Jack Rowan: Thanks again for giving me some more time to meet with you.

Ann Line: We’re glad to see you again.

Robert Line: You’re very welcome.

JR: Thank you. What I thought I’d like to start with is, right after we ran out of time last time, you were starting to talk about some of the really interesting people who had stayed up here during your early childhood like Paul Robeson. So I was wondering if you’d be willing to tell me a little bit more about that. Do you remember Paul Robeson coming?

RL: Yeah, I’m just sort of stuck now. Ted Shawn was a leader of young male dancers. And he came to Missoula, and he visited out here with some of his dancers. That was very interesting. Betty Steinway was one of the campers that we had. And her father, of course, Steinway Pianos, New York, sent us several player-piano rolls for the player-piano. That was very interesting. A good number of those they sent out. She said that one time….Who’s the black piano player?

AL: Scott Joplin?

RL: No. White keys and black keys reversed. They made a special piano for him. Anyway, he came, and when the piano was finished, why, they set it up in their living room as they always did when an important person bought a piano. So he came and gave them practically a whole afternoon concert playing…I wonder if I mean Fats Waller? I bet. Anyway, that was very interesting. And she met a lot of people, interesting musicians, particularly, of course, piano players. She had a lot of stories about that sort of thing. That’s almost way off the subject. That’s into another family. But anyway, it interested us very much. And I think I have a couple Fats Waller player-piano rolls for the player-piano. They’re kind of interesting just because of the connection with someone that was quite prominent in the jazz era. I guess you’d call Fats Waller jazz. I’m just trying to think what other people….I’m just going to have to think. Nothing comes to mind.

AL: Who was the black man, was that Paul Robeson?

RL: Yeah, he was a singer, and I think when he came to Missoula he was not able to get a room at the hotel as a black man at that time. I suppose that must have been in the
fairly early thirties or so. He came, I think, in connection with the Community Concert series, and no one thought ahead about providing a place for him to stay as a black. That was an awkward situation, so mother stepped up and said, “Send him out here to our place.” I think that’s the way it was. I really don’t know anything about him, don’t remember anything about him. Boy, I’m sort of stuck.

JR: That’s alright. So you mentioned Betty Steinway. When you and your parents started the summer camp, you mentioned last week that it was basically intended for people back East to send their kids out here. Was it your mother that was the driving force behind that?

RL: I think they equally did it. ‘Course Dad was busy with school, so I assume he did not spend as much time as Mother did on it. But he added a considerable amount of support to Mother’s interest. And I think Mother probably had more names of people that might be good campers, more than Dad, although he certainly had some.

And then when we didn’t have a real full group of youngsters, why, we would pick up some local youngsters. I mean, if we had an afternoon program or something, we’d pick up some youngsters that way. We had a fellow from Butte who, interestingly enough, came by a couple years ago on a motorcycle and stopped and visited with us. He remembered his youthful days here at the camp.

I’m looking at that swimming pool and remembered that one time, before we had the camp, we had a neighbor helping to butcher a hog that we had raised. And he had a tank over the fire to heat the water for scalding, for quick removal of the hair. The fire got away from him and rushed on up the hill. I was across town with my two sisters, and we were coming down just off the Parkway Bridge, the Orange Street Bridge, which was called Parkway at that time. As we came down south on Orange Street, we looked up here and there was a big fire rushing across the hills. My older sister said, “That’s on our place!” So she jammed on the accelerator and came rushing up the hill. There was a CCC group of boys who came up and were fighting the fire. They had one of those Pacific pumps with the hose stretched out, I think particularly to try to protect the building. It was too far to go up on the hill where the fire had advanced clear nearly to the top of Whitaker Road. Anyway, they were using the water from the swimming pool to fight the fire and protect the buildings. When they were all through, they all jumped in whatever was left of the water. I think there was an awful lot of water left in the pool. Then, later, when they cleaned out the pool—which we did right away because the fellows were pretty hot and sweaty—there were all kinds of leftovers from these fellows. They wore these fatigue hats...I can’t remember what the Army called them, but a little hat with a small brim on it. And a lot of those were left in the swimming pool, I remember particularly. I don’t know what all else. Some other garment, I suppose. But that was an interesting adjunct to that story about the fire.
I was thinking the other day a little more about Dad’s experience with Old Mr. Shanks from whom he bought the ranch. Dad had three different impressions of Shanks. There was the time when they had decided what sort of sales arrangement there was going to be. And they wanted to kill a sheep to serve as a meal, I don’t know quite how to say it, but in completion of this deal. When it came to slaughtering the sheep, Shanks handed the knife to Dad to cut its throat and said he [Shanks] could never do that and never was able to kill a sheep.

