Most of the pertinent facts concerning the location, dates and experiences of the homestead days of Bessie Pearl Conner, nee Catron, appear in the attached transcript of the interview conducted by Pearl Conner's son, Stuart Conner, on September 6, 1970. The transcript is about 99.97% verbatim. The only exceptions are a few places where one of us would repeat one word or a short phrase in the same sentence and where it was difficult to correct it on the rough draft. No effort was made to correct the English to make either of us seem articulate.

It may be well to mention that the country around the homestead is rolling hills, but with rather more relief than the rolling hills of the Montana plains. This is more foothills than plains country. Some hilltops and some swales are forested, but the majority are covered principally by short grass. Some sage brush patches occur if my memory is correct.

The homestead cabin was hurriedly recorded archaeologically by me, but should be more carefully done. The chicken house is of particular archaeological interest. Its identification may help in future identifications of homestead structures. The site archaeologically is 2HGA551.

The Department of History, University of Montana, Missoula, has a copy of the taped interview on permanent tape. Marguerite Kirk has a cassette copy, and I propose to make copies for my sister, Pat Morledge, her children, Bonne and Marilyn, and my children, Laurie, Cindy, and Robin. I believe I gave the Montana Historical Society a copy. Copies of the transcript will be given to the MHS, university history departments, relatives, and any libraries that maintain manuscript collections of this nature.

The Department of Anthropology, University of Montana, Missoula, provided the secretarial help for the rough draft of the transcript. Dr. Joseph H. Cash, Director, American Indian Research Project, University of South Dakota, has arranged for the multilithing of the final draft.

Stuart W. Conner
Billings, Montana
January 1, 1972
Stuart W. Conner: This is September 6, 1970. Pearl Conner, whose maiden name was Catron, and her son, Stuart, and her fifth granddaughter, Robin, (Conner) are on the dry, grassy hills west of Bozeman, Montana. Just over 70 years ago, Pearl moved on this land with her parents, Henry and Lucy Catron. That was in the summer of 1900. This land is situated in Gallatin County, Montana, and is the northwest quarter of section ten, township three south, range three east. We are in a low pass. A drainage that might be called the Southwest Fork of Camp Creek drains to the east. The other side of the pass is a tributary of Elk Creek. Pearl's father, Henry Catron, homesteaded this quarter section. It is nearly as remote today as it was in 1900. But today we have a jeep instead of a horse and buggy for transportation. The rut trail still skirts the hill on the west side of the little valley.

Mother said it was the one they used in the early part of the century. Very little is left of the improvements. Flat rocks laid on the surface of the ground identify the location of the north wall of the house and parts of the east and the west walls. We find no remains of the south wall at this time. An area the length of the house is scooped out immediately south of the house. Rock walls of dry laid masonry show on the excavated sides of the chicken house on the north side of the dry stream bed, across the stream from the house. A small puddle of water in the stream bed locates a spring the homesteaders used. Down the pass to the east is the valley of Camp Creek and the Bridger Mountains beyond. Low steep-sided hills form the sides of the pass, but the hill on the south and east side has some interesting broken outcrops of rocks as well as some brush and trees on its top. The hill is labeled Ruby Mountain on maps although it is the lowest topographical feature I've seen called a mountain in Montana. It's a long high ridge or hill. This land is now on the Flying D Ranch.

Mother, why did you come to Montana from Iowa?

Bessie Pearl Conner: Well, when I was a little girl, about four and a half years old, my mother wasn't very well and the doctor in those days called her trouble prospective consumption. Now we would call it tuberculosis, and advised that we go to Montana, someplace where it was high and dry. So, somewhere in the neighborhood near where they lived, between Derby and Humiston, Iowa, there were some folks there who had relatives, who a few years before had come out here to Montana and settled in a place called Camp Creek. So, in order to have someone that we knew somewhere, or had heard of, had relatives of whom we knew about, we wrote to them and came out here where they were. They met us at Bozeman, I remember, in a lumber wagon trailing a buggy behind it, and brought us twenty miles, some, maybe twenty-two or twenty-three or four miles out to Camp Creek, to where they lived.

SC: What was their name?

BC: The folks to whom we came, their name was Collett and they had other relatives out here, the Pyphers and, in fact, there were several families of Colletts.

SC: How do you spell Collett?
SC: And when was it that you arrived in Montana?

BC: It was in September of 1899.

SC: And did you come right out to Camp Creek immediately?

BC: Well, yes. We came to that little community, which at that time was fairly well settled up, and about five miles from Salesville. Now it is called Gallatin Gateway. Then later on, of course, we came here and took up this homestead because we found there was, there were 160 acres we could file on here and still have some land that we called our own, although it was only grazing land. It wasn’t, we weren’t able to cultivate it.

SC: I don’t understand. When you first came to Montana, did you go to Salesville or someplace five miles from Salesville?

BC: We went to someplace five miles beyond Salesville, through Salesville and beyond.

SC: What direction is beyond?

BC: Well, if my directions are straight, I would say it was west of Salesville.

SC: Did it have a name, or does it have a name now?

BC: Well, it’s all part of Camp Creek, and yet it is five miles from where our homestead eventually was located.

SC: Now, who was it that came in your family at that time, when you came to Montana?

