GP: So he came out alone. His family didn’t come, is that right?

FoP: No, he came out 1893.

GP: So he’d been here a while.

FoP: Oh yes. How he headed west was he worked for a newspaper company in Minneapolis. First after he left home he taught school for a while and then he went to work for a newspaper firm in Minneapolis. And then that newspaper and the one over in St. Paul amalgamated or joined and they cut their staff and he was one of the newer members so he found himself out of a job. He worked in a lumberyard for a while. Odd jobs. Then there was the Northern Pacific Railroad—no, it was straight Northern Railroad—had a crew coming out west to cut ice on the lakes in the Dakotas, Eastern Minnesota, and North Dakota and so forth. So he joined that crew and went out to cut ice with them and they cut up ice along different places. I remember Minot, North Dakota is one of the places that he talked about. So the job was getting pretty well done. They had gotten their icehouses fairly well filled, so he headed on west—he and one of the other guys on the crew—headed on west went on close to the town of Libby. The Libby of today. They got off the train there and started looking for work and so forth and they found an empty cabin—woodcutter cabin or something like that—so they spent the rest of the winter there. He said they killed some deer and bought some vegetables from a farmer for a dollar for 100 pounds or something like that, until spring came. When spring came he headed down the valley and got a job with a big landowner farmer up in the Flathead Valley—just north of Kalispell. Between Kalispell and where Columbia Falls is now—on a big ranch there—wheat ranch. And the guy was infested with gophers so he hired my dad to trap and shoot gophers that summer besides doing other range work. I think 15 dollars a month and board and room. The guy was a bachelor. He was not a married man. So he trapped gophers and then helped them harvest and so forth there the rest of that summer. And then when fall came he and the other guy headed down south and came to Missoula and soon got a job in the woods up near Clinton. Working in the logging woods.

GP: Was he working for the Bonner people at all?

FoP: Oh, they weren’t here yet at that time. It was McNamara.

GP: Oh McNamara.

FoP: A little contractor that he worked with; probably wrote his checks. And their headquarters were up what is called McNamara Landing in the Blackfoot now.
GP: Yes.

FoP: Well there was a little town there. The railroad station—the railroad had been built up the Blackfoot—and that was the station where people got on and off because the railroad followed up around the river and the wagon road right on up across the prairie. So he worked up there that winter and then he got started working on different places. In the wintertime he’d sometimes go to Cottonwoods and then the summertime he’d work around town at different jobs. He worked out at the University one summer and different places like that. He worked for a butcher shop—Daily Meat Company—for about a year and half. Then the Spanish American war broke out and that was no long (unintelligible) army so he went from Daily’s employment into the Spanish American War. He took two of Dailey’s cattle horses in the service with him and sold them to the army. He was in the Calvary.

GP: I wonder how he ever transported the horses.

FoP: Oh, they bought them right here in Missoula. There was a whole company of soldiers left from Missoula.

GP: I see. Probably enlisted at Fort Missoula.

FoP: Yes, enlisted at Fort Missoula and then they, of course, traveled by train from there to wherever they took them. They spent most of the time down south in training and they had a lot of greenfoot hot weather and no refrigeration in those days, food spoilage and so forth. So he never did go across seas. Along about the following October or November—I guess it was November—the war was about all over. He had a chance to have gone to the Philippines Islands to help put down the insurrection there and he didn’t want to go. And so he got mustered out, went back home, visited his folks for a while and spent most of the winter back there.

GP: Did he get typhoid fever in the service?

FoP: Well that’s what he got in the logging camps. And he came back here and that’s when he came back after the army. He went to work for Koopman and Wissbrod and another set of butchers that were. He worked for them for a while. It was after he worked with them after he came back from the army. He was working for Dailey when he went in the army. When he came back from the army he worked for Cooksy, Jim Walt and a man named Koopman and Wissbrod were the butchers. He worked for them a while and then got this state job.

GP: Cutting logs?

FoP: No, scaling logs.

GP: Oh, scaling logs.
FoP: He was the Assistant State Scaler. Frank Ives was the State Scaler and my dad was the Assistant. So he was working on that job and he’d stay in the logging camps and that’s where the typhoid fever broke out when he was down at Nine Mile—now called Nine Mile—in those days the camp then was called McQuarrey—the site of Nine Mile, where the Nine Mile River empties in, the main river was there. French were pretty strong down in that area and they always referred to that town as nine miles below six miles. And that’s what he was doing. Then he went to the hospital. Got out of the hospital he went up on the ranch and he started out with some dynamite and lubestuffs (?) and cleared the land and started building into a ranch, figuring he would have something to sell. And then in 1906 the National Federal Land Survey came through and that’s when they found out the land he was on—that he thought was his homestead—turned out to be Northern Pacific land.

GP: Oh my goodness.

FoP: In the meantime he had gotten married. My mother came from Illinois and they got married in 1905 and my oldest brother was born in 1906.

GP: She had come out here with her family?

FoP: No. I think they never enlarged her much on it. I think it was correspondence. And they were married at the Ives residence here in Missoula and lived on the place up there.

GP: And she came out on the train I suppose.

FoP: Yes, came out on the train. I know she talked about that. She came out on the train. Of course, I always thought the only way train and there probably weren’t any stages left then.

GP: No.

FoP: But the train was about the only way you came, before the day of the automobile.

GP: So she came out to get married.

FoP: Yes, got married.

GP: Married in Missoula, then.

FoP: Married in Missoula. That’s right.

GP: So then by this time—1905, you say—they got married.

FoP: They were married September 1 or 5.
GP: Well that’s close enough. And so was she a country girl? She didn’t mind moving up there to the ranch?

FoP: Well, her folks lived on a small place back in Illinois—five or ten acres, I guess.

GP: What city, or what part of Illinois was it?

FoP: Their closest town was Golconda, Illinois. That’s right close to the Mississippi River.

GP: I’ve heard of it, yes. Well, so—

FoP: Smitfield, I think, was the county seat. And she had two sisters and three brothers.

GP: But she was the only one who came out here?

FoP: She was the only one who came out here.

GP: So then your dad got going on his ranch up there. What was exactly was he raising? Did he have cattle up there?

FoP: Oh, he kept getting a few more cattle and as he cleared more land and was able to cut more hay and put up more hay to feed the cattle through the winter. That’s the big thing—there’s always a lot of summer pasture but not enough feed for winter. So he always had to have a team of horses, a wagon and things like that. And I can remember when I was kid growing up that was always dad’s job. Anytime he had any spare time he went down and tried to burn out a stump. He didn’t do much blasting of stumps and dynamiting after us kids got a little bigger because he was afraid of a chance of an accident and so forth. But we did still burn out a lot, dig around them and pile other stumps and logs and things on them and burn them out. We did blast a few.

GP: Before I forget this—did I understand you said that it turned out that that was railroad land?

FoP: Yes. When the Land Survey came through in 1906 why they found out that that was railroad land. The Northern Pacific Railroad was selling

GP: Alternate sections.

FoP: Yes. Alternate sections for 25 miles on each side of the railroad.

GP: What I wanted to ask, though, was did that present any problem with the title to his land?
FoP: It sure did. It certainly did. It presented titles to everybody that happened to find out they were on railroad land because right away as soon as the survey was completed they started issuing eviction notices.

GP: So how was that settled?

FoP: Well, he hired a lawyer and that about everything he could make and everything and the court bought it in 1919.

GP: Is that right?

FoP: In 1919 he decided the lawyer was the only one making any money out of this deal so he started direct negotiations with the railroad company and they finally sent a man out from St. Paul—St. Paul was the headquarters for the railroad. They sent a man out here, because they had several other people who were in the same boat, to look the land over and decide what they might want to do for it, what the future could be for it. They looked it over and bought half of it—rockslide and steep mountain—no good for anything. And about another half of that or quarter was just fairly steep mountainside with timber on it. But it did have some timber on it. So they wouldn’t sell him the 160 because about 70 acres of that 160 bottom land that he wanted was what you could call agricultural land.

GP: And when you say what he wanted, that was what he already was living on.

FoP: Yes. That was what he had hoped to get. He didn’t want the mountains. Have to pay taxes and so forth on that because it was just no good to him, no good for anything, because, I say, probably close to one quarter that section of land was just rockslide and stuff that you couldn’t get anything but mountain goat on. It was no good for pasture, no good for timber, no good for anything except if you had a good rock quarry; mining for rocks makes it nice. So in 1920 the railroad said well, we’ll sell you the whole section. We will not split it up, but we will sell you the whole square mile and the price will be two dollars a half an acre—the maximum that Congress said they could charge for it. They agreed they could because they said it wouldn’t have that much value compared to something else. And there were one or two other people who lived on up the creek who were in the same situation. And that’s why it was never really homesteaded. The original people who thought they were homesteading—they couldn’t give it (unintelligible) land.

GP: So he had to pay for it twice then?

FoP: Yes. He did. In the meantime he hired woodcutters and loggers and then he took all the available timber off of it because he figured if he was going to be evicted he was going to try to go out with a little bit of something to go with—enough to buy another place somewhere or something like that.
GP: Sure.

FoP: So then in 1920 one of the things he pushed so hard to get it settled, because in 1920 a group known as the DeSmet Irrigation Company that lived out where the airport is now—the farmers out there at the dry land farm, it was good land, but it was dry land—and they just figured if they could get some fire on that they could raise real good crops. So they got the idea that if they could just sell their land they could go up the Rattlesnake, built a dam at our place—so that’s what’s known as the Hog’s Back Hill juts out close to one from the other side of the valley. It’s a good natural gas site. And their idea was to built that dam, fix the floodwaters and that wouldn’t disturb the water system that was supplying Missoula water, because they would just hold the flood waters in a reservoir until the time of year when they needed it. But they ran out of money and didn’t have enough money, so that fell through. But he pushed hard because he had a chance to sell that land to them. He wanted to have title to that. Well, as it wound up, he stayed there and my folks left in 1930 and went back east to visit their relatives. One of my mother’s sisters had moved to Denver and they went there to visit them and then went on down to Illinois around Golconda and visited other relatives down there. And then they went north up to Minnesota and visited my dad’s folks. They spent a whole summer back there and us boys—my brother and I, my older brother had already passed away at that time—so my younger brother and I stayed on the ranch and kept. We tried to keep it going, but that’s right when the Depression hit the hardest and things were pretty tough with no capital behind you.

GP: Right. I’d like to get into the Depression, but I’d like to back up now. Were you born up there too?

FoP: Yes, ma’am—1908.

GP: Nineteen-oh-eight you were born up there. And then you said you had a younger brother too. Was he born up there also?

FoP: Nineteen ten. So the three of us brothers—1906, 1908, 1910 was when we were born, two years apart.

GP: Then I want to ask you about your school because I know there was a school up there too because when I went for a walk with you—this was eight or nine years ago, I think—you took a bunch way up beyond your place up to a rocky area I remember. You pointed out where the school was. But, before I forget to ask you this, did your older brother die then in childhood?

FoP: He was 20 years old.

GP: Oh, 20.

FoP: Just his last year in high school.
GP: Oh. Was it an illness that he had?

FoP: Yes. He was a very very studious sort of a person. He’d set up nights—way late at night studying—and didn’t really sleep and neglected his health studying so hard and then he got chickenpox and then he caught scarlet fever and then that went into spinal meningitis and that’s the end of it. And of course those days they didn’t have the medical things—the doctors like they have now.

GP: No, they certainly didn’t.

FoP: And so, that was when he passed away.

Flossie Poe: (Unintelligible)

GP: Well, even not very long ago really—20, 30 years ago—they weren’t either. A lot of them didn’t make it.

FoP: There were a few other students I know—there were two others in the high school that same year that got—and they both survived, but they were never the same. It used to be a very definitely crippling. It was Robert Putsley died from it, same as my brother did. But Virginia Elkhire, I’ll tell you she survived, but she didn’t recover. She survived.

GP: Was she related to Marguerite Elkhire?

FoP: I am sure she was.

GP: Okay, then, let’s back up then to your schooling. I remember you pointing out where the school had been up there and the path going down to the creek, where you said they got their water. Do I remember that correctly?

FoP: Yes.

GP: Was that school there when you were little—really little? I wonder when that school was built.

FoP: In 1906 the people up there began to think that they were going to need a school. And so they started working with the County Superintendent of Schools. They established a school district. The County Superintendent, who was the County Attorney, did the legal work and established what was called the Rattlesnake School at that time. I think its district 31 and in 1907 they built the schoolhouse and they held school there the first time in the fall, September 1907.
GP: Is that right? Well that is really going back there. There were earlier schools around, but that’s still pretty old, isn’t it?

FoP: I guess that (unintelligible) school out here was a little bit older.

GP: Which one?

FoP: The Grant Creek.

GP: And Bonner School was 1889 as far as we know. Well, so then by the time you were ready to go to school that had been established for some time.

FoP: It had been going a while then.

GP: What do you remember about that school?

FoP: Well, I remember one thing. It started out as a one-room school. I don’t remember it as a one-room school. Well, in a way I do. By one room, I mean there was just one classroom. Heating stove in the middle of the school and a row of desks down each side. The teacher’s desk was at one end. And it was sort of a fluctuating population. Some years there were more students than others because in those days a lot of time during the drought times and the Depression times. Would you like a chair?

GP: No, this is fine.

FoP: Sometimes with people moving out here like in Eastern Montana. They had several years of drought over that way.

GP: Yes, I know. The early ’20s were very bad.

FoP: Well there’s a victim of them right there.

GP: I’m going to get to her one of these times.