But the same fellow, early on when he first came to the ranch, he never slept inside his bunkhouse because of the chance of Indians sneaking up at night and killing him. So he would sleep some little distance from the bunkhouse. He didn’t figure the Indians would see him sleeping out there, I don’t know. But anyway, he said one time he woke up and raised up on an elbow and there was a chopping block, a log, in front of the door of this cabin. And there were two Indians lying there with their gun pointed at the front door, waiting for him to come out. And it was sort of a hairy situation, must have been. Dad said, “Well, what happened?” And he said, “Well, I got them both.”

Then there was the other situation in Dead Man’s Gulch, back of the ranch, north of the ranch. Stagecoaches would come through Columbus and they would be sizing up people who were on the stagecoaches that had money and those that didn’t. They’d send the word off ahead to a saloon up in what later became Dead Man’s Gulch. When the stagecoach got that far, which was about forty miles away from Columbus, there were people around there that would waylay the passengers that had the money. And they knew which ones did, having investigated them in Columbus. So it got to be a very bad situation.

In the early days when people were trying to sort of tame and civilize the West, it was a serious situation when a town would get a bad reputation, like Columbus and what later became Dead Man’s Gulch, north of the ranch. And so the locals decided they would get together and try to clean up the situation to get rid of that reputation. They got together at Shanks’s house, and they couldn’t just go up to dispose of this saloon-keeper directly. They had to stand around, sit around, and do quite a bit of drinking before they got up enough courage, and they all went tearing up over in Dead Man’s Gulch, which I remember as, oh, about two and a half miles or so north of the ranch house. They went in there, and they ordered a drink. The barkeep turned around and faced the back bar and started grabbing for a bottle. One of the fellows shot him in the back, and Shanks thought that was so terrible. You never shot a man in his back.

But you have those three situations: thinking that it was terrible to shoot a man in his back, the two Indians lying with their guns aimed at the doorway (his idea of an Indian was not much more than a coyote, I guess), and then his situation with trying to kill the sheep for dinner, for celebration. It was just interesting; here’s this fellow with practically three different levels of humanity, morals, or whatever you want to call it,

Robert Line and Ann Line Interview, OH 395-002, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
and I think Dad remembered those as almost being opposed things. The feeling about the Indian and the feeling about the barkeeper, who was probably way lower than the Indian, and yet he didn’t think that he should have been shot in the back.

JR: Do you remember when they bought this ranch up here? Did they buy it from the Whitaker family?

RL: No, the Whitakers had been gone maybe eight or ten years or so. A fellow out in East Missoula, near Zogville (?)—as a matter of fact his name was Zog (?) and that’s where the name came from—he had bought it, I suppose as an investment. So there was quite a bit of distance, in time at least, from Mr. Whitaker.

We later knew a couple of the Whitakers. One was a fellow who was an engineer down at the hospital, a fellow whom Ann knew. And he came out and visited one time and told us some stories about the old place. And then another was the brother, Bill Whitaker, who worked in the heating plant down at the university, and we got to see something of him. He was an interesting fellow. I think there were eight or ten Whitaker children. The first, Leonard, at the hospital, was born in England, in Wales, before Whitaker came over here, I think, as I remember. He may even have been of a different wife. I think when Whitaker came over here, he replaced his wife for some reason. I’m just guessing on that though.