BC: There was my mother and father and myself. Mother and Father were quite young people then. I think my mother was about 28 years old, and my dad was about 31. I was four and a half.

SC: When was it that Roy was adopted?

BC: Well, that was when, he was adopted when I was about seven, so that would have been about two and a half years later.

SC: What did Grandpa do that first winter that he came to Montana?
BC: Well, we lived in a little cabin not far from a little log school house, and all that I can remember of that he did was just help the neighbors around. There wasn't much to do up in this part of the country at that time of the year. But then it was the following spring that we located the land that is now our, was later to be our homestead.

SC: Did Grandpa have a nest egg when he came out here?

BC: Yes, at, by the time he sold off everything that he had, he had $1,800.

SC: And then about when was it that you came out to the homestead on Camp Creek?

BC: Well, it was in the spring following the fall that we moved out here. That would have been in 1900.

SC: Spring of 1900?

BC: That's right.

SC: We're in the jeep right now to avoid having wind disturb the microphones on the tape recorders. But right after I left the rock lines, I mentioned the one which parallels the stream bed, and the two that, short lines, perpendicular that, off each end. What are those rocks?

BC: Those rocks were the foundation of the spot on which the homestead cabin was built.

SC: What is the scooped out place just south of the foundation?

BC: Well, that was a little place for a little yard, to have a level spot, in fact it was a leveling off of the land in order to set the house level, you see.

SC: I see. And then just immediately across the little coulee and stream bed, there is some dry laid rock walls. They look like they might be 18 feet by 12 feet or something like that originally. What are, what are those rock walls?

BC: Well, when we came here we decided, of course, we must have chickens and raise chickens. Everyone in Iowa from where we had come had raised, had chickens and furnished much of their own meat that way and their eggs, and so, my father found flat, as I remember, red rocks and he built this chicken house, thinking that we would have a very nice place for our chickens. But we discovered to our dismay and great disappointment that there were so many weasels around that they killed the chickens faster than we could raise them. So we had to give that up and we didn't have chickens after all. We couldn't even raise a garden because this was really dry land. It was high and dry just as the doctor had ordered. And we couldn't even raise a garden, it was so dry. So, we who had always had gardens, and lived on them much of the summer and fall, had to give up even a garden place.
SWC Did you try a garden, though?

BC: Yes, we tried it but it would just come up and finally dry out and was dead.

SC: In the bed of the stream, which is now essentially dry, although lots of green plants in this stream bed, there is between the house and chicken coop, a little puddle of water. I believe you said that was a spring that you used.

BPC Yes, I think when they were looking for a location for the log cabin which we erected, they were looking, of course, to get it close to a spring. And that was the spring, and my father dug it out and made a nice deep spring. I remember that it was quite a little decline from the door of our cabin down to the gulch in which the spring was located; so we soon got tired of carrying water up the hill and my father fixed up some kind of a pulley arrangement in which we could let a bucket down the hill by pulley into the spring and it would dip down and fill up with water, and then by pulley we could pull it up and to our kitchen door. So we had that quite convenient.

SC: Oh, very clever. Do you happen to recall how much water there was in the stream then?

BC: There wasn't much. A little more than there is now, perhaps, because there may have been a trickle down the stream. Now, as I remember when we were down there a while ago looking around, there was just a damp spot occasionally. I think there must be many springs located along there, but there was no real stream at that time.

SC: Even now, this has been one of the driest July and August that I remember for a long time, although June was very wet. So even now on a wetter year, there might be a little bit more water then than there is this year.

BC: I think so.

SC: You mentioned that you had a barn previously. Where was the barn from the house?

BC: Well, the barn was several rods on east of the house down the side of the gulch and at the foot of the hill or mountain, as we called it, to the south. We had a barn and a corral down there where we kept our horses that we drove and, of course, we didn't work horses here, because there was no farming done. But it was a very adequate little barn.

SC: And I think we saw the scooped out area which had been the barn, the other day when we were there, didn't we?

BC: Yes. We always had a cow that we milked and always had a horse we could run in to hitch up to our buggies so we could go to town, which was at that time Salesville, and to the church which was located just across the road from the little log cabin which was our schoolhouse.
SC: Did you have cattle up here?

BC: Yes, we ran cattle and raised some cattle, not in great numbers, but several.

SC: Did you have the 160 acres fenced in?

BC: Yes, it was fenced in and much of it ran up the hillsides, in fact, there was almost no level land, but it was very picturesque and pretty, we thought. And I even still think today while we're up here looking around that it's pretty and attractive.

SC: It is. Who built the log cabin?

BC: Well, of course, this was a little community all of itself. And at that time there were quite a number of people located here and there over this Camp Creek area, with their little homes nestled in the foot of the hills, close to some spring, probably. And when we came here, they were very glad to see us and we soon became acquainted and very good friends. And when the spring came that we were going to settle on this little homestead, they all got together and came up and the neighbors and friends, with my dad, built the house, the log cabin. And I remember we had a pot luck dinner and we had a lot of fun and a good time. And we were good friends. These few people up here were just like one big family and we enjoyed them.

SC: How long did it take to build the log cabin?

BC: Well, I do believe that it was, the outside of it, was built in a day, what my father needed help with, and the rest of it he completed himself later on as he could.

SC: What did the outside of the cabin look like?