FoP: But there would be some of those that would be starting west, heading for the coast and early winter would come along and in those days they didn’t have the highways and the cars, didn’t have the ability they have now and a lot of times they couldn’t get over the pass going west and the pass would be snowed in. They didn’t have the snowplows and things that now. And they would come back to Missoula or anyplace like that and find places where they was empty wood chopper cabins and things like that—they could get out and move in for the winter, cut some wood, kill a few deer, had to buy a few vegetables from the farmers and get by ‘til spring and then they’d head on west.
GP: So some of those people were up in the Rattlesnake?

FoP: Some of them would come up into the Rattlesnake and fill up any vacant or empty cabins. There were always a few cabins in the Rattlesnake area that were for rent.

GP: Do you remember about how many students there were up there?

FoP: I have seen some years when there were only four students and I have seen some years when there were 17. After I left there and I went to high school they got to where they had 20 some—24 or 25 students one year. But, I was going to say that they usually had women teachers and they sometimes would board at one of the farm homes nearby or it was what called the Orr cabins, a third of a mile from the school house and it was two cabins there that were usually available if the teachers wanted to rent them for five dollars a month or something like that and quite often the teachers stayed in those. But, also the single young women teachers weren’t very enthused—or even the older ones—about staying up there and walking a distance from the schoolhouse to where they lived and so forth. So the school board—well they had an incident that pushed that idea—got together in 1920, I believe it was and built another room on the schoolhouse and called it a (unintelligible), where the teacher could stay. So eliminated that and then they used the school house as part of their living quarters when it was not in school use and there was another stove in that part so the wood for the school was furnished also for the teachers.

GP: Do you remember the names of any of the teachers up there?

FoP: Well, I remember a few of them. I think (unintelligible). Do you want the names of them?

GP: If it’s in a book we can—

FoP: I can remember my older brother’s first teacher. Now my folks didn’t let him go to school until he was 7. We had about almost three miles to walk to school and they didn’t want to send a 6-year-old kid down there so they waited until he was seven years old, so he was one year of ahead of me in school. But his first teacher’s name was Alice Boles—B-O-L-E-S. Her folks lived and there is an area up there it is still called Boles’ meadows. And then I think the next teacher—my first teacher’s—name was Bird. I can’t remember what her first name was, but her last name was B-I-R-D. She was an older lady. And then the next one was Morris—M-O-R-R-I-S.

GP: That wasn’t Eunice, was it?

FoP: No, I don’t think so. Are you thinking of Eunice Brown?

GP: Yes, I was.
FoP: Okay, I know her too. Morris, but it would have been the Larsons living close to Browns up there.

GP: So probably a relation of hers.

FIP: Could be.

FoP: Near Greenough.

GP: Yes, because I know she was from the Potomac area, I believe.

FIP: (unintelligible) tape for sure?

FoP: Yes.

GP: I can get a tape for you, very easily.

FIP: Okay.

FoP: Good.

GP: I just didn’t get around to that.

FIP: (Unintelligible) giving us a bad time.

GP: Yes, no problem at all. What do you remember about the school? Was it difficult to learn up there with one teacher?

FoP: No, I wouldn’t say so. Of course, you take a school where you have it possible to have all eight grades in one room, but usually there probably weren’t more than about four grades in one room and there is no way you will keep one kid from listening to another one recite and I think maybe that doesn’t hurt them because country schooling in any of histories never proved detrimental.

GP: That’s right.

FoP: Look at Abraham Lincoln. They use him as an example of what a kid can learn without very much opportunity in school at all.

GP: No, there is a lot to be said for them really.

FIP: I liked (unintelligible).
GP: Well, good.

FoP: Now, Mr. Ketchum, who was the principal at the Missoula County High School for years—when there was only one high school there—made the remark many, many times in the process of his business and the assemblies and so forth that the hardest working, best students that once attended high school were from rural schools, rural areas where they usually had two or three hours of chores to do on each end of a day and then they would still do their studying and come to school with their lessons prepared. And he used to tell us—and so did the teachers—tell us that same thing. And the kids that lived right close to the school a lot of time had lots of leisure time are the ones who did not prepare their lessons for the next day.

GP: Sure, I believe that.

FoP: No, I would say maybe they didn’t have all the advantages of music and some of the fine art stuff in the country school, but they got a little more energy out of the three Rs [reading, writing, arithmetic].

GP: I’d like to talk about your high school education, but before I do, I just wanted to find out if—your father then and your mother had a very successful ranch up there, didn’t they? I was wondering if there were many others up there also that were doing well up there.

FoP: Well, there was the Effinger Ranch, which later became the Ray Ranch. Do you know where that is?

GP: No.

FoP: Well, it’s the last one if you are going up main creek and didn’t turn over across on the (unintelligible). It was the big ranch where all those houses are up there. Effinger had 800 acres counted all together and part of it was on each side of the Rattlesnake Creek. And they were the biggest ones. Then there were usually three ranches—small places—in Spring Gulch. Like most of the ranchers up there they had to cut wood, sell it, do some logging and so forth. They couldn’t make all of their income off the cows and livestock.

GP: Do I remember that there were some fir trees up there?

FoP: Oh, yes. On our place there were 13 apple trees, and cherry trees, and plum trees and there had been raspberry bushes on a place across the creek from us. Now, in the early days—before my father went up there—there was an old fellow called John Fraser. He was a woodcutter, logger. Well, woodcutting. They didn’t do too much logging up there, especially in Beeskove (?). But one of the things that John Fraser always did—he’d move on to a place, cut the handy timber off—but he’s always file a water right and plant some fruit trees.
FIP: He was called Apple seed John.

GP: Is that right?

FoP: He was named Apple seed John because every place he lived he would do that—he would plough up a little piece of ground. He always had a horse to do it. Plough up a little piece of ground, clear the brush and stuff off, file a water right, and he is the one that filed a water right on our place, not the Wietman’s that my dad bought from them, but when John Fraser lived there he had filed a water right on that stream, called Fraser Creek, and I guess that’s probably why it is called Fraser Creek.

GP: Sure. In other words, he was up there before the Wietmans then.

FoP: Yes, he had been there quite a long time. Fact is, at the end of the Civil War he and his brother, George, and another guy...you know, a lot of the people were in the Civil War—especially the Southern soldiers—didn’t even have a home to go to. Their homes were destroyed during the war. And John was a young fellow at that time and looking for new territory so the three of them got together and started out with a horse and wagon and all their belongings and headed west. It wasn’t too long after that that one of the fellows dropped out of the party and it was just John and his brother came on west. I think one of them went down to Kansas and took up a homestead down there or something. But, John and his brother George, they headed on out west. Just how soon—whether it took them two or three years or what it took them to work their way as far as here—I don’t know. But he had lived in the Bitterroot some and he’d been in Wyoming and he had even been in Canada. I was a pretty small kid, but he was telling me some of these stories. I remember one of the stories he told me was about when they first started out—I think St. Louis, with his wagon and so forth—they had a ten-gallon keg of whiskey with them. And he said the first day they drove they traveled all day long and when night came they were right back in St. Louis. So he said that went on for about two or three days, so they decided that the only way they were ever going to get on west was to dump that barrel of whiskey out. So they dumped out the keg of whiskey and the next day they got headed in the right direction.

GP: That’s quite a story. Was he an old man? He must have been an old man when you knew him then. And where would he have been living? Did he have a little plot up there that he kept?

FoP: He lived on many—quite a few—different places. He had lived on most of the places that were (unintelligible) when I was there. Besides he built several small cabins and before I got big enough to know him, he had had an accident and lost one of his legs. Well the story was that he laid down on the railroad track and the train flying by took his leg. Now I don’t lay truth on that at all. But he did have a peg leg.

GP: Well, that’s quite a story. What was he doing? Was he sort of improving this land and then would he get any money for it?

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FoP: Mostly not. He would just move on to a piece of ground and put up a cabin and cut off all the handy wood.

GP: Sell it?

FoP: Sell it for firewood—a dollar and a quarter or something a cord or something like that.

GP: Oh my.

FoP: People bought it and hauled it to town.

FIP: He was a wanderer.

GP: A wanderer.

FoP: He never stayed any one place very long. The years that I was growing up that he was up there I can think of about eight or nine different places he lived on. He usually had one horse and a buggy or a little wagon of some sort. He built a cabin. He was pretty handy—awful handy man with an axe. With that peg leg of his—he always said—get on a hillside, while he’d set that peg down there and he knew it was going to stay there. His other foot might slip out from under him but he knew that peg was going to stay there. And he’d stand on one side and chop right handed ‘til he got the three half down and then switch the axe into the other hand and just use the same tracks let the tree fall down.

FIP: (unintelligible).

GP: Oh yes.

FIP: (unintelligible).

FoP: He made about a half a mile. Just by hollowing out logs with an axe.

GP: Then what happened to him? Did he die up there or move on?

FoP: No, he finally went to the Poor Farm and lived at the Poor Farm his last two or three or four years or something like that and then he just died there.

GP: Where was that Poor Farm?

FoP: That was up about a half a mile or a little less than half a mile up the creek or up the road from the Lincoln School.
GP: Oh, I see. Well, you mentioned the flu, which reminds me of another question that I have here. There was mining up there too, wasn’t there?

FoP: Some, but never what you could call successful mining.

GP: How far above you was it and what were they mining for?

FoP: There was one mine that was on our land, right over at the end of the humpback from us and that shaft went about 95 feet back in the Montana—hard rock, all blasted out of hard rock. Then there was about 20 feet out the mouth of it that had been timbered over so that when they wheeled their stuff out or hauled it out...They never did have a railroad track in there, and I don’t know what they hauled it out with or what.

GP: What were they looking for?

FoP: Gold and silver. They could find a trace of it.

GP: And this was all done before your dad got the land?

FoP: Yes. Well, that brings up another subject—kind of like these tree sweeps, they were called, of Swedish descent that were prospecting up there and they found some of this ore and it had promise, you could say. So they started digging into the side of the mountain and shoring it up, timbering it some and the further they went back into rocks, why, like a lot of miners, always just around the next corner they’re going to hit it rich and they never do.

GP: Do you have any idea when that would have been?

FoP: That was sometime before the turn of the century—I’d say probably before 1895.

GP: Oh, I see. Okay.

FoP: It was before my dad got there. There was a guy up there name of William Beeskove, it was also a nickname “Coyote Bill.” He claimed all the mineral rights up the valley above what was known as Day Avenue Bridge at that time. That’s where the schoolhouse is near after Ubridge and Spring Gulch came in the Ray Farm.

GP: Where did this Beeskove come from?

FoP: Well, his story was, and I guess probably some truth in it, he claimed he had been a scout for General Custer when Custer was fighting Indians. And he always dressed like him, wore his hair like him—he tried to imitate General Custer. He wore buckskins all the time and long yellow hair.
GP: Now, you sound like you knew him. You never saw him?

FoP: I saw the man once, that’s all. I was a pretty small kid.

GP: Did your dad tell you this story, then?

FoP: Well, my dad and Ned Keene and several of the other old timers that knew him. Told him quite a bit about him. But he claimed all this mineral and when these three—

FIP: Claimed it for (unintelligible).

FoP: Well he claimed everything up there. Usually a mineral claim just takes in an acre or two—he claimed everything in the valley. And so the three Swedish fellows, they worked hard. They had a cabin over there and they worked hard and they mined for a while and then they ran out of money and they’d go out and work for wages someplace, get some more money for what they call the grub steak—powder, buy some more dynamite. And then they’d come back and work the mine a while. And, as I say, they always saw little traces of ore in front of them that kept them encouraged and they kept going and finally they hit something that they thought was a pretty good vein and that’s when this Coyote Bill or Bill Beeskove came back into the scene and was checking their mine and he said, oh yes, he said, well you know this is all my land, this is my mineral and I’ve got all the mineral rights up there so you guys will either have to give me 50 percent of everything you take out of this mine or else leave—get out. Well they weren’t about to give him 50 percent—so far they hadn’t made enough grub stake for themselves very often. So he would go down with his big old blunderbuss rifle and get off from the trees and shoot bricks off their chimney and things like that.

GP: They were living up there?

FoP: They were living in a cabin close to the mine. The cabin was just over the humpback where I grew up. I could still take you up there and show you the little old dug out cellar underneath where the cabin stood. There’s no sign of the cabin anymore. I think piece of tin of something that was around the stovepipe. And I don’t know if that completely scared them out or that they had just figured there wasn’t enough ore in that mine to be worth it. Any way, they left after a few weeks of fracas with the other guy. Nobody ever worked the mine again. So that was the end of the mine. When the 1919 Fire came through while it burned all these timbers out around the mine and that all fell in, but there is still a hole there that you can get into. You’ve got to kind of get down, stoop pretty low to walk into it. You can still walk back into the (unintelligible) about 90 feet or more.

GP: I didn’t know about that fire. Did it do any damage to the homes or anything like that?

FoP: Oh yes it did. Completely burned some of them right to the ground.
GP: It did.

FoP: Yes, quite a few people lost their homes up there in that fire.

GP: I see. But it didn’t affect your family.

FoP: No. Well we had quite bit of irrigated field around our place so it didn’t get close enough to burn any of the buildings. Another reason is that my dad put a kid up on each roof with a bucket of water and a gunnysack—wet gunnysack—and we would run around over those roofs and had a couple of ladders and we had them. We couldn’t cover all the roofs, but we would run back and forth. My dad stayed on the ground most of the time—he couldn’t stand heights very good—and would splash up new buckets of water. See, there was a big wind came with that fire and sparks—live brands of burning needles and things—would come jump up far as a mile at a time ahead of the main fire and start fires. And every time we’d see smoke on one of the roofs we’d run over there and douse it out with a wet gunnysack.

GP: Was that a real dry summer?