But many of the things that Leonard told us about the place were similar to when we had followed. There was a tree down by the lower fence, the north fence, and Leonard said when he was a boy he took the barrel hoop and put it over the top of the tree, and then the tree grew into it. When I came along, here was this barrel hoop pretty well filled out with this tree. It was a pine tree. Near there was a place where apparently Whitaker had planted some alfalfa, and we used to call that the Alfalfa Point. And Leonard said that their family also called it the Alfalfa Point. An area over on the other side of the gulch we called the Bench, and it is the Bench, and Leonard said that his family called it the Bench, west of the big gulch. And there were several other things where we had a similar sort of name and had called it the same thing.

One of the Whitakers was a music teacher down at the University and walked all the way, which you know is nearly four miles, walked down every day teaching music students. I think she was a piano teacher.

JR: When you moved up here, were you excited about coming up here?

RL: I think I was indifferent. I was in about the fifth grade and I hadn’t formed too many ideas about what I liked and what I didn’t like yet. I think very soon I perked up my interest and was interested in many things about the place. And it was a slightly agricultural interest. We really didn’t work it very hard. When we had a lot of horses
here, it was because of the campers, and they were used for riding. But as far as producing beef the way we do now, we didn’t take that too seriously. We always had milk cows, usually three milk cows, to cover the periods of lactation. So anyway, we didn’t really use it as more than just a home.

As time went on, Ann and I increased the number of cows we had, and we got up close to 60 cows at one time. And it was obvious that the place was not able to handle that much. Don’t know how you could tell except to do as we did, have more and more until you began to see that they were eating more than was growing. So we have reduced way down. The thing comes about because the rancher is pretty much an optimist. He has to be: “This next year can’t be as bad as the last year.” So he has more and more animals until he finds that he’s gotten too many. And now we’re keeping 20, 25 cows, and that seems to fit pretty well.

But nature doesn’t always provide an even flow of forage. Sometimes it does a lot better and sometimes, like right now, when it’s so dry, it’s going to be about as worse as it’s ever gotten. The springs are probably going to drop off to the point where we’ll probably have to manage the water a little more carefully. There was a time when a neighbor across the road and down a quarter of a mile used to come up every few days and fill his tanks from our water. We had enough extra so we could supply him with that. But we scrounged around with some of our neighbors for house water this year. I guess it’s spring water, and of course, depending on the springs.

JR: How many other families were up here on the hill when you guys moved up here?

RL: There were about 13 families that sent children to a school just this side of the Forest Service radio station, which is now called Whitaker Park, I think. I don’t know that I could name all of them, but several of them came from up in Pattee Canyon. The Daniels, I think, for one, and the Whites. Then the Pete Hanson children; they had a boy and a girl. Then over toward Miller Creek, the Rassmussens. I’m losing the other name. There were several kids in those families. So it was a fairly busy school. Quite a few kids there. Later, Ann and I met a woman in square dancing that we knew very well. She said her father had taught in that school, so she knew something about the background of the school. I only knew for a year or two because shortly after we moved up here some kids set fire to the old schoolhouse and burned it down. I remember there were some pieces of slate around on the ground after the fire, evidently used in blackboard. Not the thin slate as we think of it, an inch and a quarter thick and big irregular chunks that had not been cut very accurately, apparently. So, I really don’t know too much about the school other than those little things. It was gone soon after we were here.

JR: Do you remember about when things started to change in terms of more houses being built up here and fewer ranches?
RL: I do remember if I can think of the approximate date. I would say toward the end of the thirties, I think, there began to be some more buildings, some more houses. Then of course when Mosby started his development, which was '48, I think, then we began to see quite a few more and also down lower on the hill. He was the one that used the word Far Views, which I don't hear too much now. Far Views is not a name that you hear people describing this hill. They frequently speak of the South Hills, but not Far Views. Seems like there's one street that's named Fairview or something, but that's not the same as Far Views. One time there was a real estate agency by that name, Far Views, but you don't hear that anymore after Mosby left this realm. Why, shortly after that I don't think there was much activity under that name.