BC: It was built of logs and I don't know even what kind of a roof it was, but it was a board roof of some kind, a lumber roof of some kind. And it was rough logs, they weren't hewn.

SC: You mean they weren't peeled either?

BC: That's right, they weren't peeled. But the inside, I remember, we covered with a lining, what they in those days called a house lining. It was white and it was all tacked on and it looked neat and clean and nice, made a nice appearance at that time.

SC: Do you recall if the ends of the logs were cut with a saw or an axe?

BC: I think they were cut with a saw. I think they slanted all the same way. I remember, as I saw it in my childhood, it was an attractive looking little house.
SC: Would you have any idea what the chinking between the logs was made of?

BC: I just can't tell you, but it was chinked and it was tight and warm, and we were very comfortable in it.

SWC How many rooms were there?

BC: Well, there were three rooms. The kitchen, which faced the west, and the living room which faced the south, and then the bedroom which faced the north. It was a comfortable little cabin.

SC: What was the floor made of?

BC: It was just plain boards. I remember in the living room, my mother had made homemade carpeting that I think was called woven carpeting, and then that covered our living room and bedroom floors and then in the kitchen it was just plain board floors which were smoothed and we kept scrubbed with lye until it just shone all the time.

SC: Were there cracks between the boards in the floor?

BC: They fit tightly. No, none to amount to anything if at all.

SC: You didn't have any trouble with animals or reptiles sneaking in then, huh?

BC: (laughs) No. Not even an ant could come through those floors.

SC: What were the windows like?

BC: Well, I remember in the kitchen, as it faced the west, it was, it seems to me, two quite nice size square windows, right together. And then in the living room, there was one big long window to the east. In the bedroom two smaller windows, facing the north, which were just like the ones in the kitchen.

SC: Were there shutters for these windows?

BC: No. Nothing like that. Never got shutters in that day.

SC: Curtains?

BC: Yes. Oh, yes, curtains. It was curtained and, in fact, we had it comfortably furnished and we were very comfortable in there. We had a stove, which we used only wood in, but it kept us warm and nice in the living room and then we had our little kitchen stove, which wasn't a range by any means, but was a good little stove. We were always warm and comfortable up here.
SC: The windows, I take it, had glass in them.

BC: Oh, yes, they were glass windows.

SC: You didn't have a fireplace it sounds like?

BC: No, we didn't have anything like that.

SC: Do you remember where Grandpa got the wood for the fuel?

BC: I don't remember anything about that, but I do know that he would have gone around on the hillsides around us and picked up dead wood for that.

SC: In pacing off the one wall of the house that is now still complete in outline, it seemed to me like it was probably about 35 feet long. Was the opposite dimension about the same size, or more or less?

BC: Well, it war, just, I would think maybe...No, I think you are about right. I think it would have been about the same.

SC: Was there only one door?

BC: No, we had the kitchen door, face the gulch, from where the spring water was, and then in the living room we had a door which faced the south mountain and also the little road, or pass, that passed between us and the mountain.

SC: What did you use for locks on your doors in those days?

BC: I don't remember that we locked our door. Maybe we did, but I don't recall that. (laughs)

SC: How did your mother make the rugs?

BC: They were what we called rag carpeting. And then they were, we sewed the rags out of different colors of cotton material, and then took them to someone who had a loom, who wove them by the yard. That's the way we made that carpet. They were used a good deal around at that time in this part of the country and in Iowa from where we came, also.

SC: Do you have any recollection at all of specific people that participated in raising the house here?

BC: Only of a few. I suppose if I had time enough to concentrate on it, I could remember a number of names, more than I can now. But I remember that one family was the Sam Pyfer family.
BC: I think it was P-Y-F-E-R, as I recall. Maybe it was P-Y-P-H-E-R, I’m not sure which it was. And then one was the John Collett family, and another, the Sam Collett family. And there was the Cephas Inabnit family and Harris Kirk.

BC: How do you spell Mr. Inabnit’s first name?

BC: C-E-P-H-A-S. Just like they did in Bible times. (laughs)

BC: Can you think of any of the others who were here when the house was built?

BC: Well, there was the Floyd Maryotts. I happen to remember them, and there was also a Charles Anceney family, but I don’t recall if they were here at the building of the little cabin or not.

SC: Was that Anceney or Anthony?

BC: A-N-C-E-N-E-Y. Anceney. He was one of the original owners of the Flying D Ranch, in which our homestead is now incorporated.

SC: Did Grandpa Catron ever try to cultivate any of this land on the quarter section?

BC: Whether or not he ever tried to cultivate it other than to attempt to raise a garden, I do not remember. I doubt very much, because we knew well enough from the way the garden acted, that we couldn’t cultivate it. No one around us could cultivate these hills. There was no level land here, you see.

SC: Were there any wild animals around here?

BC: We never saw any on our homestead here. But I remember when I was going to school, at the Camp Creek School, which was four miles, that I often was fearful when I’d get home at night after dark, be coming home at night after dark, that maybe something might come down out of the hills that were at least slightly forested, because I had known that just a little ways from us, maybe three or four miles over the hills, they had trapped three mountain lions. So I know they had them not far away, but I don’t think we had any here on our homestead that we ever knew of.

SC: You never saw any signs of bears, or anything?

BC: No, we never did, any signs of bears.
SC: As I recall, you used to have coyotes around here?