FoP: Extremely dry summer, just like the one we just went through. I know when my folks would see that smoke boiling up over the mountain at Spring Gulch there, why my dad and my older brother went up in Fraser Creek and worked on the stream bed up there some and (unintelligible) and built some dams and things. Get a little bigger head of down because our ditch was getting quite short on water. And then my dad and brother worked for about eight or nine days over across the creek from our place in the old logging road and things that were in there, using them as firebreaks to keep the fire from getting down closer to our place. But they saved quite a bit of our timber. And on the other side they were over by the big rockslide and all that. There was not much up there for it to burn on. On Hog’s Back Hill there was a lot of young tamaracks set to go coming in after their roots on logging. It killed all of that, but we didn’t lose an awful lot, but some of the people—like Mrs. Pringle—some of the homes were just completely wiped out.

GP: Did they rebuild?

FoP: No, the Vassers never did rebuild. The Duncans did not rebuild. The Lappis they were housed, but they had to rebuild their barn and chicken house. Curry managed up in Dry Gulch, out of Spring Gulch—Curry managed to save his house and his chicken house. But his barn—he only had one cow and a team of horses. He spent most of his time hauling wood to town and selling it. He would hire woodchoppers. He was getting to be an old man—the Currys were old people—and he had the last of his timber cut into cordwood and took it to haul back to town and sell it. He could haul it to town, up there sell it—about the most you could probably get for it was three dollars or usually two and a half, it depends and if you hauled it to town you could get four or five dollars for it, maybe six dollars a cord. Well he lost all of that and so that old couple they lived a pretty meager life for the rest of the time they were there until they went to 18
the Poor Farm, too. The Currys had one daughter. She was Mrs. Walter Grant. She married Walter Grant, who lived in the head of Saw Mill Gulch. Walter Grant, himself, was a tailor at the Mercantile most of his life. He built a nice log house up there on this place up there on this place up in Saw Mill Gulch and they had one boy and he never went in very heavy for cattle. He had some beef cattle but he didn’t do much milking because he drove to town everyday and worked down there.

FIP: (unintelligible)

FoP: Then there was the Swansons that lived up on the side of the hill and the Larsons—another older couple called Hog Larsons because they raised hogs. And then, Mrs. Swanson’s parents, the Sutherlands had the place right up above where the Rattlesnake Dam is now. If you look there, there’s a new house been built up there. But the Sutherlands were old when I first remember them. I remember going to their house one time and they were both quite old people. So, that’s kind of the history. Most of the ones I knew and the ones that I did know up there are the ones I got most of my information from, like my dad. In 1897 my uncle—my dad’s younger brother—came out here and he and my dad were together some. They worked up on Jumbo quarrying the rock, sliding it down the hill; it was hauled over to build what was originally the Donohue Building in Missoula. Have you been here very long? Do you know where it is?

GP: Not that long.

FoP: Okay. The Donahue Building was replaced by what later became the Montgomery Ward building.

GP: Oh yes, I know the corner. Downtown.

FoP: Okay. Well the Donahue Building—the first eight feet of that—was put up with stone and it was a three story building and there are some pictures of that, but I don’t know if I have them.

GP: Well, so that’s quite impressive that your dad and your uncle helped to build that then.

FoP: They quarried the rock. That’s what their part of it was. A fellow named Joseph Longly was a teamster now and he hauled the rock.

GP: Longly.

FoP: Joseph Longly. Joseph Longly had quite a family and they later moved up the Rattlesnake and had a place up there.
GP: I have some more questions, and by the way I talked to Dale Johnson this morning—he’s the archivist at the University—and these are questions that he was interested in: the one about the mines and another one he said was he had heard that they had some kilns up there.

FoP: That’s right. A lot of kilns.

GP: Where were they?

FoP: Well there is a gulch up there that is named Lime Kiln Gulch—that’s about a mile. It must have been a mile and a quarter upstream from what you call the Hog’s Back Hill.

GP: Who ran those?

FoP: I don’t know who did. There is a road. They built a road up to it. The road went in on the Keene place and it was a pretty steep road going up the hill that went back to their plot—close to two miles. And this limekiln was built in the side of the hill and it was a pretty fair sized landfill. I would say 30 things this room and maybe larger.

GP: Had it been operated before your time or during your time?

FoP: I never knew when it was operating, but I have seen it standing there, looked at it and saw a pit in the hill where they used scrapers and horses to scrape the metal soil out and take it to the mine and they had lots of wood and logs up there so that’s what a land kiln does. They heat the stuff and burn out the mineral earth from the lime part of the earth and then they clean good lime and they hauled it down and a lot of houses and cabins up there that had great chimneys and great foundations and things like that. A lot of the lime came right out of that lime kiln that put those bricks together and they hauled quite a bit to town, but they never could get any successful shipping it out of town. When they paid the freight it wasn’t there.

GP: Did you get that information then from your father?

FoP: I got some of that from my father, although he didn’t know that limekiln was it was actually run.

GP: He just knew about it.

FoP: Some from Mr. Effinger, some from Keene, some from John Fraser—just different ones, but Pilcher’s the one that gave me the most information. I can remember one of the things Pilcher told. He said it was a horse killer. That they would have to hook six horses on to the empty wagon and pull it up the land kiln and then they’d load it up and they’d use the horse and pull in about six logs, tie them on behind the wagon to hold the wagon back coming back down the hump. It was just (unintelligible). You can still see it where it went.
GP: Did you say this Pilcher was somebody who lived up there too?

FoP: Yes, there was the Pilcher place and he... I assume is where Pilcher Creek got its name. He filed the first water right on Pilcher Creek.

GP: Well I have another question here then from Dale. He mentioned the name Quast—Q-U-A-S-T. Does that ring a bell to you? And he said something about a dairy being up there.

FoP: There were two Quasts. Otto Quast and his brother Charlie Quast. Otto Quast was on one side of the creek, where later was the Klapwyck Place and called the Pony Rein.

FIP: Why that’s just right here.

FoP: Yes, on the west side of the creek up here about two miles and over on the east side of the creek—the place that’s Lincoln Hills now—was Charlie Quast’s property. And they both had dairies and Otto Quast had the original oldest water right planning on that lower part of the Rattlesnake. And so Bart when he owned the water company bought out Quast. Quast bought his property from Federsons to start with. Federsons are what filed the original water right. And they bought Quast to get the water right so they could keep the streams for more water for the city of Missoula.

GP: I see. So there were two successful dairies in the Rattlesnake.

FoP: Oh, there would have been more than that.

GP: I mean in the Rattlesnake.

FoP: But there was more than that. There was the Hamilton Dairy and then the smaller dairy like Ray’s Dairy and Day’s Dairy that was down there below the Lincoln school there. They were smaller but the Quasts had the two biggest one. Hamilton (unintelligible) they only had about 30 head of milk cows.

GP: And they took their milk right into Missoula to customers in Missoula.

FoP: The fact is, Otto Quast moved out. They bought him out to get his water rights. He moved up the Bitterroot, up by Corvallis and he was the main party involved in starting the Corvallis Cheese factory.

GP: Oh, is that right?

FoP: (unintelligible) He had a quite a large place up there and he was the biggest stockholder in that cheese factory in Corvallis. His brother Charlie Quast was up there in the Rattlesnake for a while and he was a great man to borrow. He borrowed money for everything. He’d borrow
money from the bank to operate on. So finally the bank got close to foreclosing on him up in the Rattlesnake so went over and took up the place Quast Ranch in Grant Creek now known as the Marbut (?)

GP: Oh is that right?

FoP: That was the Quast Ranch moved from the east side of the Rattlesnake over there and started that big Quast Ranch up there.

FIP: (unintelligible).

GP: Married?

FoP: Mrs. Quast, after Charlie died, married a foreman. No, I think it was the daughter. Yes, the daughter. She married the foreman and (unintelligible) Gary Marbut either father or grandson. I don’t know. I never talked to Gary about it. But I’ve never had good feelings about Quast myself. Mainly because he was burning straw stack in 1919 on the 17th of August at his grandfather’s place.

GP: Oh, that was the year the fire.

FoP: And he let that fire get away and that’s the one came over the top, burned out everything, just about all the property that’s on the (unintelligible)—Dry Gulch, Sawmill Gulch, Spring Gulch, the Rattlesnake and went clear through to Placid Lake.

GP: Was that general knowledge?

FoP: Yes.

GP: Was there a lot of ill feeling over that?

FoP: Oh yes. One of the people who got burned out took his rifle and run over and sit on the hillside for about a week trying to get a shot at him. But, lawsuits were no good because the bank stepped in and said, “Oh no, you don’t start any lawsuits against that man. He owes us too much money.” He just disappeared. He wasn’t around for a month or two after that fire.

GP: Is that right? Did he come back?

FoP: Oh yes. He eventually came back. Sold the house.

GP: Well, that’s quite a story. Well.
FoP: He didn’t sell off then, though. He came back and just continued the ranch until the ill feelings died down a little bit, he wasn’t in danger of somebody taking a rifle shot.

GP: You told us a lot now about the Rattlesnake and going to school up there and the people who lived there. Maybe now we can get back to your high school days. Let’s see. You were born in 1908 so you were in high school in the ’20s then, right?

FoP: Yes.

[End of Tape 1]
FoP: When I was in third grade the school board had a little trouble getting a teacher. So they hired a teacher they weren’t very enthused about but they hired her on a half-year basis. As it turned out they did not want to hire her for the second half of the school year. So they cancelled her contract, put on a school bus, hired my uncle (unintelligible). It was a school bus and that school bus was a team of horses and a sled because it was wintertime. And he hauled the kids to the Lincoln School and that is where I finished my third grade. The next year there was some (unintelligible) people up there on the school board. Some of the parents wanted their (unintelligible) to open up, have school up there again and some of them didn’t. And of course my uncle didn’t want to have school up there because he liked that job hauling the students. And I think they paid him more than they were paying the teachers to teach him too. So my folks kept us kids home that winter. That was the first winter after the war. My cousins. During World War I we were going to the Lincoln School. I can remember the man coming out to put his girl on the school bus one morning and he said well, we’re in the war. They’ve declared war on Germany. Then the following fall was when the 1918 Armistice.

GP: Yes. That’s so. We went in, I think, in ’17.

FoP: Yes, ’17. But the following winter we didn’t have any school. That is, us kids didn’t go to school. So I missed a year of school. We were all a year later going to school on account of that.

GP: Now why did you miss? Because you didn’t have a teacher up there at your school? Or you didn’t get hauled into Lincoln?

FoP: The school board decided not to hire a teacher that second year—the year before they cancelled the contract in the middle of the year and put on the school bus. The next year my folks didn’t want to send us kids to the Lincoln School on the school bus because the driver and them weren’t getting along.

GP: It was a long trip, too, wasn’t it?

FoP: Yes. It was. So then the following the year they went back and started having school up there. But I went to the Lincoln School for a half a year.

GP: I see. Earlier.

FoP: When I was in the third grade.

GP: Okay. So you were really pretty young during World War I, weren’t you?

FoP: Oh yes.
GP: Do you remember how it affected you or the community?

FoP: Oh, I can remember some of the things going with that. I can remember when we were going to the Lincoln School—our country was in war that spring—and there were some kids going there—two girls and a boy. Their name was Guetler. They were good people, I guess, but they were German people and everybody—like they did during the next world war if you were Japanese—they'd point their finger and said pen 'em up. And they felt the same way and they had some patriotic exercises, flag salutes and so forth, and I remember everybody's eyes were on the Guetler kids. They got a lot of criticism. I can't remember whether they refused to salute the flag or anything like that. But they didn't go out as wild for the patriotism stuff as some of the others. They were looked down on. So I can remember some of those things. I can remember Louis Effinger, who was—the Affnes were German—Mr. Effinger, the father, had already died. Louis, the son, was running the place, and he wasn't really a very sharp man. A little bit retarded. So he got a lot of criticism and he was provoked into one or two fights during the war by people making remarks to him. One day was saying something. Some guy—a neighbor—came along and rubbed it into him over the Germans lost the battle. Oh, he got mad, fought the guy and he spent a night in jail. I can remember he was worrying about how he was going to get the milk because he was in jail. The sheriff didn't have enough sympathy for him. He was a German sympathizer. You know how all those things can run rampant at a time like that. There really wasn't any good solid foundation. Germans are like the Swedes and some of the rest of them. They've turned out to be some of the best citizens we ever had in our country.

GP: Certainly.

FoP: But at a time like that, as I say, just like it was in the last world war, why everybody if you were German or Japanese why you had your finger pointed.

GP: And this Effinger that spent the night in jail was at least second generation, too. Wasn't he?

FoP: He was young enough to have to register for the draft. My father went down—as a patriotic gesture—to the schoolhouse and registered all the people of draft age two different times during that war. The first time registered all the people between the age of 21 and 31. The next draft was all of those between the ages of 18 and 45. And they never did get around to give the 60-year-old draft. I forget (unintelligible).

GP: Sixty, my goodness.

FoP: Yes, in (unintelligible) they drafted them all the way from 15 to 65.

GP: Is that right? I didn’t know that.
GP: Was he?

FoP: That’s old. My Grandfather Hall was not old enough to be in the army during the Civil War, but he was left an orphan.

GP: Well, we get back in the Civil War, we’ll never get going on this, but we’re doing fine here. I was wondering. Do you remember if there was much flu at that time? Around here?

FoP: Yes, there was. Because after the first year—the next winter—the first year they had school back up there again after we missed a year of school, and they had the school bus going to Lincoln. I remember our teacher was out, couldn’t teach, for about three or four weeks because of the influenza and quite a few of the kids were and it made a lot of disruption in the schools. Not only the one in the Rattlesnake, but the town schools had the same problem. So there was a lot of flu epidemic in the Missoula area and up in the Rattlesnake area.