JR: So one of the things I wanted to ask you a little bit more about—this is kind of shifting gears—is your mom's parents. Last week you talked a little bit about how her father was a publisher, mostly about agricultural subjects. Do you remember much about her mother and what she was involved in?

RL: She was around in Missoula, so we saw quite a bit of her. I don't think she really ever lived right here, but she was very much in our family circle. I'm trying to think what I know about grandmother. I think she would have considered herself quite a lady, that is, as opposed to the ranch-oriented person. Although her husband had connections with ranching and agricultural communities because of taking ads from people in his magazines. But they settled among some fairly aristocratic people around Lake Geneva, and in later years I think they lived out at Lake Geneva, although to begin with it was just sort of a summer home out there. They knew the Harrises of Chicago, people pretty well up in the financial world. They had quite a few other friends.

There was an observatory, I think, west of the lake. The main astronomer there had fixed up a wire from his house up to the observatory because he had lost his eyesight. And how he was an astronomer I'm sure I don't know. But anyway, he would feel his way along this wire in getting up to the observatory. And there is something about him (I think his name was Frost, perhaps). There was something about his discoveries and so on, in connection with astronomy, that put him on the map, and it eludes me now. I don't remember what it was. But I remember seeing that observatory. Our family visited there in 1937.

But anyway, I think Mother would have considered that they were traveling in fairly aristocratic circles and educated people, anyway. I don't remember where Grandmother went to school. I don't think she had any connection with Holyoke. But Grandfather went to Amherst, which is just across the hill from Holyoke, the women's college. I think I mentioned it, that one time he took a group of guitar players...or was it a choral group? Grandfather played the guitar. I think there were several guitars in the group...and took them over to Europe. How he managed the trip without more experience than
that...Normally when you take a group of people, you assume that you know something about the area where you take them. But anyway, he did.

AL: It might be interesting, if you’re still talking about your grandfather Chapman, to hear about the letters that he has from the President.

RL: Oh, yeah. As a publisher, of course, he produced quite a few editorials, I think. Frequently they were editorials pro or con some of the politicians at the time. Having written an editorial, the politicians would write back and say thank you for the good comments or they’d take issue with the others. Anyway, we came across a stack of letters—Woodrow Wilson, Teddy Roosevelt...

AL: I think there were about three or four presidents...

RL: But it’s interesting to have those letters with their own signatures on them.

AL: William Jennings Bryant, a couple letters from him. They’re tucked away here. We don’t know what to do with them.

RL: I think there were about seven, weren’t there?

AL: Yeah, more than one from Teddy Roosevelt. Did you say Woodrow Wilson?

RL: I did say Woodrow Wilson. He was also interested in the, I want to say abolition, that’s not the word.

AL: Prohibition?

RL: Prohibition, yeah. Not too close! And this fellow, Beard, was an anti-drinking guy, and he was an artist, drew a lot of pictures of the terrible damage drinking does: the saloon keeper with the big over-sized tummy and big gross features and painting everything in a very negative sort of aspect. Many of the pictures that he did then were converted into slides that are used in this stereopticon. I didn’t know whether my other grandfather, Lemuel, used those very much as an anti-drinker. I don’t know whether he was or not. As a doctor, he always would have some whiskey in the drug store to use in various ways. Doctors doled out whiskey. Well, during the days of the Prohibition, you would still dole out some alcohol occasionally. I suppose it’s a stimulant or something, or, alcohol’s really not a stimulant. But he may have used those slides to keep people from becoming interested in doing a lot of drinking, knowing that only for medicinal—

[End of Side A]
RL: ...my grandmother, the guitar trip over to Europe...

JR: Oh, I know what I was going to ask you. Actually, going back to your mom, one of the things you shared with me last week is that she had written this journal on women’s issues. Do you know what happened to those? Are there copies of those still available?

RL: Well, for a while, we kept some of them. I don’t know that we do now.