BC: Yes, we had coyotes. I remember that later on when my father decided that he must go down into the valley and buy up a quarter section of land that he could cultivate, in order that we would have a living, and he'd be gone through the week, and come home then over the weekend. My mother and I would be here alone in the cabin, and we were especially conscious of the coyotes. One would get on the hill to the south of us and one to the hill north of us, and they say two coyotes sound like a great group of them. And they would bark and howl back and forth to each other. It is the most lonesome sound in the whole world. And I remember one night when my mother and I were especially lonely and it was, real dark and the coyotes were howling and calling to each other back over our heads, from one hilltop to another, that we went out the front room door and we faced the south hill and just listened to that lonesome sound, and then pretty soon a hoot owl joined in and that did add to the misery of which we were not enjoying too much. (laughs) So we had coyotes, all right.

SWC Did the coyotes and the hoot owl seem to respond back and forth to each other?

BC: I don't know. I just imagine that hoot owl was protesting the noise that the coyotes made. (laughs)

SC: What was this area called, this immediate homestead area?

BC: Well, this little, if you could call it valley or pass maybe, where our cabin was located, because you see we were down in the pass where the hills rising up on either side of us. This little pass was called Fox Tail Pass. I suppose there was a day when many little foxes went through, but that was before our day.

SC: Do you remember what the barn looked like?

BC: I don't remember much about the barn. We didn't have a great deal of use for a barn, so we only kept a cow or two which we milked and the horses which we drove. But I do remember we had a corral and I think my dad could run in the horses or cows, whichever he chose to do, when he happened to want them corralled, but I don't remember much about what it looked. But if I were, this would not be authentic, but my impression is that it was probably made of slab lumber.

SC: Now, as I recall, you didn't have very many neighbors in this area, but I believe that there was one relative that lived very close by. Could you tell us about that?

BC: Yes. Would you like me to tell you what our neighbors were before I speak about my grandmother that lived here? Well, down to the east of us and a little to the north, three miles down, there was an old French couple by the name of LaPen. And she could not talk English at all, and he could talk very little English, so that they weren't any company for us and we seldom
got together, but I remember one time, as I was mentioning this morning, that the old fellow came up to see us. My dad happened to be gone, and he and my mother tried to talk together and she said to him, "Mr. LaPen, how is Mrs. LaPen?" And he thought a minute and he said, "Oh, Miss LaPen, he is sick today." So we didn't get too much company from them. But I remember down the bend east of us, and around for about three miles, through fences or through gates, which I never could go alone, but my mother and I together could go, there was a family by the name of Cephas Inabnit, formerly from Iowa, and the community in which my folks lived. We didn't get to see them too often because in that day and age to round up the horse and hitch it up and go make that trip there and back was quite a little task. But we were always glad to know that they were there. And then around from where we lived, east and then south if we went far enough, say five miles, we would get to Harris Kirk's. And a little farther on were the Maryotts, and then further on, let's see, what direction would that be, further on west there were the Colletts and other families of Inabnits, as I recall. So that our neighbors were very far away and we didn't too often get together with them except on Sunday, and that was really a nice time. We always made a nice time out of that, but while we still lived here my Grandmother Smith, was my father's mother, came out to visit us with her son and daughter, Alida and Oscar, who were neither one married, and were still in school in Simpson College trying to get their degrees there. They came out with her one summer. And we learned that over here there was a, some unwell, some land that hadn't been chosen yet as a home site and that they could take up as a homestead. So my grandmother filed on that and it didn't take her so long because, I think, she had some Civil War widow's rights that enabled her to settle up sooner than we did because we had to be here about five years before we could settle up, but I think she settled up in a year and a half or two years, and so she and my aunt lived over there about, I would judge, a good half mile, or more, maybe three-quarters of a mile, from us. It was around the bend of the hill south of us. And they had a little cabin, just a tiny little cabin and my grandmother kept house and my aunt taught school part of the time while she was here, at our Camp Creek School, which was a little school house about four miles from us, a little log school house, and she and I used to drive to that school. My dad would hitch up the horse and buggy and go over, he and I would go over and pick her up, and then she and I would drive on to the little Camp Creek School. About four miles of driving we had. And, of course, at that time we weren't so much alone because we had the company of our Smith relatives.

SC: That would have been about three years, you say?

BC: Well, since I am not completely sure, but they weren't here anyways near all the time that we were. I would come nearer saying maybe it was two years.

SWC Was Aunt Alida here most all of that time?

BC: No, not all that time, but much of that time. And I remember part of the time she and my grandmother through the winter went down to Salesville and Aunt Alida taught the school at Salesville. And one, that winter I went down there and lived with them and went to school at
Salesville. But most of the year, or I'll say half of the year, I think they lived here on the homestead in order to be legal in their requirements for proving up on it.

SC: How much of the time was Uncle Oscar here?

BC: You see, I can't remember exactly about that, but I think through one summer at least, he was here, and taught a little school someplace down in the valley, I think on beyond Salesville. And he didn't have any way of getting around much but he did have a bicycle or at least he borrowed a bicycle. And I think it was a borrowed bicycle, for if I remember, my father took him down to this school, and then once in a while of a weekend he would ride the bicycle all the miles it was, which it must have been 12 or 13 or 14 miles, up to Camp Creek here to spend the weekend with my grandmother and aunt and our family. It was quite a task for him, but they were in school and working their way through school and they were very anxious to do everything they could to make a little more money so they could go on to school. And that was what he did that one summer.