GP: But you or your family weren’t hurt by it?

FoP: Well, I can’t remember us having medical diagnosis of the flu. We all thought we had the flu. I can remember years since then a lot of people have come to get a cold and got the flu.

GP: I know, but it wasn’t like that.

FoP: But we knew two people that died from it.

GP: Well, let’s get back then to your high school days. It was quite a trip. How did you get to the County High School from up where you lived?

FoP: Well, the first year when my brother went, my folks rented a place for him and he thatched in a room in a home. The home was located right by the Lincoln School—the Dighton Little property, the upstairs of the Dighton Little property. He thatched (?) there and walked to the Missoula County High School, quite a little walk, too.

GP: Yes.

FoP: From there to the Missoula County High School. And the next year he and I stayed down there and thatched and walked over to the high school. On Friday nights we’d walk home and help around the ranch and Sunday night we would come back down to our room and stay there during the year and thatch, or leaf and thatch and that is the year when we went home for the spring vacation that I got hit in the face with the horses hoof and got measles and a few other things. We lost about three or four weeks of school and so the school board just decided it
would be best if we waited and went back and started in again the next year. So that is why I was always a half year behind the class.

GP: I think I ’m wearing you out with all this talk.

FoP: I ’ve got a little kind of a cold and a sore throat.

GP: Well, if this gets to be too much just say so.

FoP: (unintelligible) I think I ought to go in and gargle a little bit.

GP: Sure, okay. I’ll turn this.

FoP: I didn’t feel this old when I was in high school.

GP: Well, getting back now to your high school days, Forrest. I’d like to just talk about those for a while. What was it like going to Missoula County High School? This would have been in the...let’s see now, you were born in—

FoP: I think it was 1925, either ’24 or ’25. I can’t remember.

GP: When you were a freshman.

FoP: When I started out.

GP: And you said that you had a room in town.

FoP: Yes. Then the next fall my dad bought a Model A Ford. That’s about the only kind there was those days. He bought a Model A Ford and he started to drive to school.

FIP: A Model T.

FoP: Yes, a Model T.

FIP: I thought you said Model A.

FoP: Yes, I did, but it was a Model T, because they hadn’t made the Model A yet. And we drove to school and that sometimes a pretty big chore.

GP: I bet, the road must have been pretty bad.

FoP: The roads weren’t too good. By that time the county had started grading the roads a little bit. So they could get a little bit smooth sometimes a year, but a lot of times it was just rough.
But in the wintertime they didn’t do much snowplowing. So the snow ploughs were boys with scoop shovels.

GP: You and your brother, huh?

FoP: Yes. And then the thing would get down as far as Saw Mill Gulch and then Walter Grant, who lived up Saw Mill Gulch, and his son would come down. His son was going to high school and Walter worked in town. And then had some respite because they helped us shovel a little.

GP: Did you get to school on time?

FoP: Lots of times we did not. Sometimes we would start as early as five o’clock in the morning and didn’t make it by 9. We used to have to take down farmer’s fences and walk through the fields, hunting for the highest ground where the snow had blown off.

GP: Oh my.

FIP: Just a patch of (unintelligible), honey. School starts at 8.

FoP: Well, quarter to nine. When I was going to high school, (unintelligible). The first bell rang at a quarter to nine in the morning. But I’ve seen the time we left home before five o’clock several times.

GP: Is that right?

FoP: Believe it or not. But the teachers and the principal and everything were always real good about those things. They realized that us kids that lived out in the country—it wasn’t only us; there were others kids who lived out in the country who had those kinds of problems too.

GP: What did you study? What stands out in your mind at least?

FoP: Well, English, history and arithmetic are the three main things. Algebra.

GP: Did you have any vocational subjects at all? Like shop or woodwork or anything like that?

FoP: They started a Smith Hughes, which was agriculture class in high school the last year that I went there. But I didn’t take agriculture because I had a full schedule. I did take drafting at school.

FIP: (unintelligible)

FoP: Just a short time. I didn’t get in a whole session.
GP: Do you remember any of the school personnel—the teachers that you had that stand out in your mind?

FoP: Oh yes. The first teacher that I ever had in high school was an English teacher name of Grace Ryon. She was my first teacher and I was in her first class she ever taught in Missoula County High School.

GP: Is that right.

FoP: I think she is Mrs. Simmons now I believe.

FIP: Wasn’t she still there when the girls went to school?

FoP: I think.

FIP: I think that she was.

FoP: She probably was. I’m not sure. There was a Miss Rich there at that time that was the old senior English teacher in the English Department. Let’s see. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Peterson were the science teachers—general science and—

GP: Is that the Mr. Peterson who is still living in Missoula Manor by any chance?

FoP: Could be.

GP: He’s quite deaf.

FoP: He could be. He’d be quite old now, but he was young man at the time I went there, so he would be in his late 80s I would guess.

GP: It probably is the same one.

FoP: Possibly early 90s.

GP: Well is there anything you would like to say about your high school days before we move ahead?

FoP: Well I should say it was worth and it was sometimes a hard job to get there, but I can say that I enjoyed my high school days very definitely. Met a lot of kids. Most of the kids that I was close to were kids that came from Bonner. I knew the kids that came in from Bonner. They were a little more the rural type of students and I knew them better than I did most of the Missoula kids, like the Chaffeys and (?) Stoop, —who had an electrical shop or started it afterwards—the Dewits.
GP: Oh, Dewits. Now you see Aafje Demmons was a Dewit. That was her maiden name.

FoP: Oh, Aafje.


FoP: Yes, yes. She was younger, I think.

FIP: What was her name?


FoP: She probably wasn’t going to school when I was. She was probably younger. There was one girl. Let’s see. The oldest boys name was Peter, and next was Klaus or Claus.

GP: Yes, that’s her family. Cornelius or something like that. She had a brother.

FoP: Yes, Cornelius was the younger brother. Claus and Pete. I didn’t know Cornelius. He didn’t going to high school until after I was gone from there, but I know they had a sister or two and I (unintelligible). He knew the kids I attended school with. Claus and Peter. Peter was the oldest boy, and then Claus was second and then Cornelius, because Cornelius went into the electrical business and worked for Koop Davis in the later years.

GP: Was there much sports going on in high school at that time?

FoP: Oh yes. There was football—but they didn’t have the emphasis on football—and basketball and track were the three main things.

FIP: And your coach’s name was Stegner.

FoP: Stegner, Guy Stegner.

GP: Oh is that right.

FoP: He was the track coach.

GP: And I imagine that the sports were not for everybody.

FoP: No, that was one of the things that there were some arguments the time I was going to high school was that the kids that were not or could not participate actively in some of the sports didn’t have much use for the gymnasium. They didn’t have physical education classes in those days.
GP: Oh, they weren’t required.

FoP: And that was some of the complaint was the kids that needed to use the gymnasium were not big husky kids that could get on the football team or the basketball team or the track team.

FIP: Excuse me, but all the times I (unintelligible) never saw the—

[Break in audio]

GP: Sure.

FoP: It’s a lot like I remember, Mr. Stiles and some of the older people telling me about when they were kids going to Central School and some of those kids would be going to school until they were grownups because they would only go a few months out of the year or they would miss a year sometimes or something like that.

GP: But it was important, though, that they graduate, wasn’t it?

FoP: My folks were always strong on that. My dad wanted to make us kids got through high school. He wanted us to have a high school diploma. Then if we wanted to go on college that was going to be our own. He didn’t figure he could afford to send us there.

GP: Did you know people, though, who did not graduate from high school? Were there quite a few dropouts?

FoP: Yes, but I don’t think the percentage was as big then as it is now.

GP: Is that right?

FoP: I remember when I went there a lot of kids had to drop out of high school to go to work and things like that. Sometimes their father would die or something like that and they’d have to (unintelligible) to help support the family.

FIP: My folks did not (unintelligible).

FoP: My uncles weren’t much...the kids didn’t want to go to school. They didn’t. But my folks were pretty insistent. They wanted us kids to go to school and at least graduate from high school.

GP: Well, let’s move ahead then if you don’t have anything further to add about your high school days. What did you do when you graduated?
FoP: I stayed up at the ranch and worked there.

GP: Worked there and helped your dad?

FoP: Yes. Helped him and then I started doing some trapping in the wintertime to make a little extra money. And then a couple of years after I graduated my folks took off and went back east and my dad decided to take retirement so I took over the ranch myself.

GP: Okay. You said earlier that that was in 1930 when they left for their long trip. Had the Depression hit at all by then?

FoP: The Depression hit in the fall of 1929.

GP: I know it did. That’s when in the east it did, but I was wondering if it had any effect on your folks at all at that time.

FoP: It didn’t have much effect out here ’til the spring of 1930.

GP: Uh-huh. And what was the effect?

FoP: Well all the prices went down, went (unintelligible) hard. People lost their jobs and there wasn’t much you could sell. There just weren’t any jobs and the people starting trying to migrate and that’s when the automobiles were quite young yet, but a lot of people would migrate towards the west coast because there was so much unemployment on the east coast. And then the big drought caused so much with the Midwest Dust Bowl and all of that came in the early 1930s and that made a lot of farmers just take off, head for someplace else. We heard about some of things—recessions and depressions and so forth, even in the last few years, but there is nothing—I have never seen anything since the 1930s that compared with that. Because I had grown men come up there to me on the ranch.

GP: They would just walk up the Rattlesnake looking and hoping?

FoP: They would come up there and ask if they could work for their board, things like that. We even had a man that was a husky man came up—I knew him, you know—came up and brought some groceries with him and asked if he could stay there and work and help me for a while until things maybe opened up someplace where he could go out and get some other employment. He was there about six weeks helping me. He worked around the ranch and helped me and so forth and he brought a bunch of groceries.

GP: Were these local people or had they or had they just walked into the area?

FoP: This man I’m speaking about had migrated from North Dakota a few years earlier, but you could call him a native here at time. I had worked with him before. He’d been here 10 or 15
years by that time, but he had always had steady employment on the big Ford ranch up the Bitterroot. Things got so bad that the big ranchers couldn’t hire help either. They had to let their help go and the price of livestock went to nothing almost. I went with Daily’s Meat Company buyer up the Blackfoot and I can’t be sure which year that was now—about 1933 or ‘34. I went with him up the Blackfoot when he was buying cattle and he picked the first for twelve dollars a half a head and a lot of those were four-year-old steers. The first year that he priced them and held them the price was down so low they held them. The second year they held them and after you hold a steer about three years the next year you better sell him or shoot him for coyotes. And I had heard some of those ranchers up that were well enough heeled with money they didn’t have to sell. They stood right there and tell him that they’d take ‘em out and shoot ‘em for cow bait before they’d sell them for less than 15 dollars a head. I sold just veal—a lot of it—when we were on the ranch for six cents a pound—that’s dressed. I sold cows for three cents a pound. I’ve sold dressed pork for four cents and they were peddling on the streets of Missoula for three cents on the dime and I remember I went down to make a deal with Daily and we would take some hogs I had. I took them into him and he said that’s why we are having trouble. See that wagon out there—got about 30 dressed hogs on it. They are trying to sell them for three cents a pound out here of the sidewalk in front of his meat store. That’s what the situation was. Well, you know, if you’ve got 30 or 40 dollars invested in an animal in feed and so forth, and you have to sell it for 10 dollars. You aren’t going to make any money.

GP: No.

FIP: I have budget books.

GP: Do you?

FIP: (unintelligible)

GP: That budget book you are speaking of might be interesting some time for the archives. Or they could make a copy of it or something.

FIP: Well, like I said, I don’t have a heck of a lot of it in there—how much we had to put out and how much we had had to live on the rest of the week.

GP: Now it sounds like you must have gotten married in the ‘30s. Early ‘30s? Is that correct?

FoP: Nineteen thirty-one.

GP: Thirty-one. So you were out there when all this was going on. Well, you managed to hang on out there and you at least could eat living out there.
FoP: Yes, that’s one thing we could do, but sometimes it was pretty much limited. Potatoes. You had to buy things like sugar and flour.

FIP: Well, another thing is (unintelligible) sugar and flour—stuff like that. Sometimes we had to skimp to buy it.

FoP: I remember trading a cord of wood for a pair of shoes and things like that. But our kids were born—both our kids were born—at the Elmore Hospital, the baby hospital over there.

GP: I get mixed up. There was one right off Higgins and there was one on Front Street.

FoP: This was South 4th East.

GP: Yes, right off Higgins, wasn’t it?

FoP: About a block, I think. South 4th East—124 South 4th East. I think that’s the address.

FIP: Both of our girls were born there.

FoP: I couldn’t pay cash but they used fuel like wood—fire the furnace.

GP: They bartered?

FoP: Yes, they bartered.

FIP: They took eggs.

FoP: Eggs, I don’t remember.

GP: You wouldn’t happen to remember what the price of the hospital was that you had to meet?

FoP: Sure I’ll tell you. The doctor’s fee was 35 dollars and the hospital bill was 40.

GP: And what year would that have been?

FoP: Hazel was born in August of 1932 and Shirley was born in March of 1935.

GP: Well those are good figure to know about.

FIP: I still have the (unintelligible).

GP: Do you?
FoP: And there was a doctor Ritchey, an old time doctor, a medical doctor and I did the same thing with him. I paid part of the bill with wood or produce.

GP: He was probably glad to get it.

FoP: Very nice old couple.

FIP: He said—like he said—I’d have to buy it from someone, why not buy it from you?

GP: What about the hospital, though? How did you pay that bill? Same way?

FoP: Wood fuel. We hauled wood to them, fueled their furnace and I took them eggs and meat and things like that.

