The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society with its associated audio recording.
Suzanne Vernon: What time of year did you move here?

Herb Styler: In the spring. April I think it was. Pretty early. It took us all day to get here. (from Kalispell)

SV: What were the roads like?

HS: (laughs) Wasn’t much. Just two parallel ruts. You know, zig-zag. We lived in Columbia Falls. At Swan Lake the road went up over the top of the hill. Different route. I wonder why they don’t mark that, the old highway, up through here. It would be interesting for a lot of people.

SV: The old maps must show that route.

HS: I could still pick it out. There at Swan Lake, you know where that big store is and gas station? It used to go up over the hill there and it comes down just before that other, you go around that new highway and up that steep hill? That’s where it come out, in the bottom of that. The (mud holes) were worst up here, up through the valley.

SV: Was there room to pass a car?

HS: No, you just had to drive out in the woods. In the wintertime if you met a logging truck you just (dove off).

SV: Who were your co-workers that came with you?

HS: I can’t remember their names right now. They were just seasonal. That’s the way we started out. They had their own, I think it was about a ’37 Ford car. We were stuck and out pushing and prying all day long. . . We got to the old station there (Condon Creek) late in the afternoon, just about suppertime I guess.

SV: What did the station look like? Was there much going on there?

HS: Not in them days, not until the logging really started in ’54. Well, they had quite a bit of logging up here above Lindbergh Lake before that, from the blowdown.

SV: When you lived in Columbia Falls, did you work for the Forest Service?
HS: No. I worked on Hungry Horse dam first. Then come back in the spring and signed up in Kalispell. This is where they sent me.

SV: What were some of the things you had to do? A typical day?

HS: We were building a lot of trail up Lion Creek. They had that spruce bark beetle infestation and we had to build trail and build camps up there to spray that. About the middle of the summer, the ranger called up there on the radio and said he wanted me at the station. Wanted me to work permanent, so that’s what I did. Been there ‘til I retired. I’ve been retired over 20 years. Retired in ’77. Now it’s 99. Twenty-two years.

SV: What did you do when you worked permanently?

HS: A lot of trail work. Charge of the trail crew. Slash disposal crew. Oh, I done a lot of cruising timber for some of the timber sale. Later on I was what they called the alternate ranger. Later on they called it the Fire Control Officer.

SV: You probably saw all of these trails being built?

HS: I was just in charge of the trail crews. But I was all over the Missions and back in Bigfork and Big Prairie was part of our District. Later on, when they... see, Spotted Bear was with Hungry Horse. There was Condon District and Big Prairie. Now Spotted Bear’s got Big Prairie and Swan Lake’s got our district.

SV: It’s all different. Was the Foothills Trail still here, on both sides of the valley?

HS: Yes. Oh yeah. About the longest road off the highway was, if you call it a highway, was towards the Lindbergh blowdown up there.

SV: And the logging they were doing up Lindbergh was in that blowdown up there?

HS: Yeah, there was a big wind that come through and blew. I think it took in the better part of about four sections.

SV: Is that just kind of a windy area or was that some kind of tornado?

HS: I don’t know. Kind of a twister, I guess. But it laid everything the same way I guess. It was tough logging. The sawyers were standing sometimes way up above the ground.

SV: Did that go to the Wineglass or did that go down to . . . ?

HS: That was the Wilhelm’s had a mill right off what’s the highway now. Percy and Lee. Brothers had the mill and then most of the boys worked there. Dobb and Ting. Jeff. Jeff worked there. He
was on the (?) saw. Johnny Matthews, he was riding the carriage setting the cat for, well, Dobb was the head sawyer there. (There was practically a town there. Nothing there now.) Lumber went to Missoula mostly. I suppose, better road just as you got over the Summit here. It was a tarred highway then. But not up here. (laughs) We got (080) power in ’57, that fall. Highway was in, started building in ’56. I don’t remember the exact date when they tarred it. Blacktop. It must have been in ’58 or 59.

SV: Businesses?

HS: Buckhorn Camp. Strom’s store. Kopra’s Garage. It was on the old highway, then by the Bar 33 Ranch there. (The road still went by the Bar 33) Up where the Matthew Brothers live. It come right up by there. Holland Lake Lodge and Lindbergh. (Post office was at the Buckhorn.) They used to bring the mail up from Seeley and they had them little places along the highway there. Little stage station they called them? Drop the mail off. Ole’ Cap Laird he had the lodge there at Lindbergh. He’s the one that built it. I suppose you knew that? Cap Laird. There was a good book, I had it once . . . it was all about Cap’s life. When he was a river boat captain over at Coeur d’Alene. You probably remember John Stark, and Marie? Marie was Cap’s daughter. There’s a Laird that lives at Swan Lake, too. I think it’s her brother, I think. Still alive.