SC: Just to keep this straight for future generations, although both you and I obviously know, but the grandmother that you speak of was Annie Catherine Smith?

BC: That's right.

SC: She was your father's mother?

BC: That's right. Her name was Smith because of her second marriage.

SC: And Henry Catron, your father, was a half-brother to Alida and Oscar?

BC: That's right.

SC: Then when Grandma Smith got her patent for this land did she sell it and leave?

BC: Yes, she sold it and went back to Iowa where she and Aunt Alida and Uncle Oscar spent much of their time in Indianola at Simpson College. She kept house for them while they went to school. And with her help they were able to finance their way. Finally each got a degree, Aunt Alida from Simpson College got her B.A. and I think Uncle Oscar had two years of credit at Simpson and went on to Ann Arbor, Michigan, from which he got his medical degree.

SC: And both of them also received law degrees and were admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States.

BC: That's right, and then, I think, Aunt Alida went to Ann Arbor and got her Master's Degree, if I remember, her major was in Latin and her minor in Greek.
SC: Aunt Alida was with me the day I was admitted to the Supreme Court and moved my admission.

BC: That's interesting, isn't it?

SC: And both Alida and Oscar also have honorary doctorates now.

BC: That's something that they can be proud of.

SC: How long did the Catron family stay on this homestead?

BC: Well, as I have mentioned before, I think I mentioned before, we went down to, my dad went down to the valley, the Gallatin Valley, and bought a quarter section of land which was irrigated where he could raise hay and wheat and oats. And he would do that in the summertime, one year, at least, my mother and Roy and I went down with him, but most of the time my mother and Roy and I were up here at Camp Creek proving up on the homestead. But all together before we could really legally prove up, we had to spend five years.

SC: Where was this school that you went to when you lived on the homestead?

BC: Well, it was four miles from our homestead here, around the hills and toward Salesville.

SC: Was it in Camp Creek valley?

BC: No, I don't think you could say it was. It was up on a piece of land that I think you would call "a bit of bench land" using Montana terminology

SC: Did the school have a name?

BC: We just called it the Camp Creek School. It was a little log cabin and it wasn't very big. I don't think it would hold more than 12 seats, and the teacher's desk and then one bench up in front where we went up to recite our lessons.

SC: It was obviously a one room school?

BC: Yes, it was one room. It was a dark little place. I remember when I first went I had a bad time, and we've all laughed a number of times since then about that first year. The teacher told one of the neighbors, Mavis Inabnit, her name was, that Pearl was kind of dumb, she wasn't, she wouldn't ever be able to learn a great deal. (laughs) I remember even yet about the front page of our little reader. It had a picture of a cow drawn in the center, and up and down each side, and across the top and across the bottom was printed "see my cow", "see my cow". And I think I was on that for at least two weeks. (laughs) I later sort of redeemed myself on that, thank goodness. (laughs)
SC: How was the school heated?

BC: Oh, a big stove right in the center and, as I recall, it was warm for it was a little log schoolhouse and these log buildings, when they were built right, were warm.

SC: How did you get back and forth to school when you didn't ride with Aunt Alida?

BC: Well, I went on horseback. In order to get there by horseback, I had to go around where there were no gates to open so I'd have to leave our little homestead cabin here and start out east and then after a couple miles or so I'd turn south and go a mile or two, a mile probably, and then turn again the direction of which I can't even tell you right now, and go about half or three-quarters of a mile and I finally got there by horseback. I had many interesting experiences going by horseback. I think the first horse I rode was a great big work horse called Nell, and she was safe, but we went around and had to go down steep hills, and up steep hills. But something happened, I don't know what it was, I didn't have Nell to go on. Maybe my dad sold her, I don't know.

Later on my dad got me a pony, a little white pony, mean as she could be, pretty. She had one blue eye and one pink one and she was part Indian and part Shetland. And sometimes she'd go and sometimes she wouldn't. So I can remember that one time, when I was coming home from this little log schoolhouse, one winter day, and my dad had had occasion to be down in the valley at the ranch at that time so that he wasn't at home, but she got just about two miles of home and she decided to balk, that meant that she just wasn't going to go any further. The snow was pretty deep and it was cold and it was dark and I was afraid. I could look up to the timber above us on those foothills around the foot of which I was travelling with her, and I was afraid. I kept trying to whip her with a little quirt that my dad had made, but every time I would hit her with the quirt, she'd balk and I couldn't get her to go on. I waited about half an hour before I got off. Finally I decided I would have to get off and go on, so I got off and started on leading her, and I remember I was so mad at her to think she wouldn't go on then I had to lead her, and I was so mad that I began crying and I was afraid at the same time.