GP: What about the stores? Now I imagine most of the businesses were in downtown Missoula at that time. Were there a lot of stores that closed—bankruptcies and things like that?

FoP: Oh yes, quite a few of them. But, most of the grocery stores were pretty good. They bartered a certain amount, too. Let’s see. At that time there was Piggly Wiggly—one of the main stores in Missoula. Haines just about started along about then.

GP: Tom Haines—he was on 4th or 5th or someplace. Was it 1st?

FoP: No, this was Harry Haines.

GP: Oh, not Tom.

FoP: The originator of what later became Stop ‘N Shop. The other Haines was the one who took off right down on 4th.

FIP: And what was the (unintelligible).

FoP: Yes, there was a Paisley’s Grocery and after a while he gave up the grocery business and went into the theater business. He was the one who started the Roxy Theater.

GP: I see, there was a Stop’ N Shop on Broadway when we moved here.

FoP: They moved. That was their big shop. They moved it—to start out with Haines was lower on the railroad—West Railroad Street, 300 block I believe.

FIP: Yes, I think.
FoP: So then they started the store, built a new building downtown on the corner Broadway and (unintelligible). The most modern store in Missoula at that time.

GP: That was still here when we moved here in ’65.

FIP: They had another one over on Southside.

FoP: They created one over on the Southside, which later became, now I think, the Senior Citizen’s Center.

GP: Yes that was still here too in 1965 when we moved here.

FIP: And what the store just below it?

FoP: Cubby’s.

FIP: Cubby’s.

FoP: Well see, Harry Cubby, the oldest Cubby. Both Cubbys worked for Haines.

GP: Yes, I know that.

FoP: The boys got bigger—Haines’ own sons got bigger—got into business. Harry Cubby stayed with the Haines. They lived up the Rattlesnake. Then Howard Cubby, the younger brother, he went over and started his own store on South Higgins across from the High School Annex.

FIP: And then there was Maury’s (?).

FoP: Yes, the Quality Market over on the Southside where I used to sell a lot of beef and veal and quite a lot of my meat. Quality Meat, Quality Market would only buy upgrade pounds and could always get about a penny a pound more for my animals over there than have to take them in, because spent a little time and care dressing them a little neat and nice and we always had good fat animals. That’s what they looked at in animals.

FIP: And as far as clothing (unintelligible) JC Penney.

FoP: Yes, but JC Penney’s in those days was Golden Rule.

GP: That’s where you traded, was at the Golden Rule then. I remember where that was downtown, too.

FoP: And McCrakens. McCrakens came in a little later. In the earlier days there was the Schlossberg—a men’s clothing store on Higgins Avenue.

Forrest H. Poe Interview, OH 196-001, 002, 003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana–Missoula.
GP: Schlossberg.

FoP: Schlossberg. He was a Jewish man. He was one of these guys that believed that no matter what came up you sold something to the first customer that came in the store in the morning. So a lot of times you need to buy something you try to be the first customer in there in the morning. You don’t fuss. Get you to make that sale. They just had that farther religion, I guess.

FIP: The Cummins?

FoP: The Cummins came along a little later like the Combs first shop.

GP: Anyhow you saw a lot of stores go up. I understand that Mr. McLeod was very good to the people.

FoP: Yes, Mr. McLeod would even do some barter.

GP: Would he?

FoP: Not too much in the bartering in the small stuff, but he would issue credit. And it’s like a man worked—a guy that worked near us—left and went over on East of Helena to work a job working sheep, taking care of sheep. And he wrote to me and he said will you go see if you can go get me a pair of shoes. They’ve got to be pretty good shoes because I’m doing a lot of walking. He was packing or sheep tending out there. So I went down to the Mercantile and talked to Mr. Peterson, the credit manager down there and he told me a pair of shoes was five dollars. I made a deal with him; I got those shoes on credit for five dollars. I took them a load of wood to pay for them and I sent them over to the guy over there and when he got his paycheck about the fourth of July he sent me a five dollar to pay for the shoes. Really. You know, but man a lot of things had to be done that way in those days.

GP: Yes.

FIP: But people were, I think, a little more honest in those days than they are today.

GP: But the idea of chopping that wood to pay for a pair of shoes—a load of wood. It’s rather amazing—a cord of wood to pay for a pair of shoes.

FoP: The same price they want about 75 dollars now for a cord of wood.

GP: Well that’s about what you’d have to pay for the shoes too these days. They were boots. Well doesn’t sound like it was a very easy time. What else do you remember about the Depression?
FoP: Well just a lot of things. Now I can tell you the other thing was we used to...didn’t try to sell milk very much of the time. Most of the time we had a cream separator and we milked the cow, separated the milk, sold the cream to the creamery, and fed the skim milk to the pigs and the calves and things like that.

GP: What creamery were you dealing with?

FoP: Started out dealing with the Old Missoula Creamery over on East Railroad Street—that’s close to where the viaduct goes under there now. Then Nels Solander came in and started Golden Glo Creamery. No—first he started the Sentinel Creamery, which was down on West Front Street, I think it was, on the north side of the street on West Front. And then we moved over and put up a new building south of the Stop ‘N Shop. It was a new building adjoining the Stop ‘N Shop where the telephone company building is now. That was the Golden Glo Creamery—he called it. That was Nels Solander and I saw in the paper where Nels just died at the age of 92.

GP: Oh is that right?

FoP: He was living up in Kalispell. And so we dealt with him. And then later Fred Madsen got unhappy with the Old Missoula Creamery and he pulled out his...He had some wages coming, and they couldn’t pay it so he took his churn and something else and he moved it over on West Spruce and started the Community Creamery. He had some boys that were growing up and they all worked for him, and Fred Mattson really gave the other creameries a rough shuffle. He was a very nice man to do business with. He was well liked by all the businessmen in town and so was Solander as far as that goes. The Missoula Creamery just gradually faded away and lost their customers.

GP: Was the milk pasteurized in the ‘30s?

FoP: They didn’t do. They started, I think, sometime in the late ‘30s I think they started the first pasteurizing of milk at the creamery.

FIP: The first time we ever tasted pasteurized milk was (unintelligible).

FoP: Yes, well of course before we moved out here we had our own land. I think Solander at the Golden Glo Creamery had the first pasteurized milk.

GP: What brought that on? Were there a lot of under (unintelligible) fever or that going on? Was it the state law or what?

FoP: About that time the Health Department expanded a little bit. Dr. Pease was the original health department up until pretty well into the 1930s or maybe later.
GP: You are talking about County Health Department now?

FoP: Yes, I’m talking about Missoula County Health Department. There was no city Health Department in those days.

GP: I thought maybe you meant state, but it was county.

FoP: As far as I know it was the county, but I suppose they had to observe whatever state laws that there were then. And then about that time, they expanded that, and Dr. Pease got a helper, known as Shorty Whistler—F.D. Whistler or something like that. His job was to go to the dairy ranches and checking the dairies. There used to be quite a lot of people in the early days who did what’s called wet milking. I don’t know if you know what that is.

GP: I’ve never heard of that.

FoP: It’s where they squirt the milk on their hands and milk wet. They can strip the cow more than just squeeze and so forth.

FIP: It’s awful.

FoP: But it is not a very sanitary way to milk. A lot of your old country people did that, especially the Hollanders like the Klaus and the Klapwyck and so forth by the time. It’s faster and I guess the cows don’t mind. But that’s when they first started coming out with some ideas about pasteurizing, because they had come to the conclusion that some diseases were being carried through milk to the children.

GP: Yes, okay. What else do you remember about the Depression? I’d like to get your remembrances and then later I’m going talk to your wife and I’m sure she’ll have her side of the story too.

FoP: Well the main thing I remember is cash was a very scarce item and it was very hard to come buy. Of course, a lot of things were an awful lot cheaper then. I can remember when you could go to the grocery store—the Haines grocery we talked about—and if you bought five dollars worth of groceries, you had to have a truck to haul it away in. You didn’t carry it out in your arm like you do a 15-dollar bag of groceries nowadays. Eggs were retailing anywhere from 10 cents to 14 cents a dozen. You could go to the butcher shop or any of the stores that sold meat and you could buy hamburger lots of the time for ten cents a pound, or three pounds for a quarter. Just an awful lot of things. But it was the same thing with me. I was on the selling end of most of that (unintelligible). That’s what made farm income such a low item, and that’s why the government in the Depression years developed the idea of what they call the slaughter—killing off the excess hogs and the excess beef and paying the farmers not to raise the corn because there was bigger surplus of crops and there wasn’t enough money in the country to
buy it. All the money was stored up in the banks and you couldn’t borrow it. Nobody had security enough.

GP: Was that going on around here? Henry Wallace was involved in that. He was a Secretary of Agriculture at the time.

FoP: Well it affected everybody in the United States.

GP: Did it affect you? Were you paid for not raising anything?

FoP: No.

GP: You weren’t involved in that.

FoP: We never had any one crop big enough to do that. So they never, as far as I can remember, put any...some areas, yes. I don’t know that they were doing it here. Some places they poured the milk out on the ground instead of delivering it because the price was so cheap. Some places the price of milk went down to a cent a gallon. Things like that.

GP: Now this was the time Roosevelt came into office as President—Franklin Roosevelt. What do you remember about the feelings about him at that time around here?

FoP: Well see the Depression started in the fall of ’29 and here in Missoula we didn’t’ feel it as much as they did in the east, but by 1930, things were getting pretty rough and pretty tight here in Missoula. People were getting unhappy. About that time when the notorious veterans march on Washington D.C. Hoover, the man that was President at that time, had the military go out and meet them with bullets. He didn’t meet them with open arms. I suppose he had a lot of problems, too. But by the time Roosevelt ran for office, there was no question about it; people were down on the Republican Administration and Hoover. By that time they had originated what they call the work programs and they called it Hoover money. People went out. They put people to work doing jobs because there was no work to be found and they put them to work. I can remember how they got to bring my team. I had a team of horses and a wagon that I had registered that I would work if they needed them. So they had to hire me in order to get the team and the wagons to go out and do some work at the university. So I got paid with what they call Hoover money. In other words, if you got out there and worked and you had 30 dollars coming (unintelligible). You were limited. They were only so many hours a month you could work. You were not given cash or a check. You took your script—like they did in the early days in some of the sawmills and things similar—and went up to the office—the original beginning of the welfare office—and the lady...Hanson? What was her name?

FIP: Mrs. Hanson, Mary Hanson.
FoP: Anyway, she sat in there and told you what you could buy with that. Say you went up there and wanted some groceries. Well, if you got sugar and you couldn’t have syrup. If your kids wanted shoes, she’d let you have shoes, but you couldn’t have rubbers to put over the top of them even if they were wading in water. If you got overalls you couldn’t get any other kind of pants. If you got a shirt you couldn’t get any other thing in the way of a shirt. You would get one kind of shirt or something like that. I know there were some pretty rough battles that came up over that. Some of these women that went there and wanted to get milk for the babies and she wouldn’t let them have the milk although they’d worked for this money and had a script. She would dole that script out to them, and they had to come back next week to try to get some flour. You couldn’t have sugar and flour both the same day and things like that.

GP: Now you call that Hoover money, but this was after Roosevelt came? It was still before?

FoP: No. This was before Roosevelt got in the office. This was in the fall and if you remember your history some. Hoover stepped out of office and turned the thing over the Roosevelt a little while before the regular normal inaugural procedure.

GP: Before the term was up.

FoP: Yes. It used to be the 4th of March, I think, when the new President took office. Things were so rough and so bad at the time that Hoover was getting the blame for everything. That’s where the nickname of Hoover money came in for the script money. I worked for about a month and half or so at the University with my team and my horses. I got 50 cents a day for the wagon, got two dollar a day for the horses, and I had to buy feed for them.

GP: Was this about 1931, say?

FoP: Thirty-two. Thirty-one we have nothing like that. People just got hungry. But 1932 with the election year coming up and everything the Republican administration that Hoover was the head of that time got in with the Bank creating these work programs—work jobs. And they would let you have 18 hours a month—figured out at about 30 some cents an hour. And you got script money.

GP: Did that help you quite a bit? You really needed that job too.

FoP: It helped me in a way, because the University paid me the two dollars a day cash for my team and the wagon. See each locality. Local people put a portion and the government put up a portion of it. I think in some communities the local people put up 50 percent and some of them put up 30 percent of the money to put these people to work. One of the first things Hoover did when he came to power was change it from the script type of money and started paying cash.

GP: Roosevelt.
FoP: Roosevelt. Roosevelt took over from Hoover. Why it was one of his first acts to change that script money into cash and they gave you a check. You got three dollars a day. You worked 18 hours, six-hour days. In the amount of about two dollars. 37 ½ cents or something like that an hour. Three hours for one dollar.

GP: Did you know people who actually were hungry?

FoP: Oh yes.

FIP: Oh Yes.

FoP: We’ll say they were hungry, but I wouldn’t say that I knew of any who starved to death. But very, very few people could have anything of what you could call a certain diet or something. If they were lucky, of course, a lot of them went out and poached wild game, deer and things like that to eat too. A lot of them went out and bought their vegetables (unintelligible). You could buy a hundred pound sack of vegetables from a framer for a dollar. They would go out and get a hold of some ground or some dead timber or something like that or even pay a little bit of something for it and cut it into wood haul it to town and swell it. You’d make a dollar, maybe two. A dollar a day was big wages.

GP: Then when Roosevelt came in, things changed quite a bit, didn’t they? With these programs?

FoP: Work programs started paying cash. There were more programs, and Roosevelt pushed Congress to pass certain laws. They increased the welfare aid, and made more people eligible for it.

FIP: That’s when the CCP [Civilian Conservation Program] came in.

GP: The CCP came in and the WPA.