AL: We may have one of them as a souvenir, but we discarded most of them.

RL: They were sort of observations about women’s situations, relationships in society now. It was when Women’s Lib was getting to be recognized and given the name Women’s Lib. And much of it was way over my head. That’s why I’m having a hard time remembering what it was about.

AL: It was very hard to understand. Bob’s mother was quite a brilliant woman and wrote in terms that were kind of above me, and I didn’t always follow what she was trying to say.

JR: Did she publish them herself or work with someone else to publish them?

RL: She had Dave Flackas (?) print them, didn’t she, at the Mountain Press? Yeah. And I think they had quite a list of people that received them, all over the world, to some extent. Mostly in America and England, but I think there were some people in India who subscribed.

AL: She had a co-author who lived in New York City.

RL: And she was an Englishwoman originally, I think.

AL: She was really dedicated to that. She did that for quite a few years. It meant an awful lot to her, but unfortunately it didn’t mean a whole lot to the family. So they didn’t take a lot of interest in that, I guess.

JR: Do you remember what it was called?

RL: The Unicorn.

AL: She had a lot of unicorn memorabilia: pictures, little statues and so on. When we dispensed with many of the belongings up there, there was a woman who was very,
very interested in unicorns, so we just gave them to her. So she has them all, a friend of a friend.

RL: She was interested in very different ways. She was interested in the unicorn as an animal, a mythical animal.

AL: We were glad to give them to somebody who had some respect and value for them.

RL: I think the unicorn occurs quite frequently in mythology, and I don’t know why. The idea of a horse with a...the horse had a horn, didn’t it, on the front of its head? And I don’t know the significance of that. And why mother would have picked that name, I don’t know either. So that’s a pretty fuzzy, incomplete report.

AL: I think I have one copy of one you could look at. If you’re really interested, you can read it.

JR: Yeah, actually I think I would.

AL: Before you go I can get it out for you, and you can look at it.

JR: Thank you, I appreciate that. So we also talked a little bit about how you decided on your own career, and that was a little bit different from what maybe your father had envisioned for you.

RL: Well, as a retailer, he very much would have liked to have me go into that kind of business, I think. But particular types of merchandise he handled, I was not interested in going into. Before we went into cattle a little more seriously, I had some chickens. I built a chicken house, a poultry house for 2,000 birds and sold eggs for seven or eight years. Montana is full of old poultry houses, people who at one time or another had chickens, mainly for eggs. Also, there are some fryer buildings. But mainly for eggs. And then for one reason or another, people did not stay with it. I had several reasons. One, I don’t like the sound of chickens; the noise they make is not a very attractive cackle. And I guess I just sort of got tired of chickens and selling eggs. I established some routes around town where I would deliver eggs every week, but I delivered in a particular day—I think on Mondays and Thursdays—and when I’d show up on Thursday, which happened to be Christmas Day every few years, people would say, “Goodness, why are you out delivering eggs today? Why didn’t you deliver them yesterday?” Well, they weren’t laid yet! I couldn’t deliver them yesterday. I had to deliver them that day. The next day I was busy delivering other eggs. I got a little tired of that routine, I think.

JR: Did you deliver mostly to individual families or to the local markets?
RL: Mostly. I did have some stores that I delivered to. As a matter of fact, I had about five stores that I delivered to. And then also to the 4B’s restaurant business. I happened to be delivering individual house eggs down in...what is that area called?...not The Elms...anyway, and came across Bill Hainline, who owned and ran the 4B’s restaurants. I came expecting to see that he might want to buy eggs weekly. And he said, “Do you want to supply my restaurant?” He was having trouble getting someone to supply regularly. I have to say, after seven years, I no longer supplied him regularly. But he went through the same thing. Various people were eager to produce eggs and sell them and then as time went on they would peter out, or of course the birds would peter out. So he always wanted a dependable supply and I was able to provide that, for the time I was selling them at least.

AL: You were 37 when I met you, and you had been out of the egg business about a year or two, maybe. So you were about 35 by the time you quit the business. You did quite a bit in those young years.