So as we got along, I suppose possibly a half a mile from where I lived, why, I could see something moving down the road. It was snowing, the snow was deep. Moving very slowly. Of course, my first thought was animal, a wild animal. I think I was always more afraid of that than I think I had need to be, but since they had trapped three mountain lions not very far from us, at that time, I always imagined that maybe it was something like that that I was looking for. Well, anyway, I tried frantically to get on her and she wouldn't let me and she'd reach around to bite me and besides I wasn't big enough to reach the stirrups so I could get a hold of the horn even of the saddle. And just as I was wondering what in the world I could do, why I heard a voice call, "Pearl, is that you?" It was my mother coming to meet me because it was two hours after dark. She was dragging through the snow, dragging this little two year old baby along with her who was ill, and hoping that they would run across me and that if anything had happened
to me, why, they'd find out about it. But that was all that she needed, she kept me home then until my dad came home and then after that he went down into the valley and found a 16 year old lad who was interested in working some place for his board and room, and he had a pony, so he came up and lived with us the rest of the school year and he'd take me back and forth, and I was secure that way.

SC: About when would that have been?

BC: Well, that was when I was about seven years old. That would have been about 1902.

SC: Did most of the other kids that attended the little school ride horseback?

BPC No, I don't recall that any of them rode horseback. The most of them could walk. Of course, in those days, kids weren't concerned too much about walking and they could walk two, three miles and most of them had several in the family. I was alone, which made it a little more difficult for me. And I remember when I would get there with my pony the big boys of the school would come out and unsaddle her and feed her. I think I usually took along oats. When I was ready to go back, they would saddle her and lift me up on her and we'd start home then. I'd start home by myself.

SC: Robin would like to ask a question, I think.

Robin Conner: What was wrong with your little brother? *(The tape that I am using for this transcription did not properly record all of Robin's question, but the way it is quoted above contains the essence. SWC)*

BC: He had tonsillitis that time.

SC: Where was the church that you folks attended?

BC: Well, it was a building, a frame building that the neighbors got together and built, just across the road from the schoolhouse. It was really, it made a great contribution to the community. It was our social get together, and the community would gather there on Sundays and we would visit and we would go home with each other for dinner. And, oh, I remember that with the greatest of warm feeling! And we enjoyed so much our church experience as well as our social life there at that church. I think every two weeks the minister came out from Salesville and he would preach. His name was Merring, Reverend Merring.

SC: How do you spell that?

BC: I think it was M-E-R-R-I-N-G. And then the other week I think we gathered and had Sunday school. Part of the time my dad was superintendent of the Sunday school. At Christmas time we had the nicest get-togethers which we enjoyed, oh, so much. I remember one Christmas, when

Bessie Pearl Catron Connor Interview, OH 082-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana–Montana.
I was just a little girl, a little tiny girl, and we had all, the whole community had gathered into this church for a Christmas program. And there was the Christmas tree, the evergreen tree up in one corner at the front of the church and it was all trimmed and decorated and everyone then brought all their gifts. Even if they’d been going to give some member of their family a rocking chair, they brought it to the Christmas tree to present to that particular member. And I remember that time Mr. Kirk, my little girlhood friend whose name was Marguerite, it was her father that was Santa Claus. He was a very good Santa Claus, and he would reach up and get something off of the tree and call "Fred Brown" and then Fred Brown would go up and get whatever it was, and, oh, everybody was so delighted! And I remember as I looked up at the tree I saw a little black Negro dolly and it was dressed in red calico and, oh, I thought, if I just had that little Negro dolly. But, of course, it wouldn’t be mine. But, oh, how I did covet that little Negro dolly. And he just didn’t give it to anyone. He didn’t call off for so long. Finally he called off, or picked up the little Negro dolly and then he called off the name, "Pearl Catron". Oh, I was so delighted! I rushed up there and I gathered that dolly into my arms and I marched back to the front door and back again, very much to my mother’s chagrin because she was ashamed that I was so excited, (laughs) but that was one of my experiences in that little church. But we did have some such nice times there.

SC: Did that church belong to any denomination?

BC: I don't know about that part of it. I was too little to know. I don't think it did. It was just a little neighborhood church and I don't think anyone ever thought of calling it any denomination, because folks in that neighborhood were from every denomination. And in my opinion, it was just a little neighborhood church.

SC: Do you have any idea if there are any remains yet of either the school house or the church?

BC: No, there are none at all. A number of years ago, I drove up there. I was planning to come on here to the homestead, but it was fenced in then because even at that time the homestead was a part of the Flying D Ranch. But I drove up there and I could get as far as the old location of the church and the school house, but there wasn’t even one board left, as far as I know, of the church, nor one log even of the schoolhouse. Whatever happened to them, I don’t know. We moved down into the valley when I was eight or nine years old and I never knew what happened to them. One interesting thing that we had so much fun with when we were there at the schoolhouse. Back of the schoolhouse there was quite a hill, that was just straight down with no obstruction, no trees, no rocks, no anything. And the big boys in the school built a kind of a sled-like arrangement and every member of the school would pile on that and away we’d go down the hill. Oh, it was so much fun! And sometimes we would fall off and all the screaming and hollering and laughing. It was so much fun and even yet today, my friend Marguerite Kirk, whom I mentioned a while ago, and I speak about that, how much fun we had sliding down the hill, all of us together, falling all over each other.

SC: Who were your girlhood friends when you were out on the homestead?