FoP: CCP came in, and I will always think that was on the best, most wonderful programs there ever was. Then they had different initials for some of those—ERA and so forth. They all ended up in what they call WPA [Works Projects Administration], which was the main backbone. And the WPA workers did a lot of good things. A lot of the Westside, Northside sewer right here in Missoula was put in by WPA workers. A lot of our streets were graded by WPA workers. Now a lot of WPA workers were criticized. I never got to work with much of WPA because I had a ranch up there and I didn’t get to work a lot on it. They got a lot of criticism for standing around. But, nothing like they would today. I mean the people today don’t know how to work compared to what the WPA workers were like. And most of the time the reason they stood around was a lot of the folk act like they had (unintelligible) in the park and so forth. The park board would come up. I remember when they started this job here in Greenough Park. The Park board came up and said well they couldn’t get together. They had a City Council meeting the
night before, but they couldn’t decide what they were going to do about the Rattlesnake Creek. But that’s the main thing they wanted these workers to work on. So Monday morning the foreman would out and he’d say well they didn’t decide anything last night at the council meeting—that would be Tuesday morning. I think Park Board met on Monday. So we’ll just have to pretend like we’re busy. He had some guys over here digging a hole and others over here hauling that dirt over here digging another hole and they’d haul it from this hole over to that one and back to make them look busy. Now anybody who is putting in the hours doing things like that is not going to break their backs to look like they are working hard.

GP: Well, it wasn’t their fault then.

FoP: No, it wasn’t the workers’ fault, it was the planning groups’ fault.

GP: Then do you think that Roosevelt was pretty popular around here?

FoP: Oh yes.

GP: He was.

FoP: Yes, he carried the deal. When Roosevelt won in the first time he carried all but one state. Or two states. Maybe two states. I think it was two states. He carried all the other 46.

GP: Did you people ever have any time for recreation?

FoP: Oh yes. When we were young and first married, we used to have what we called “Hard Times” Dances. The schoolhouse, which was up there by the spring of 1930, was the last year that they had the school there, but they had a building there. I was one of the people who was on the School Board. Most of the other neighbors didn’t care too much about the school so I put more interest in it because I had kids coming on. When it was our turn, we held these dances at the schoolhouse. Everybody brought something. You didn’t go there and pay a fee to get in or anything like that. We were lived on a ranch; we had cows. Our project, we always borough a quart of ice cream for coffee. That was ours. Others brought something to make sandwiches out of, or something like that. After our oldest girl was born [Hazel], and as soon as she got a little older—she was a real good-natured kid—we used to put her in the baby buggy and take her with us. We didn’t even try to hire a babysitter. You didn’t have any money to hire a babysitter in those days. We’d take the little girl with and a general rule if she wanted to sleep, she slept in the baby buggy, but a lot of the times she would like to stay awake. She got a lot of attention.

GP: What kind of music did you have?

FoP: Usually there would be about three sometimes maybe four of the people, one of them might have a fiddle, and another one a mouth organ or mouth harp or something like that.
GP: Was it like square dancing?

FoP: They did some square dancing, some regular ballroom dancing. Everybody would have a good time, and someone would take up a collection sometime during the evening. Everybody attempted to throw in a quarter. They'd get three or four dollars, and that paid the orchestra. It was just usually some of the gang. Her older brother used to play the fiddle quite a lot of the time. And her dad—I remember when our kids were tiny—he used to call square dances some. We always had a happy time. It was still during the prohibition days.

GP: I was going to ask you about prohibition.

FoP: She can tell you that more than one of these places we went to initiate a new house or a new cabin, and there was be a still out behind there that they bought and fill up with moonshine and bring it into the dancehall. I could show you a half a dozen old still sites up the Rattlesnake.

GP: So they kind of made a mockery out of prohibition. Is that right?

FoP: Well, it was a very unpopular thing. It was good in its ways, but it was only a short time until the unlawful element got a chance to take over. That's why more gangsters started during prohibition, because it was an easy chance for people to get into some crooked business.

GP: Yes. I understand there was quite a bit of bootlegging going on too from Canada down into Montana at that time. Did you ever see the results of that around here?

FoP: Oh yes.

GP: They had some speakeasies around here? Did they?

FoP: Oh yes, they had their speakeasies in Missoula. In fact, some of the quite well respected places had their speakeasy corners, places like the Florence Hotel and so forth.

GP: Oh is that right?

FoP: They all had a place where if you knew the right person, asked the right questions why you could go in.

GP: They'd let you in. Do you remember the names of any of the others--speakeasies?
FoP: Oh. I think Jake’s Bar was considered one of the first of them.

GP: Did you ever go to the show? The movies?

FoP: Oh once in a while, maybe once a month or something like that. We’d drive downtown and go to the show. Of course you see like with us, we always had cows to milk, so that limited you. The same thing us in the time we’d gone to some kind of square dance, we didn’t’ get home in time in the morning to milk those cows on time. But we did there sometimes and things like that.

GP: Did you have a radio?

FoP: We got our first radio about the second year you and I were married, maybe third. Something like that.

FIP: (unintelligible) between Shirley and Hazel.

FoP: Yes, about 1934, I would guess. I traded off two or three cords of wood to a guy that worked at that the Firestone. He had a battery-operated radio, and he wanted to get a direct current radio, and up where we lived we had no electricity, so we needed a battery radio. We bought that old Stuart-Warner AM radio from him and I paid him a bunch of wood. He was the man in business. The time we were trading the Firestone, the Firestone fire service, gas pump and all that. I don’t remember what the price was. I think it was either three or five cords of wood.

GP: Did you use your radio a lot?

FoP: Oh, quite a bit. But you know, it was batteries, so you didn’t use accept when you wanted to listen to a program, because the batteries go dead and you always have to charge them up.

GP: Did you have some favorite programs or stars?

FoP: Oh yes. I can remember one of the old original programs “Amos and Andy.” Who is the woman I always liked her singing so well?

GP: Not Kate Smith? Was she back that early?

FoP: Kate Smith. She did quite a bit of singing on the radio.

GP: Did she?

FoP: I can’t remember.
GP: Well now, you said you got polio in 1936. Is that right?

FoP: Yes.

GP: Was there an epidemic around here?

FoP: No. They only said it was an epidemic because there was an epidemic of polio in 1924, two or three cases of death and two or three people left quite crippled. That’s when Dorothy Boyd—later became Dorothy Haye—and Bill Boyd, her brother—they’re still alive, Bill’s in his 80s now—they were both polio victims. Robert Pugsley, a kid I went to high school with, he died with it. There were quite a few in the 1924 epidemic. And that’s when Mrs. Stoutenberg first got into the polio. She was a special nurse for Doctor Allard connected with the hospital in Billings—Children’s Hospital in Billings. And he was the most noted person in Montana as far as a polio specialist goes. And Miss Stoutenberg—she later became Mrs. Stoutenberg—at the time she worked for Allard was a Miss McQueen.

GP: Was she a nurse?

FoP: She was a nurse.

GP: Well, if you wouldn’t mind talking about this polio because this is really history, history of medicine. How did it strike you?

FoP: I was working in town. We lived on the ranch, but I was driving to town. I was working down there eight hours a day in concrete, making concrete for WPA. I began to have quite a fit of headaches and I was putting in awful long hours. I would get up at about four o’clock in the morning trying to do some irrigating on the place, milk the cows, do some chores, and then drive to work. Id’ put in my eight hours down there doing concrete work and drive home at night. The history of polio seems to be that it has hit more people when they were extremely tired and their body was run down like President Roosevelt. See he went out firefighting. That’s how he caught polio. He spent a lot of hours fire fighting, but he had more money and more resources behind him to get better treatment. But, by that time Mrs. Stoutenberg, who used to work for Allard, had moved to Missoula and married Hiram Stoutenberg then. He was running a
garage and he became a county commissioner here. But she was considered about the only nurse in Missoula area that knew very much about polio.

FIP: (unintelligible)

FoP: Yes, she went through the ’24 epidemic in Billings at the hospital. And our doctor, Dr. Ritchey, got a hold of her and she used to come in here and give me treatments for polio.

GP: So were you bedridden?

FoP: I spent about twelve weeks sandbagged in bed and I couldn’t even turn over.

GP: Were you in the hospital?

FoP: No. In those days polio was a communicable disease and I had two choices—go to the county hospital up here called the “Pest House” out by the Poor Farm, or stay in my house, because they would not allow a polio victim in a hospital because they didn’t know how dangerous it was or how contagious it was. So my folks went up and took care of the ranch. We stayed in their little house downtown here and Floss took care of me under Mrs. Stoutenberg and Dr. Ritchey’s supervision. And they took this arm and sandbagged it up here like this because when you get polio all of your muscles atrophy or shrink. And they didn’t want this to shrink down against my side. So they kept me lying on my back. I learned all about bedsores with that. But they did a good job.

GP: Now, it never affected your lungs or any other part of your body?

FoP: Not internally much. My ribs, they took this left quarter out. See on this side here my ribs stick out like an accordion to play a tune on, because there is no muscles or much of anything. But as far as I know it never affected my lungs or my heart.

GP: Was there a lot of pain with it?

FoP: Quite a lot of pain to start with, yes. The first week was quite painful. But then after the pain left then the after-pain, or the muscle deterioration started.

[End of Tape 2]
GP: You were one of the more fortunate ones. I mean not that didn’t have some lasting effects, but you didn’t end up in an iron lung or anything like that.

FoP: That’s true.

GP: Did you?

FoP: There was one other case of polio in the State of Montana in the year of 1936, the same year I got it and his name was Easterly. He was a younger man than me. His mother and him lived in the house back here on Knowles Street, the 700 block on Knowles Street. My doctor and his doctor and Mrs. Stoutenburg used a little of her influence and made arrangements for us, because at that time they thought swimming, giving treatments in water was a big help. They made arrangements Mr. Easterly and I to go out to the University and take swimming lessons out there. As far as medical history knows, he is the only other person besides me who had polio in the State of Montana in that year of 1936.

GP: That is really strange, isn’t it?

FoP: And he was over on his side of Butte when he got it. So they think there is no connection between the two of us getting it.

GP: And you don’t have any idea where you picked it up either.

FoP: The only thing I know I was using my arm a lot in water and I did hurt my arm—strained my arm, helping load one of these pieces of concrete on to that—and it tore all these muscle groups right there. I didn’t go to the doctor. I just waited for the first aid man to come and make a report on it. He did make a report and put it in his pocket. Later it was lost (unintelligible). And that—according to the doctor—was sort of typical history, but most everybody if they had any weakness and injury would go into the weakened part. And also the extra body strength. And this thing here I tried for several years to get some kind of compensation out of it because I got hurt on the job and it was the injured part, was the part that polio invaded and destroyed.

GP: Now you say the first aid man. You were working for a concrete company, is that right?

FoP: I was working for Uncle Sam on one of their work projects. I think it was WPA. Anyway, one of those.

GP: I see. And they sent a first aid man around once in a while?
FoP: No. Well actually there was a countywide first aid man. And he went from project to project to check. Then each project had one of their workers that had been designated as the first aid man. To chase to an accident or anything like that you needed to get to a doctor in a hurry or something. But like with me it wasn’t something you could see. I didn’t go to the doctor. I went on and worked for several days, tried to work until I just about finished my shift. I went home, got up in the morning—tired, my head ached, all the parts of my body hurt. I got up in the morning and I had a fever and I told her I couldn’t get up. I started to get up first and I was so dizzy I fell back on the bed. So then she got up and see what she could do and I said bring me a drink of water. I want a glass of water. So she brought me a drink of water and I went to take it with that left arm and couldn’t raise my arm. I couldn’t get a hold of the glass of water by slight. I couldn’t use the arm and that’s when we both began to worry about it. And she went right out and my dad was staying in a cabin up by our place, so she went up and got a hold of him and told him that she was going to get me to town to the doctor and would he please go take care of the cows and things. So she took me to the doctor and I was getting kind of delirious. And that’s when they decided I should stay in bed and so forth and so my mother took our two little girls. She went up to the ranch and stayed with my dad and the neighbors put up our hay that summer. We were down there for the rest (unintelligible)—20 something of July. And the first day I got out was the day the Florence Hotel burned. I remember I had got up and walked around a little bit. It was outside, a nice warm day and I think you and my dad each one got on each side of me. We were walking up the front street where we could see the fire. That was the first time I walked around again.

GP: Were you feeling really weak too?

FoP: Quite weak. I didn’t feel so bad. One thing the nurse—Mrs. Stoutenberg—told her, the doctor did to as soon as I got able and didn’t have to lay stiff. See the first three or four weeks I had to lay still. They were afraid it would spread to other parts of my body. I had to lie real still and then when I got (unintelligible) into it they had her get a hold of my feet and push on my feet and exercise my legs and this arm (unintelligible) so they wouldn’t get too weak. I would work them up and down in the bed and then she would get over and push against my feet. So was able to first get up and get out the door I could walk.

GP: You could?

FoP: I wasn’t in such bad shape that I couldn’t walk. I kept doing these exercises in bed. With this arm they had to keep it—I’d say about a month

GP: Was your hand paralyzed too at the time?

FoP: To an extent and it was kind of (unintelligible) so she made a board the size of my hand and padded it, put a strap across it and tied it down flat on that board and I lay like this. I lay with (unintelligible). That’s why my hand is so—I can’t turn it up only partway. I can’t roll it over like I can this one. But when the muscles atrophied and went into this position why it was the
only position I could use for quite a while. And I still up here—this (unintelligible)—I’ve got pretty fair use of that hand. My (unintelligible) sat down and so forth it never closed up like that—like the other one.

GP: So how long did it take before you say you had a recovery from that?

FoP: Oh, that fall I started—

FIP: (unintelligible).