JR: So did you do other things as well as the chickens in order to make a living?

RL: Yeah, I cut Christmas trees on the hill and hauled them to town in trailer loads. Dave and I were together in that project. Then I sold some fire prevention equipment and alarm systems and then extinguishers, all kinds of extinguishers. I didn’t know there were that many different kinds of extinguishers, which is necessary to match all the different kinds of fire that they have: electrical fires, oil fires, and solid wood fires, of course. They each take a different extinguisher for the most efficiency.

AL: Along the way you were doing some cattle, though, and managing the ranch, which is a lot of work.

RL: Yeah, early on we decided that wood posts were a darn nuisance because the posts would last about only five years. So around the whole place, why, you’d wind up putting in...well, every fifth post every year. For around here, there’s six miles of fence on the upper section. It was not completely fenced at that time, so it wasn’t quite that. But six miles of fence and every sixteen feet, posts that had to be replaced. That was really for the birds, and I was glad to see when steel fence posts came about, although they’re fairly expensive. I think they started out at about a dollar apiece. But still, they were much more permanent, except when the cars would hit them. The area along Whitaker Road has been badly damaged through the years. Cars have slipped off the road and damaged the fence, so the fence has been constantly repaired and looks like it has. Wires have been spliced and repaired over and over again.

AL: Well, you did a lot, too, Bob, with trying to make the most of this land here for producing grass and alfalfa. Didn’t you and David develop an irrigation system?
RL: Yes, that aluminum pipe, it was called overhead sprinkling at that time. The pipe was fitted with a nozzle to sprinkle like a lawn sprinkler, anyway. It was overhead in that sense, as opposed to flood irrigating or ditches along on the ground. With the limited amount of water we had from the springs, it seemed to me ideal to get the most bang out of the buck for water. And we actually did irrigate nearly twenty acres, which helped quite a little bit. The interesting thing is if land has not been irrigated before, the first time you irrigate it, it produces a great deal more because it has accumulated a lot of nutrition that plants need. And when you release that nutrition, they grow like mad. The first several years, these fields down here—you wouldn’t believe it now—but you’d walk through waist-deep grass that had grown up. We haven’t irrigated that much for quite a long time. I bet if we were to do it now we’d grow something like that. But the interesting thing is it’s pretty hard to get people to move irrigation pipe. It’s a monotonous thing: pick up pipe and move it, set it down, hook it under the pipe, go back up to the next one, over and over and over again. So it is hard to keep on doing that, and the return is not extremely generous. It tapers off.

JR: I’ve done it myself.

RL: You have? It’s one of the reasons for these wheel move systems and also the big inches, the big nozzles that squirt out two-hundred feet or so, just turn around. And recently, there’s more interest in the drip irrigation systems because sprinklers lose a lot of water in evaporation. Around here, we sprinkle only at night time when the sun is down. You get a lot more value from the irrigation that you put on. But the drip systems are even better yet: bring drips down with a tube on the particular plants that you want and you don’t spray the whole area. You just spray certain places. Don’t know just how that works, but we didn’t ever use that system. But people do. I guess that was particularly true of plants that grow in bushes where you can drip down to one place, right where the bush is. You wouldn’t normally use drip irrigation in a hay field.

JR: You talked a little bit last week about how you had invented The Jogger. Was that something you started to do after you gave up the chicken business?

RL: That was before, actually. My brother-in-law started Mountain Press and he looked into a Jogger and found that they were three, four hundred dollars. And I thought, the way a ranch kid will often think, “Heck, I could build something cheaper than that.” So I did. And I did that for quite a while, along with selling fire equipment. And that’s how I got that started.

JR: Were there other things you tried to do?

RL: I’m stuck again.