SV: There’s a lot of pictures at the Forest Service. In the Elk Creek drainage. Were you building trail up there?

HS: No, we were looking to build some high trail up in that country. Was I and Van Gieson and some guys from Missoula. They was always wanting to go up there. We made the whole way north, way south.

SV: How did you get through all of that? There isn’t one trail...?

HS: We just get up high, it’s pretty open. We hiked a lot. After we hiked it a few times then we could take stock in there.

SV: When did you get married?


SV: What was your maiden name?

Leona Styler: Lund. Family was from Minnesota. Well, I was born in North Dakota, then we moved to Minnesota. In ’38.

HS: The Dirty Thirties.

LS: The Drought.
HS: Well, it wasn’t so hot back in Minnesota, though, either. But we didn’t get the drought, anyway.

SV: So did you come out to Kalispell from Minnesota, too?

HS: I was born in Minnesota. The northern part. Way up north. 12 miles from Canada. Lake of the Woods.

SV: When were you born?

HS: 22nd of November in ’23. (Brothers and sisters?) Three brothers and one sister. Older brother still living down by Ferndale. My sister’s in Minnesota now.

LS: I had five brothers and one sister, and that’s Evie (Anderson, was married to Adolph here at Condon). They came out... we went home one time and Evie and my mother and dad came back with us. And then Adolph was supposed to come back and get here. He came out and never went back. He went to work at the Wineglass Mill. (He was from Minnesota). About ’55.

SV: Were you guys married here in Montana?

LS: No. Back there. I moved to Minnesota, was going into third grade. ’38 or ’39. I met him after he came out of the service.

HS: Army. Attack outfit. All blood and guts. Ole’ Patton. I got a bunch of books. In Europe. Patton was in Africa and Italy for awhile. Then they moved him up to Europe.

SV: So what brought you to Montana.

HS: My brother was out here. They sent him out so he could do work on the railroad. The telegraph operator. They kept getting bumped. He went to work on the dam. He wrote and told me I better come out.

LS: We got in the little tail end of it. ’52. We finished. He was the foreman on the sand blasting crew.

HS: I didn’t know what was going on. It took about one night to get used to it. To figure out what they were doing. . . We came out (from Minnesota) in an old International School Bus. To Columbia Falls.

LS: All of our belongings, which wasn’t much. Three kids. We had our propane and our old refrigerator. And the beds set up in the back for the kids. Bonnie might remember. Gary sat on his Dad’s lap helping him drive quite a bit. How we ever made it. . . (shakes her head). Came
around the Park at night (Highway 2) following a big old truck. I don’t think we would have made it otherwise. Big old ruts. Doing some work on it.

(Discussion: Leona stayed home with her kids until Fred went to First Grade. Then she worked at Strom’s Store. As a young girl, Leona worked a lot on farms (grain) and started babysitting when she was 9.) Worked hard, too. 5 o’clock sometimes until midnight. Red River Valley. North Dakota. Always missed five or six weeks of school. Had to work, to make our own couple of skirts for school. Didn’t have much but nobody else had much more either. Nobody had money. During the last of the Depression. If it hadn’t of been for the War. . .

SV: Where did you live in the Swan?

LS: The Hollopeter cabin. Log cabin. Royden Hollopeter (where Gem lives now, same area. Lockwoods have it now.). Had three children. Karen was born in Minnesota while we were there for a visit. Fred was born in Whitefish. One room cabin we rented for the summer. Then moved to the (old) ranger station.

SV: What did you feel like when you first saw this place?

LS: I thought Oh MY Gosh. His brother and his wife helped us up that day. We were in the school bus. I thought, My gosh, where’s he bringing me to? Then when my folks came up, they came in the middle of the night and the moon was shining on the lake. They wondered where in the world do they live? But when morning came, it was okay with me. No electricity no nothing, either. (were used to it) Didn’t get electricity in our home until high school. We kept our stuff cold in the well at Hollopeters. Then when we got the ranger station, they had a plant they used to put on. Lived in the house on the hill. Old log cabin up on the hill. To me it looked big at the time. Nice big kitchen, bathroom. Living dining room, and bedroom. That old shed out there? (points out the door) That used to be our bedroom.

HS: That two story log house was built in ’28. The others were all built before that. There was a big log barn there, and the warehouse. The cook shack. The CC’s [Civilian Conservation Corps] had built that. And the bunkhouse.

SV: What about the mules? How much did you have to do with the pack strings?

HS: Not too much. First packer I remember was a young kid out of Kalispell. Can’t think of his name. Tuffy Anderson he packed there for few years. Leita. Dick Pelke packed before Tuffy.