FoP: No, she did some work. She went out and worked some and so forth but it was about a year—about 14 months—October and November of the year of ’37 before they’d even talk about letting me go to work. Of course, From then on I was always very limited in what I could be hired to do. So then the WPA put me back on work as a part time timekeeper. That was a job I could do.

GP: Where were their headquarters?

FoP: For a while it was out at the Fairgrounds. Different places beyond Missoula. Of course Washington D.C. was the real headquarters.

GP: Oh yes. I mean local.

FoP: In Montana it was Butte and in Missoula it was a whole two or three different places, but most of them wound up at the fairgrounds as headquarters and Fort Missoula. Fort Missoula and the Fairgrounds were the headquarters.

GP: So then you were with the WPA until it probably broke up. When did it break up? Nobody’s ever told me that.

FoP: During the war.

GP: Oh, during the war.

FoP: I worked with that and I was a timekeeper. I started timekeeping on this job in Greenough Park and they put me on that so I could keep close to home and I could still (unintelligible) do my swimming at the University. And then I went from that one project to another and I never did work on the Fish Project, but I worked on the Island Project. I worked a lot of different projects on that.

GP: Is that Kelly Island Project you’re talking about?
FoP: No, the one right down here. It used to be an island. There used to be a stream ran right by the Wilma, and that was the island. We built a bridge—a log bridge—over to that island.

GP: Yes, I've heard a little bit about that.

FoP: Then there are different projects I worked on out at the University Nursery out here. I was the timekeeper out there and then they decided they wanted me to teach another man how to do that so they sent him out and I taught him his timekeeping and bookkeeping for that project. And then they transferred me up to Clinton when they built the new school—the High School in Clinton was built with WPA money and the gymnasium (unintelligible) and so I was timekeeper on that for a while. And then they had a one armed man named Summers and they sent him up there to learn that bookkeeping and (unintelligible) from me up there. So as soon as I talked to him why then they started the airport out here because we were heading towards war about that time. And so they put me out at the airport because I was the most trained timekeeper outside of the traveling state.

GP: Now you are talking about Hale Field.

FoP: Yes, well no.

GP: It was the other new—the present airport.

FoP: The new airport. Hale Airport was still in use, but we were building the new one out here. Hale was in use until we got that one done.

GP: And the WPA built that airport?

FoP: That was the aid money that was there for it. It was county contributions, state contributions, and so forth. But then about in 1941 I think it was, things began to look rougher and they began to want to get that speeded up. The theory was if we got into war they could (unintelligible) Air Force and things like that. It might have to all be moved again away from the coast where they couldn’t be shelled off of gun boats and then when the war did hit. The Japanese hit it, and they practically annihilated our navy at Pearl Harbor and so forth. We didn’t have much of a navy or anything. And so they really put pressure on us to get going on that airport and so they changed that from the WPA into a full time defense job. And then I worked full time out there and I worked on that airport until...well, as it came along and other things. The only one going. They had me out there for quite a while. And then when we finished building the airport Cy Proctor and I were the only two left in the accounting and timekeeping department and so I got a chance to go to work for Montana Power Company. So I took that. It looked like better people.
GP: I think maybe this would be a good place to stop for today, Forrest. And then when we resume on this I’d like to ask you about Montana Power and your ranch. You sold that to Montana Power, didn’t you?

FoP: My dad did. My dad owned the land. I never owned the land.

GP: I see. So maybe we can start there when we continue this the next time.

FoP: Okay.

GP: But thank you very much.

[End of interview on January 14; continues on January 20]

GP: This is January 20th and we are going to continue our interview now with Forrest Poe. Forrest, I’d like to ask you, as I said, about the sale of the ranch. Do you remember what year it was sold?

FoP: Nineteen thirty-six.

GP: That was the year that you had polio. Did that have anything to do with it?

FoP: It certainly did. My folks had left the ranch in 1930 and my dad took retirement and they took off that summer of 1930 and bought a new Model A Ford Sedan and they drove from Missoula to Denver and visited some of my mother’s folks in Denver and then they went on to Illinois and visited some more of my mother’s folks in Illinois. Then they went north from there up into Minnesota, visited with my dad’s folks up there. And then they came back I think it was about September here and they got an apartment in town and my brother and I were running the ranch, but he didn’t take strongly to farm work or farm type of living so he mostly went off and worked somewhere else and I stayed home on the ranch. So then I lived there part of the time alone and then this young couple that came over (unintelligible) to cut wood and do some (unintelligible) work for me. The school house was not in use any longer so I got permission from the School Board for them to rent the schoolhouse and live in that for a while and then they wanted to move up to the ranch where I was living and he said his wife could do the cooking and so forth and it’s be more convenient. So that’s what they did. They moved up there that winter and they stayed there until about July or August the next year. And that was my wife’s brother and his wife. My wife and I were just going together at that time. In the fall of 1930 my wife’s folks broke into Marshall Creek area up here—that is they had already moved in there the year before, but they found out that Missoula, Pound said, “Hey, you’re in that school district up there and your kids need to go that school.” So they came over to see me. I was one of the members of the school board. See me about what are they going to do.
GP: Now, what school would that have been?

FoP: That was in the lower Rattlesnake School up there just above Spring Gulch.

GP: Oh, the same one.

FoP: That was the only one that was ever up there.

GP: I know, but I didn’t understand that it was operating again.

FoP: The last year that the official school had been held there was in the winter of ’29 and ’30. And then there was only three children going there so they decided not to hold school again. They didn’t hire another teacher or anything. The school was just sitting there idle. And when her brother and his wife wanted to move in or move up there because he had a woodcutting contract or two up there, why an arrangement to live in the school house for a while until they moved up with me. That fall, a little while before he came up—that’s how he got (unintelligible)—and her folks came over to see me and then we got in touch with the rest of the school board. She helped me do about sending those kids to school who were living in Marshall Creek, but they’re in the Rattlesnake School District. There was no why they could come over the mountains to Rattlesnake School so they used (unintelligible) and (unintelligible) school. So Missoula City School system said, oh they can go to school there. So we made arrangements to pay their rent. So my wife’s mother and Mrs. Gallen and the Soller kids moved to town. We rented a house for them or they were told to go rent a house and we would pay the bill. In those days you could rent a pretty nice house for twenty dollars a month. That’s a little different from what it is now.

GP: So that was cheaper than hiring a teacher and opening up the school.

FoP: We still had the other three children at the school.

GP: Oh, I see. They were still there.

FoP: There was still Gail Follen that lived on up above me and she had a married sister in town that she stayed with and went to school and the two Ray children, who at that time were living on the old Effinger place, almost across the street from the school house, but Mr. Ray was running a milk route to town delivering milk so he went to town every morning anyway. So we just paid him to haul the children—their two children down—they went to the Lincoln School. The Gallen children went to the Lolo School on the west side because that’s where they picked out their house they wanted to live in. And Gail Poe, my cousin, was living with her sister on the north side, so they she went to the Wheeler School. So we had six children from that district that year that went to the city schools. Then (unintelligible) Millie, Harvard, Tommy.

FIP: (unintelligible).
FoP: Well anyway that is how I got in (unintelligible) to my wife.

GP: Still that Rattlesnake School District paid the rent. It was the best arrangement rather than consider having school up there in the Rattlesnake.

FoP: Yes, rather than that or trying to put on a school bus and run it back and forth through the houses. Sometimes in the wintertime that hill used to be pretty near impossible. They didn’t have county road plows and things like that.

GP: So then your wife’s brother and his wife helped you on the ranch. How long did that continue then?

FoP: Oh, they lived there I think they moved into the school house up there about two months and they moved up to the house with me about probably in November and they stayed with me until the following August or September. Oh, it was August because her brother said well one house is not big enough for two families. So he figured when I was probably going to get married to his sister and so forth why they moved out and moved over into Marshall Creek again, I believe, or somewhere like that. So the (unintelligible) the first of September 1931. And we lived there and our two children were raised there until 1936 when the land was sold to the power company. And I think our oldest girl was about four and a half. Hazel was born in 1932, so she would have been just past four.

GP: I’m going to ask your wife later some questions about the women’s side of those years, but getting back now to when you get polio and that was the time that you sold out to Montana Power. Did they come to you or did you go to them or what happened?

FoP: No, I was working part time in town. I was doing WPA work at that time—eight days a month I think it was. I worked downtown on the mess there and that’s when I come back to (unintelligible). At the time we didn’t know much about polio and neither did the doctors or anybody. But I just knew that I hurt my arm helping load those pieces of concrete bases onto a truck. I thought it was a minor item, but it turned out that it didn’t get better. I got worse and worse and after about the time I put in another week I was getting to be a pretty sick person and my shoulder and arm was hurting real bad. So I think this is the next morning when I quit work or something like that that I went and I had a fever and I was going to go out and milk the cows and I got out of bed to sit up and got dizzy and fell down again. So I got back into bed and my wife went to my dad—he was staying in a cabin. He kept a little cabin up there he liked to come up and stay in. And so she went and got him to come down and told him she was going to take me to the doctor. So I went to the doctor and the doctor examined me and decided I had polio and that I would have to be confined to bed for quite a length of time. And at that time they didn’t know much about polio—how contagious it was or infectious or anything—so he said well you have your choice. With a disease like this you are not allowed to go to a hospital because the
GP: Now, we did talk about this the other and unless you can remember some additional things maybe we’ll continue on then. So you actually where living in Missoula during the period when you were recovering from polio. You weren’t up on the ranch.

FoP: No, I was living in Missoula now, near the river.

GP: And I think you said the other day that you were confined for...it was 14 months before you could go back to work. Is that right?

FoP: Yes. I was confined in bed for about two months. The day that the Florence Hotel burned—I think it was—was the first day that I got up and tried to walk. My wife used to give me exercises while I lay in bed. That was the doctor said would be a good thing to do, which we did and I still think it was a real good thing to do. We did walk up by the mercantile building and the old Florence Laundry on Front Street where we could see the firefighting action and so forth. I can’t remember if they verified it was the Hammond Arcade or the Florence Hotel. But it would have been probably close of the first of October 1936.

GP: So, after that?

FoP: After that I had to take treatments for my arm. A nurse named Mrs. Stoutenberg came here to the house and gave treatments and tried to work with my arm. See if she could bring back any recovery in it. And I went through that all that first year following that.

GP: So this would have been into 1937 then.

FoP: Into the summer, even the late summer of 1937. About a year of it. And then I felt pretty good. I got up and roamed around and wanted to go back to work, but they kept saying no, there is no place for you to work. We don’t have any place for a one armed man. So my wife was working at the Westside School at that time. She had a job working over there.

GP: I’m going to ask her about that later.

FoP: So I finally worked on the WPA people enough to put me on the payroll and I think it was either October or November of 1937 I started back to work at that time.

GP: Now I know the other day you said you were a timekeeper. Did this mean that you were on your feet when you were on the job?
Foop: Oh, mostly.

Gp: Was that rough on you?

Foop: No, no. My life has always been different. My left leg—pardon the doctors—I not only was analyzed here but also up in Billings and the spring of 1937 I went up to Billings and a Dr. Allard, who was considered the best authority on polio at that time in the state of Montana and he estimated my left leg was 12 percent damaged by the polio. My left arm was about 95 percent damaged by the polio.

Gp: Is that right?

Foop: All of my left side, like my ribs—you could play a tune on them because all of the flesh and so forth that covered the ribs is like stretching hide over a drum.

Gp: Did they ever say that that was getting mighty close to your lungs, that maybe the next step would have been your lungs.

Foop: Oh yes. About that time is when they thought. And that’s one of the reasons they kept me back in bed and kept me so still was because that polio just took off that left quarter of me—it got the left side of my head and the left side of my face and the left arm, left the hand—it didn’t do too much harm. If I had a good arm to push that hand around with I could use it fine then. But this shoulder was completely gone and they just took off a quarter of me and affected the left like that.

Gp: Well then you got back on with the WPA. What about the ranch then?

Foop: At the time that I was out here and my dad and my mother went back to the ranch and took our two little girls with them. Then my dad got afflicted with ailments and of course he was getting up there in years then. He was getting older. So he had to do some doctoring and so forth. And so he said well, I don’t think we’ll ever be able to operate this ranch again and so forth. And he kind of wanted to get out from under so he heard that the Montana Power Company was buying some land in the Rattlesnake and he decided he would go up and talk to Christiansen. Mr. Christiansen was the manager of the Montana Power Company at that time.

Gp: Christiansen?

Foop: Yes. And there was a man that he worked there. No my dad and Mr. Christiansen worked on the first Montana Power—before it was Montana Power. He helped build the first power line from Milltown Damn to Missoula in 1897 I believe. And they had worked together so they were old friends. And so he went up to see Christiansen about the ranch and selling the ranch and Christiansen said, well what price do you want for it, what kind of money? And my dad told him the figure and he said that’s a little more than we have estimated on our bid sheets here to
I'll talk to them over in Butte and see if I can talk them into going for it, he said, because we do want to buy all that land up there and get all the farmers out and cattle and so forth out of it to keep the water clean. So he said, get your papers ready and come back up to see me tomorrow. In the meantime I'll call Butte and see what (unintelligible) just what I can allow you for. So they did and they made a deal. The Power Company accepted my dad's offer. So they said okay we will give you a year to get your stuff off the place. You can take the buildings. You can take everything. One year from now we will destroy it, get rid of it. So in that following year we salvaged quite a lot of the lumber and so forth. And that spring earlier I had just redone our hayshed roof, which had caved in from the heavy snowstorm, and I had just put that new roof on and I hated to turn right around and tear it off again. But we salvaged most of the lumber. I sold most all of the cows. Well, I did sell all the cows and calves and horses and machinery, and got rid of about everything. And then Montana Power Company went up and they picked up and the (unintelligible) people, some of them were making some of their living that way by going around gathering scrap fire and they went and got all that was left. People went in and hauled off a lot of things. They didn't want without permission. But I didn't have storage for it anyway so it didn't so much difference. And during that year I hired some woodcutters to go up there and cut some wood, take off the best of the handiest tipper and have it cut in the woods. I sold the wood and got a little bit of money that way and by selling the house. Those kind of prices are a lot different then from what they are now. I sold fifteen head of cattle for 300 dollars. Now you pay more than 300 dollars for one animal. So that just kind of gives you an idea of what the prices were during those Depression days.