AL: What’s your most favorite job that you ever had?
RL: Oh, well, I enjoy roadwork, building roads. And fortunately I was able to buy a Cat and that was the first basic thing. Frequently after I’d built a road, people would say, “Well, now do you have something to smooth up the road?” Because a dozer leaves a pretty irregular surface. So it was obvious that it was necessary to get a motor grader, which I did do quite a while back when I got that 211, 210, whatever it was. Anyway, I was able to complete a pretty respectable-looking mountain road at least. I suppose I have enjoyed the Cat work, which I originally did up in Alaska in ’43. I enjoyed that much more than any of the other income-producing things, quite a bit better than I enjoyed chickens and somewhat better than I enjoyed cattle.

JR: Building roads up in Alaska in ’43. So was that part of the effort to make sure that they could get troops up there?

RL: Yeah, that was right after that. By the time I got up there, the main work was done with Negro troops, and they were all pretty much gone by the time I got up there in ’43. I think they started in ’42, and so the sort of thing I was doing was with civilian contractors. The road had been built right up to the bottom of the valleys, and obviously with the mudscape, the wet conditions, the road would sink away and these civilian contractors were fixing up the road, filling in the low spots and some places moving the road on up to the edge of the hillside where it would drain and mudscape would not be a problem. Then more recently, in order to get a faster road, they moved the roads from the hillsides back down into the valleys where they could go straight through without more complicated construction, filling in with gravel and laying down corduroy. Early on they used the corduroy idea, laying down trees side by side. But they don’t last very long, I mean, when the tree rots away, then its value as supporting the road is pretty well lost.

AL: Would you be interested in hearing what the big house was like when they moved here?

JR: Yeah, actually, that would be great.

AL: There’s a story to be told of that.

RL: What are you thinking of, Annie?

AL: The condition of the house and your grandmother coming out and what your folks had to do to make it livable.

RL: Yeah, when we first moved out the renter in there, they didn’t take very good care of things. Their old stove they moved out so that we could move a stove in. When they pushed it across the floor it pushed up a pile of dirt several inches high. And when my
grandmother, Mother’s mother, came out to see what we had bought...’Course Dad was interested in the springs and the big barn. That appealed to him. And my mother saw other possibilities around the place, and she thought it was wonderful. But when her mother came out, Grandmother said, “Oh Louise, how could you?” The ranchers had been chopping up the railing around the front porch for firewood. And there was a railing around the top of the house, a captain’s walk, I think it was called. It was a sort of architectural feature that many people did at that time. The top of the house is still flat but the railing is gone. And they were burning that and other things that made it look pretty decrepit. The front porch and steps were all broken and torn up. Sort of depressing to look back on what it was like! [laughing]

AL: And what about basic things like water and electricity and plumbing?

RL: Yeah, we didn’t have inside plumbing. They had a little three-quarter inch pipe coming up to the sink, so we did have water in the house. But one of the first things we did was to lay that four-inch cast iron for a drain for our bathroom. We brought it up into the floor, down below, with the idea of setting a toilet on it and a regular type of insulation. But in the mean time we bought a tub, and we sat the tub with the drain right over that open pipe. So we had a regular chance to take at least a tub bath anyway. And then later on the shower and so on. But it was pretty primitive. But too many people wouldn’t have looked down on that. There were a lot of people not living too very high on the hog at that time. And the Dean of the School of Business at that time, their salary was $2300 a year, which is not too very great, and it didn’t allow you to build much of a palace to live in. So we thought that was pretty nice. It was quite a long trip out of town at that time.

From the bottom of the hill, a little more than a mile and a half away, Dad got a chance to get a used ice box, which was really an icebox, not a refrigerator. You put in chunks of ice. Many people are familiar with that. And we sat down for supper, and Dad said that he had bought this icebox from a second-hand store in town, and after supper we’d go out and bring it in. So after supper, we went out and there wasn’t any icebox, there wasn’t any trailer. The car was sitting there with nothing attached to it. At that time we didn’t have a ball and socket type hitch. We just dropped a pin down through a couple holes in the tongue onto a trailer hitch on the back of the car. We assumed that as the car was driving along and the trailer was bouncing up and down, the pin would work its way out and the trailer would be free. So, sure enough, we went down the hill and found it at the bottom of the hill at the end of Higgins Avenue. There was a trailer and a poor icebox sitting there feeling sort of neglected, right along next to a bunch of graves. Some of the early Missoula people were buried down at the end of Higgins Avenue on the hillside. I don’t remember when those graves were removed, but it must have been within a few years of when we moved up here.