SV: Where did your kids go to school?

HS: Smith Flats School. Martha Anderson taught there. And Marguerite was Linda’s first teacher. (Discussion: kids went to high school other places. No high school in Seeley. Linda to Columbia Falls, etc.)
SV: What about hunting, fishing?

HS: Not too much.

SV: Clubs?

LS: Saddle Club. The first 4th of July it was snowing. Woke up, we were still in that old shed at Hollopeters. It was snowing. Couldn’t believe it, for us. It was really something.

HS: Celebration was at the Hall. That Arena has been rebuilt about three or four different times. It’s been there, but a little different shape. . .

[End of Side A]
HS: Used to have bucking horses (rodeo) at the arena.

SV: What about volunteer fire departments? Ladies club?

HS: Just the Forest Service.

Leona was part of the Salmon Prairie Ladies Club. “That’s where we got to know some of the people here.” Weren’t as many people here then.

HS: They all lived right along the highway, you know. This old snake trail.

SV: Was outfitting and packing a big deal then?

HS: Yes. They had that girls club that came all the time. The Keywaydens. Bar 33, Buff Hultman. Holland Lake.


HS: He didn’t do as much outfitting. He done a lot of haying. Kind of a small logger, too, he and his son. 1954, 55 when the logging really started.

SV: Did you cruise a lot of timber for sales when you worked for the Forest Service?

HS: Oh yeah. Laid out a lot of roads, too. Cold Creek Road. Lindbergh Lake Road was in. Kraft Creek, we laid that out. Usually went right to the wilderness boundary up there, the Missions. Cold Creek the road went back in a little ways when they were logging that spruce bark beetle out.

SV: Did the Elk Creek Road get laid out about the same time?

HS: That was later on. The railroad did.

SV: What about wildlife when you moved here?

HS: Wasn’t too many elk. A lot of deer. Elk was kind of scarce.

SV: I’ve heard that from a lot of people. The elk must have been just in little pockets here and there.

HS: Most of them came over from the South Fork. Pressure over there. There wasn’t too much good. . . I know the logging helped develop a lot of good feed for them
SV: What were the forests like before they started logging? What do you remember?

HS: About the same as it is now, where you see patches they haven’t logged. You’d be surprised how fast it grows, too. (Points across road) I used to mow that piece there. (Maloney homestead?) (Now grown up with small trees.)

SV: How did the Forest Service change in the years you were there?

HS: It got a lot bigger. A lot more paperwork. I was glad to get out of that.

LS: I like my old cookstove. We’ve cooked on that ever since we’ve been here. We cooked on one up at the old ranger station too.

SV: Did most people cook with wood?

LS: I think most people did.

SV: How did they keep their food? You said you put some down the well at Hollopeter’s?

LS: You just hang them in the jar and hang it on a rope down in there, the water thing there. Or you just didn’t buy much ahead of time.

SV: Did you have gardens?

LS: We tried when we (were first here). But it froze. We were kind of disgusted. You have to have a lot of patience, and greenhouses, and cover everything at night.

SV: How about the logging? Did it change much in the years since you’ve been here?

HS: Well chainsaws were just coming out good then. Skidded mostly with cats, you know. Caterpillars, 6’s, 7’s and 8’s. They’d put those skid pans behind so they wouldn’t gouge up all the ground. Then they come out with that little two wheeled arch, the cable went up and over that. They could lift the logs up over and they wouldn’t gouge the ground. A lot of difference now. You should see the way the boys log now. Bill and Fred. They hardly ever touch a chainsaw anymore, unless they get some big timber to get down. (noise, background)

SV: But they didn’t have that stuff in the 70’s... 

HS: No just lately. And now they got them delimiters. That feller buncher they just cut everything and somebody logs a bunch... bring it into the delimiter, picks it up, delims it, cuts it off. That grapple skidder. Computerized.
SV: Do you remember Forest Fires here?

HS: The first year, Cold Creek. We hiked right up from the station to the fire. There were no roads or nothing then. Just south of Cold Lakes. Pretty good sized fire.

SV: Lightning? Terrain?

HS: Yes. Rocky. Grass. And then the fire would burn up hill at night and the stuff would roll down over the fire line at night. We had to build just like a trench in the bottom.

SV: Were there a lot of local people employed by the Forest Service?

HS: Quite a few. They brought people from town once in awhile. But they wanted people who knew the country then. They hired them to do a lot of the packing and stuff for the fires.

LS: What year was it you found that plane burnt up? They were out looking for a fire and found that plane, with people in . . .