GP: So Montana Power took over then in 1938.

FoP: No, it was actually 1937 when they took it. It was 1936 when we sold the place and that is when we bought this house here.

GP: Oh, I see. So you've lived in this house ever since then?

FoP: We moved in here at the end of October 1936.

GP: Now you told me the other that you continued with the WPA and you worked out at the airport because they were so anxious to get that completed and then you continued that into World War II after the WPA disbanded. Now, when did you go to work for Montana Power then?

FoP: I went to work for Montana Power in the spring—I think it was April or May—of 1942.

GP: So it wasn't long after that.

FoP: That was part of the agreement that my dad made with the Montana Power Company when he sold then the place was that when I would be able to go back to work I was to have a job. I was really supposed to have a job as a lineman, but my arm never got well so anybody
with any sense knows that there isn’t too many places for one-armed linemen. So that’s how come I went to work for them in the spring. They needed a watchman. They were putting in new waterlines. So they gave me a job as a watchman in the spring (unintelligible). I was a watchman on their ditches where they had their ditches open to put in new water pipes and I was still working at the airport days and I would work for them nights because I didn’t know whether that was a trial run. They didn’t know. They were pretty scared to take a chance on me at the time and she can tell you too that there were a few years that a lot of people seemed to think I was almost the same thing as an invalid and it was pretty hard to get a job. I walked these streets and it was real hard to try to sell yourself for a job when you only had one arm that would work and they were scared to death to take you on physically because it might involve compensation and all kinds of things like that.

GP: Was this before you went to work for Montana Power?

FoP: Yes, in those six years or five years between the time...well, I figured I could go back and do a little bit of work—some kind of work.

GP: But you had been doing timekeeping, though, out at the airport even after the WPA disbanded, right?

FoP: Yes.

GP: You kept on with that.

FoP: Well I kept time on the WPA for quite a few different crews. I worked out at the University of Montana when they were putting in—they had a WPA crew out there taking care of maintenance and building a new football field. And I worked over at the University nursery when they had crews over there. I worked there. I worked three times at the airport. They would transfer me. They would start on these other jobs so they’d transfer me off the airport to go over and start up the books and teach somebody else how to do timekeeping and even up at Clinton School when they built the new Clinton School up there. When (unintelligible) they sent me up there and I broke in a guy named Summers. He was the one on that.

GP: Yes, you mentioned that the other day. So anyhow it was 1942 when you went to work for Montana Power. Is that what you said?

FoP: Yes, the spring of 1942 I went to work for them. I worked as a watchman during the summer and I worked at the airport during the day and I worked at Montana Power at night until midnight. That made kind of a short day out of it.

GP: I’ll bet.
FoP: Maybe a long day, a short time. Then in the fall—I think it was about the first of November—they were shutting down their ditch digging crews and war had gotten close and some of their men had quit going to work out on the coast as...oh, jobs suddenly became its premiums and several of the men here left and went out to work in defense industry and things like that because war had been declared in December of 1941 and on the spring of 1942 Montana Power Company said, well we sure need a meter reader real bad and we think maybe you could do that with one arm and so forth so we’ll give you a try at bat. So I started out with them reading the meters. Within a year all the other guys were gone and I was alone. Then I got a small raise in pay. Now when I went to work for Montana Power Company I got 85 dollars a month plus a 20-dollar bonus. So it made me a total wage of 105 dollars a month and I worked that what I started out. I mean immediately. I got more than, I figured, when I was working as a watchman, because I worked more hours. So I was with the Power Company until I reached the age of 65, and that was automatic retirement.

GP: And what kind of work were you doing during those years?

FoP: Well I never could feature myself being a person who wanted to work inside. I always wanted to work outside. Meter reading that was an outside job. I would love to have gotten on to some of the other things. But, like I say, I was supposed to have been hired as a lineman, but there was no way I could do lineman work. I stayed outside and worked for eleven years as a meter reader, on the survey crew and anything that was outside work. And then they said well, we do have to have some bookkeepers and some inside help and we think you better come inside. So I finally agreed I would. I tried bookkeeping and I wasn’t very good at that because my left hand. A lot of bookkeeping work involves posting the payments and every day there are a lot of payments. See there are close to a thousand people pay there bill their everyday so it’s kind of like working in a bank and my left arm didn’t function on that so good.

GP: Probably all done on a computer today.

FoP: Yes, it is all done on a computer now, but at that time an opening came up out on the front desk, what they call the information desk—new applications, new service, moves. Anytime anybody changed one address to another or left town or a new customer came in or anything like that why that was what the front desk of mine did. So I went to work on that desk and they said do you know the town very well. I did. So I got along real good there until later years when the job just got too crazy. Too many people came in. I had to have help. But I was pretty much stayed with that job until I left there.

GP: Well, there are so many things we could talk about. We could keep this up for a long time, but I think maybe I better get back now to the Rattlesnake. And, first of all, I have a question here that I forgot to ask you the other day. This is another of those questions from Dale Johnson. He said that he has a journal—somebody’s personal journal—that must be newly acquired and in it this person, who lived up either in Ronan or St. Ignatius—up in that area—talks about a road that came somehow either across the mountains up there somewhere into
the Seeley Swan area and came down in or near the Rattlesnake. Do you know anything about such a road? He asked me to find out.

FoP: No. There was a trail. After the Forest Service was created about 1906 to 1908, the federal government or the Forest Service put out men who blazed trails and build new trails. So they had trail crews that created trails and definitely good trails, hard to find trails, walking trails, one from the Rattlesnake through up and over into the west part of Gold Creek, across the west part of Gold Creek and over Gold Hill and into the main Gold Creek past the ranger station there and on through to close to Placid Lake and then to Seeley Lake. And they strung a telephone line all the way. Now there was quite a trail in there and there were people that used to live up by Seeley lake ride horseback—like Mr. Sparey that lived up there by Placid Lake. He came through more than once on horseback through that trail down the Rattlesnake to Missoula to conduct business here. And he quite often would stay overnight at our place. And there were Forest Service and different ones used that trail quite a lot.

GP: There wasn’t a road in the trail.

FoP: You couldn’t take a wagon up there, but they could travel it with packhorses and saddle horses and on foot.

GP: Does that trail exist today?

FoP: Oh yes, but I don’t think it’s maintained near as well as it used to be. And when the logging has taken place in a lot of areas the logging operations just about completely obliterated the trail. They have roads going in across it and around it and so forth now.

GP: But you don’t know of any continuation of that trail that would have gone over towards Ronan or St. Ignatius or something?

FoP: Well there is a trail that goes up through to the upper end of the Rattlesnake and over the divide down out Jocko side, past Crazy Fish Lake and in the south part of the Jocko and you can just come out on the south part of the Jocko.

GP: Perhaps that’s what he was talking about then.

FoP: Well there are a lot of (unintelligible) trails.

FIP: But those are just trails.

FoP: Yes, just the trails that would take horses.

FIP: Sparey used to bring some cattle over. One time he stopped at our place and brought about ten head of cattle over the trail, but that’s just one follows the other.
GP: Sure. Well I’m sure he’ll be glad to get that information. Before I forget though I was going to ask what happened to your younger brother? Did he stay in Missoula?

FoP: Oh yes he was around Missoula and mostly around Missoula—worked out here, worked out at some ranches for a while and then he got involved in other things and he got married about a year or two after we did (unintelligible). He worked at several different enterprises and then he finally got into a magazine route where he sold first publishing company magazines like Colliers, the Saturday Evening Post and magazines and he had an established route that he took over from another man and his job was to sell more magazines as well collect for the ones that were delivered. And he was in that quite a few years and while he was in that he took up flying. He started taking flying lessons. He took some out here down at some ball field (unintelligible), and then his magazine route had him in Kalispell a lot of the time so he took flying up there from Bud King, who owned a private airport in Kalispell and then he took flying lessons over at Belgrade from the Lynch brothers. And he got more and more into flying and he was using his magazine route as a means to make his living while he was taking the flying lessons. And then about the time that war was coming on, he had gotten up to where he had a commercial license. So he joined what you call the Prairie Command, which was United States and the Allied countries were flying supplies over the hills from Burma, India, and China and back. What they called the Burma—

FIP: Flying the hump.

FoP: Flying the hump. That’s right. And he did that for about a year or a year and a half. And he said well—he talked to my dad about it—and he said, I think I’d be better off. I’m going to fly for commission in the United States Army as a flier because I’m training—they put him to work training other fliers for the army—and he said long time working for Uncle Sam training. I might as well join the service and when I get out I would have the benefits.

GP: The benefits, sure.

FoP: My dad was a Spanish American War veteran so he knew some of those benefits. So my brother applied for his commission, got a second lieutenant commission during the early part of the war, about 1942 I think it was. So he served his time in World War II and then later he stayed in the Reserves and he was sent back to Japan during the Korean War and he was in that as a flight instructor. He wasn’t quite as active in that because he was married and had a family and so forth. And then after he came out he went into flying his own private airfield down in Long Beach, California and he was there until a big windstorm wiped out his airplanes and so forth. So then they picked up stakes and moved up to Portland, Oregon and he built a home up in Portland, Oregon and he rented the airport across the river in Vancouver Washington. And he had that until he retired about six or seven years ago. When his physical condition wouldn’t let him give flying lessons anymore, why he turned the business over to his son.
FIP: He didn’t like the ranch very much.

GP: He didn’t like farming and the country.

FoP: He didn’t want that kind of thing.

GP: He was a city boy. Well that’s interesting that you two were so different and you weren’t that apart in age either were you.

FoP: About two years. Not much.

GP: I think we can wind this up pretty quickly now, Forrest. You’ve seen a lot of changes in the Rattlesnake. Do you like what you see?

FoP: Well, I am one of the people that joined the group known as “The Friends of the Rattlesnake,” and we worked long and hard. We worked about ten years—really worked—trying to get the Rattlesnake area, that upper area safe, preserved, and made into what it is now. So I feel that was quite an accomplishment. Now you’ll find people that disagree with me on that; they think it would have been better if it had been left alone and it would had been sold to developers and they’d have made a housing development or something else up there. But I’m just the kind of guy that thinks we have got a lot of nice things in western Montana. I want to see as many of them preserved as possible. We worked for about ten years getting that area preserved. The group known as “The Friends of the Rattlesnake” they accessed themselves money. They went out and got donations from people and people that were interested. We spent quite a lot of money. Sent people back to Washington, D.C., as representatives to lobby for us and so forth. In 1980 we succeeded in getting a pretty good start with our Congressmen. We worked with Congressman Max Baucus, and then later Pat Williams took up the issue. He pushed it hard. Then we got John Melcher involved in it and by October 1982, we got it set aside. Melcher worked out a deal with the Federal Government to trade the Rattlesnake lands to the Federal Government for the Forest Service Management, and in turn the Montana Power Company took coal lease lands over in eastern Montana. So the set up is beneficial to both sides as far as that goes. I think it is really great that we have that up there and the people of Montana and Missoula especially so they and their visiting friends have a place they can go and enjoy outdoor life if they want to. And part of Pat Williams’ theory was that it was close to the University here and it would be a great place for natural studies. That was one of his big concerns. And it is. People can go up there and they can study the tree populations and soil composition for years and years, study wildlife—there is plenty of it wild up there but they don’t want to extensively because any game they get they have to pack it out on their backs. That discourages most hunters, packing very far. I think we accomplished a real good thing up there and I’m rather proud to know that I am a part of it.
GP: Well maybe this is a good place to stop, Forrest, unless you have anything else you would like to add.

FoP: Well now, the Montana Power Company took an interest in that up there a few years ago, and they started a good will gesture towards the senior citizens. With the Wilderness people—between the two of them—they sponsor a few senior citizens bus trips up the Rattlesnake each summer, and I usually try to go along on those trips if I can, and sometimes Mrs. Poe goes with me, as a tour guide and relate some of the history. We show people where the homes used to be and who lives here and the old schoolhouse was here and things like that.

GP: Well, for the sake of the record and to let whoever uses this tape and listens to it at a later date, I think we should add that you very recently—within the last six or eight weeks—have had balloon heart surgery and you are making an excellent recovery on that, which to me shows you are a mighty tough guy.

FoP: I don’t know about my chest, though. I should feel good about, because the doctor told me that when they got through with that process he said, oh, I don’t worry about you, you’ve got an excellent chance of recovery because you were a good healthy person yet for your age. See I’ll be 80 my next birthday. He said, you’re a healthy person yet for your age and I’m sure you’ll make a good recovery. He said so many people by the time they get to the surgeon to get their heart ailments corrected, their health is so far gone they don’t have much left to recover with. And he said I just wanted to tell you how much we think the best thing to do is come get it over with as soon as you can if you know you need it.

GP: Sure. Well, it’s not the first time you’ve made a remarkable recovery either, is it.

FoP: Well as I said, there are probably a lot of people...I got tired of hearing a lot of people felt sorry for me and so forth and I’ve outlived most of them.

GP: Well that just proves my point, doesn’t it? So, thanks very much.

[End of Interview]