Bessie Pearl Catron Connor Interview, OH 082-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana–Montana.
BC: Well, there was just three of us that were about of an age. One was Marguerite Kirk, who now is in Bozeman, has a bookstore there, and she and I get to see each other every now and then. And further on beyond the Kirks was a little girl whom I thought a great deal of, was Ruth Maryott, and the three of us would get together and just have the most wonderful times. Later on, I left and I never saw much of Ruth Maryott until she passed away quite a number of years ago. But she was a lovely little girl. We used to go there every once in a while and stay all night and enjoy ourselves visiting. That was the way we had to do in order to see each other except on Sundays.

SC: Do you have any idea how often you would be able to get together with other children just for play?

BC: Well, very, very seldom, just for play, unless it was at school, just once in a great while, maybe a couple of times, or at the most three times in a year. I can remember of our folks going over to the Harris Kirk's where my little friend, Marguerite, lived and we had spent the day, possibly it was Sunday, I don't know, but we had spent the day there and had such a nice time with them, and Marguerite and I had played all day long. Oh, what a nice time it was and how I enjoyed so much getting with another little girl. And I remember the time came when my mother said, "Well, now Pearl, come and get your wraps on, we must go home." I can remember even today of crying like my heart would break, and can remember yet how badly I felt just to think how long it would be till I'd get to see my little friend, Marguerite, or get to play with another little girl, so it was a long time in between times.

SC: How long was it entirely then that you stayed up here, the five years?

BC: We stayed up here five years before we could legally prove up on the place, but we were gone off and on to the valley where we had this ranch where we really made our living.

SC: Do you recall when you sold the homestead?

BC: Well, when we proved up on it, which would probably have been in 1905, we sold it then at that time. And we got the magnificent sum of $10.00 an acre, and it amused me when I was telling you about it while ago, Stuart, and you thought we had gotten a pretty good price for it. (laughs)

SC: I don’t think it is worth any more than ten bucks an acre now. (laughs) Where did you go when you left here?

BC: Well, when we left the Camp Creek hills, we moved down to the Gallatin Valley where we had this ranch, which my dad, we called it at first the Middle Creek Ranch because it was on Middle Creek and then my dad later named it the Elkhorn Ranch, which was quite a productive good 160 acres where he made a nice living out of it. And then later on, I suppose when I was
ten or eleven, possibly eleven years old, we moved to Bozeman. We lived there then for a
number of years. In fact, until he bought a ranch out, see, what direction it would be, it'd be
north of Bozeman, about two and three quarter miles north of Bozeman, which we, for lack of a
better name for it, called it by the name of the man we bought of it, the Brooks Ranch. And so
then later on, we moved out to the Brooks Ranch, although we did move back and forth some
and I don't remember, being just a kid, I don't remember for what reason we didn't stay on the
ranch. But he owned it then for 52 years.

SC: Is that the ranch that you're now selling to the people in Bozeman?

BC: Yes, that's right, that's the same ranch. Then I inherited the ranch from my father and now
Rolfe and Wood are buying it.

SC: As I recall, the first time that you visited the homestead after you left was in 1917, the
summer that you and Dad were married.

BC: Yes, that is the, I think that was the first time that I was back there. I never remembered
being back here and seeing the cabin again after we left it. When we came back the summer of
1917, when Grandma and Grandpa Catron brought us up here, the cabin was then gone. And in
fact, it had very much the same appearance that it has now. Someone who had bought it in the
meantime had moved the cabin away. The chicken house walls were pretty well down. You
could still see where the walls were and still quite a number of stones up and the sort of
scooped out place where the house was, the rocks on which the house had been built were still
there as they are now. It hasn't changed much in all these years.

SC: Were you back again after 1917?

BC: I tried to one time, drive in, but it had been sold to the Flying D Ranch and the new owners
had fenced off the land and we couldn't get in.

SC: Then when you and I were here last week, that was the first time since 1917 that you'd
been back to the homestead?

BC: That was, since 1917. What would that be, 53 years, wouldn't it. But as strangely enough,
and I was surprised myself, the hills look so natural I could almost imagine it was only yesterday
that I had lived here and had climbed these hills and had these experiences that I have told you
about a number of times.

[Break in audio]
SC: Why don’t you tell Robin about the time that you and your little girl friend were frightened in the hole up on the hillside here above us?

BC: (laughs) Well, that was lots of fun, Robin. I will have a lot of fun telling you about that. Well, you see on this hill to the south of us, there are those three huge rocks that stand out probably 35, 40, or 50y feet into the air, side by side. In the first one here there was a hole that seemed like it might have been a hole that animals would have wintered in. It ran clear back into that rock, and turned and curved and, of course, we couldn’t tell just where it went to, but we always imagined it was a wintering place, for maybe bears. Well, it was always a lot of fun for anyone who was here to play with me, and me, and go up to the hill and go up there and stand in front of that hole, just imagining how scared we would be if an animal would come out. Well, one day some girl and her mother came here to spend the day with us and she and I decided we’d go up there to that rock and look in the hole and have the fun of being scared. And when we got up there and got in front of that hole, sure enough, we could hear something walking in there and we knew they were coming toward us and were we ever really frightened. And we screamed and down the hill we came pell-mell just as fast as we could come and about the time we got half way down to the house, why here ran the dog out ahead of us. And it was the dog who had gone ahead of us and gone back in there, (laughs) It was lots of fun, but we had some other nice times up there up on that hill, though. Sometimes on Sunday afternoon Grandpa and Grandma and I would climb that hill in the springtime and the most beautiful wild flowers grew up there amongst the pines and around about those rocks that were up there, and there were buttercups and the shooting stars and the yellow bells and other of our Rocky Mountain flowers. It was just beautiful and we had the nicest time sometimes, Sunday afternoons, going up there just for the pure pleasure of seeing the beauty of that hillside. The one across from us, the one that was to the north of our cabin, was just a bare hill. I never did, all the time I lived here, climb that. But many times I was up on this other hill, because it was such a pretty hill.