AL: So did you get into the plumbing and the electricity?
RL: Well, just a little bit.

JR: So was it mostly you and you have one brother and two sisters, right?

RL: Right. The four of us.

JR: Did your parents hire a lot of people from town to do the work or did you guys do a lot of the work yourselves?

RL: Well, we were pretty young to be doing much of it. We usually had a hired man, I would suppose, for seven or eight years anyway, until we got pretty well into high school. Then we took over the fencing and various other things that needed doing. At that time, quantities of fellows begged to come out and work for a dollar a day. Thirty bucks a month or so. Prior to that, when Whitaker was here, he would provide wood for the wood fires down at the campus before they had central heating. They’d come out and beg him for a job getting wood out. They didn’t get paid for anything, just food. So thirty dollars a month was a step up for many of them. And of course with the Depression around the country and the soup lines, that was quite a lift for a lot of fellows. Thought it was pretty good to have a job here where they earned a dollar a day.

JR: Did you have electricity at all up here or was it a generator, or...?

RL: We bought it at Kohler Electric Light Plant. I’m trying to think how early on that was. We used kerosene lamps, of course, Aladdin lamps, the type that uses a mantle kind of like the Coleman gasoline lamps. We used a kerosene lamp when we’d go down to the barn to milk the cows if it was dark. And of course we used some flashlights, but with the cost of batteries we would tend to use oil lamps a little bit more.

AL: The thing I always marveled at was that this family lived in town where there was inside plumbing, electricity, water...

RL: Gas for the stove...

AL: And they came out to this place where they didn’t have anything like that. It’s like going back a hundred years. And they survived, and they thrived.

JR: Especially because it sounds like your mother was happy to get out of Columbus for much the same reason, right?

RL: Yeah. But then when she had a chance, she went backwards!

AL: I can’t imagine.

Robert Line and Ann Line Interview, OH 395-002, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
RL: It was quite a job climbing the hill with those old cars. They didn’t have a regular fuel pump the way we do now; they had a vacuum pump. There was a little device of about two quarts, it amounted to usually, in the firewall, just in front of the driver’s feet. And it had a little flip-flop arrangement. It would flip one way and the vacuum from the manifold down by the carburetor that led into that container would suck gasoline up in there and it would flip the other way and let the gas down into the carburetor. Meantime, other side was being evacuated. It was sort of a problematical situation, especially on hills. If you’re going uphill and if the gas tank was in the back of the car, why, it took a lot more vacuum to pull the gas up into that vacuum pump. Have you ever worked with a vacuum tank? I had a lot of experiences with them. That old Hudson has a vacuum tank on it. And then we had a Lincoln from Yellowstone Park and that had a vacuum tank.

Henry Ford was interested in the Lincoln company, which had been established some time before, and he was trying to decide whether to buy the company or not. When he got the park concession and also a contract for the Reds up in Glacier Park, those busses - no, the Reds were something else; that’s the white - anyway, Glacier Park also bought a bunch of Lincolns. On the strength of that, Henry went ahead and bought the Lincoln company and did a pretty good job with it, I think. It became a much more important name, the Lincoln car company. It still is a Ford company.

JR: Did your parents have the seven-passenger Lincoln for the camp?

RL: For the camp, uh huh. We have lots of pictures of that old Lincoln full of kids.

JR: Did they take the kids down in town or did they pretty much try to stay up here?

RL: When it was a valid reason the kids would go to town; get film developed and mail sent off. So the kids went down quite often but it wasn’t an every night thing.

AL: How did the kids get to Missoula?

RL: By train almost entirely. There was no air service. Actually the tri-motors came through here—

[End of Interview]