HS: I forget what year. 59? 57? It had crashed that day. Up there above Cedar Lake, north of Cedar Lake. They call it Rainbow Lake. They crashed right next to it. Old pack trail went by there. There was a fire up the hill and I was headed for that. I found that plane. Three guys in it. Nothing left of it. It burnt, the plane, too. I had a lot of company the next day.

SV: There weren’t any roads to get up to the trailhead.

HS: There was a trail going right by the lake.

SV: Did those trails up there get very much use

HS: Yes. A lot of people. Horseback.

SV: Fishing?

HS: Yes.

LS: We even went up sometimes. He even delivered a baby in January of ’55. Freddy was born in March. He sent me out a month early. Glen and Shirley Parrs.

HS: They lived just down from the old station on the highway? Logging camp, Somers Timber Company. He (Parrs) was the boss of that. We got pretty well acquainted, working in the woods. I’d go up and see what the outfit was doing, logging. We’d play cards at night.
LS: Jokingly of course, we (teased him) about delivering babies. I was carrying Fred. Well, he did. One of them.

SV: Glen Parr.

HS: He just passed away.

LS: The baby ended up with a long name: Ray Michael HSert.

HS: They tried to get to town but a logging truck had jack knifed on the hill down there. On the old road. Headed for Kalispell.

LS: They came back from up there. And Herb came down, and that was that.

SV: You must have done a good job.

HS: The doctor said he couldn’t have done better himself, when they finally got her to town.

SV: Had you ever had to do something like that before?

HS: No.

LS: They sent me out early!

SV: You are pretty involved in the Legion. How long?

HS: Ever since they started.

SV: Were there a lot of veterans living here?

HS: Yes.

(Herb helps with the ball park. Used to have a ball team. Used to go to Columbia Falls and all over. Field was right across from the Condon Community Hall. That used to be all bare in there. Used to have a ball park in there. 1960s.)

SV: Church?

(Yes. Herb helped build the Lutheran church. 1960s)

Leona worked for Strom’s store. Early ‘60s. Carried “everything you wanted.” Conklin’s had the locker plant and Post Office. Then I worked at Conklin’s for a little while.
SV: Did they have gas pumps?

HS: Oh yeah. The old pump ones. Pump the gas up into the glass up above. Pump them up by hand. How many gallons you wanted measure it out. That glass held ten gallons up there. (Who ended up with that? Randy Williams has some.)

SV: What about fishing? Somebody told me there was never a problem catching fish for dinner.

HS: Oh yeah. The river hasn’t been the same since ’64, when the flood was.

SV: What about trapping?

HS: Quite a few people. (Butch Harmon’s dad, Nat.) Fred Messerer. He worked at the Wineglass Mill, too. Adolph worked at the Wineglass. John Stark worked there. Boyd Kessler worked there. Two brothers up… (Zimple) both worked there.

LS: I remember that old (truck). He’d come into the store, and he had pots and pans and everything on that…

HS: That old Army Power Wagon.

LS: Fred Kaser used to come to the store and get a gallon of gas at a time. That was at the Buckhorn. I used to remember that.

SV: What were the wages like in the fifties?

LS: Not very much.

HS: Had just as much then as you do now. Everything was on the same level. Prices really went up.

SV: Was it hard to get fruit and vegetables?

LS: Well, I remember when we first lived at the old ranger station. There was a fella that came through in the summertime, and he’d come through with some stuff. It was really nice.

SV: How often did you go to town?

LS: Hardly ever. We usually just got stuff down here. If we went to see Herb’s brother in Columbia Falls… we’d pick up different things. I remember when we first moved up there (the Forest Service) said they’d fly in to help us if we ever needed help with the kids or anything. But fortunately we didn’t have to have any help. Just lucky that we didn’t need any help, you know. But they said if we needed, you know, in an emergency.
SV: What would you change if you could go back and change anything?

LS: Oh, I liked it back then. Actually, as far as some things.

HS: I think it was a good move.

SV: Did you ever think about your kids living in such a rural area?

LS: No. It was nice. They all liked it.

HS: This is the best place to raise kids, is right here.

SV: what kind of advice would you give?

LS: They should learn not to have as much as they have nowadays. Kids expect everything. We didn’t have nothing. We come out here, I think after we paid the first rent... well we borrowed money from his brother for the first rent we paid. We had three dollars when we first landed out here. (Hard work pays off).

HS: She give all the kids a lickin’ so she can give advice.

SV: Hard for families to make a living.

HS: Yeah, unless you’re in the logging business, or have a business of your own.

Anniversary: 52 (?) years.

SV: What was the best thing about living here?

HS: Good work. Forest Service. Good health all family. Good people in the valley.

Family pretty involved with horses. Hobbies, reading. Legion.

Special Deputy sheriff’s Search and Rescue at Condon.

[End of Interview]