SC: As I recall, it wasn’t always wild flowers and dogs that were frightening you. It seems to me like I remember you mentioning that there were some legitimate frights thrown into you and your mother when you lived here.

BC: Well, maybe you are thinking of one time in particular that I remember, and it happened more than once, of the cattle rustlers driving their loot through our little canyon here. My mother and I were alone that night because my father was down in the valley at the Middle Creek Ranch working on that and we became aware that there was a tramp, tramp, tramp of animals going past the little path or road that was on the hill above our place, going around the
hill. And we went around to the kitchen door so they wouldn't see us open the door, and went around the house to see what it was, and here it was the cattle rustlers who had been out that night and gathered up loot as they went along, probably two or three cows and horses, too, from each place, and taking them on, as I recall, about four or five miles around the hill to the west and south of us where they had a lair where they sort of cached away or hid away the stock until they could get them down to market. And so that night we watched them go through and listened to them and we thought probably they had some of ours. So, sure enough, when my dad came home, lie discovered that two or three cattle had been taken from our group, too. But they were the very last of the cattle rustlers in this part of the country, and as I remember before we even left Camp Creek, they had been arrested and tried and sentenced to 14 years in prison. They were sentenced to serve their time for cattle rustling. And I think after that not very many people had the courage to try and do that.

SC: Did you ever see the place that they hid their cattle?

BC: I never saw that, I just heard about it.

SC: When you first came to this area, were there any improvements to the land around this Camp Creek area except the few neighbors that you mentioned?

BC: No, not a thing I can think of.

SC: Just plain old virgin country in those days?

BC: Just virgin country. And I think we even had to fence in our homestead land.

SC: You've mentioned in the past the time that Grandpa had trouble with his horse at night and his horse broke his leg and what happened that night and the following day or days. Would you just tell the whole story to us again?

BC: Well, this was an incident that occurred while we were up here on the homestead and during the time that he had the ranch and was working the ranch down on the Middle Creek and I remember that we were looking for him home that night, which was probably Saturday night, and he came by horseback, and it was quite a little journey down there, it was probably 15 or 16 miles from our place here, maybe 17. Of course, going by horseback that was quite a journey, so we didn't expect him home until late at night, but my mother and I were waiting for him to get here before we retired that night. About ten o'clock he hadn't come yet. But suddenly my mother came to me and she shook me and said, "Pearl, Pearl, I hear your dad." And I listened, and way, way in the distance I could hear a sound very faintly, "Lucy, Lucy", and she said, "Pearl, there is something wrong, we'll have to go and see."

So away we went down the road toward where he would have to come over in order to get home, and she was calling all the time, answering him, "Henry, where are you?" After while we
heard him again and we knew that he was way down the road probably a good quarter of a mile from our house. We got down there and here he was lying in the road and the horse which he had been riding had fallen in a badger hole and had fallen on his ankle and broken his ankle badly. It was frightened, of course, and he'd fallen off the horse and it had jumped up and run up on the hilltop above, and there he was. He had tried to crawl but his ankle hurt him so badly he just couldn't crawl any further. So then we had to decide what we would do and we decided that I would stay with him and that my mother would come home and get something that would take the place of a crutch. So she got the broomstick and the mop and she came back and then he walked, using them for crutches, the rest of the distance until we finally got here to the house. He was in such agony going through all that experience, of course, he just felt like he couldn't stand the pain any longer. He wanted my mother to let me go through the field past the hills to this neighbor, which was three miles around the hills from us, and see if they wouldn't go to Salesville and get the doctor, which was Doctor Safely.

My mother was afraid to let me do it. "No," she said, "this time of night, I'm afraid to let her do it." So he just had to stick it out until morning. So when morning came, she went up on the hill and got the horse that had fallen in the badger hole the night before, and hitched it up to the buggy, and he managed somehow or other to get in the buggy and we started to Salesville, nine miles away, to get help with that broken ankle. And about the time we got to the first bridge, which I'll just guess was a mile from Salesville, we saw the doctor coming just tearing, two horse team just going past us as fast as he could go. They yelled and shouted and waved their hands and called to him, "Doctor Safely, Doctor Safely", and so he stopped and they told him what had happened. And so he got out some splints and some bandaging and he bandaged, he set that ankle as my dad sat in the buggy, and put on the splints and bandaged up that ankle, and we turned around and went home again. (laughs) And he got over that and never even limped. (laughs) So that was one of our harrowing experiences here.

SC: Robin, do you want to ask a question? Go ahead.

BC: What is it, honey?

Robin Conner: Do you know where the doctor was going in such a hurry?

BC: There was someone out in the country that was real sick. It might have been someone that was going to have a baby. And he was in a hurry to get there.

SC: You have mentioned once or twice in the past about the Christmas dinners at the Kirks' house, Mother. I'd like you to tell us about that, too.

BC: Well, they were quite an occasion. And it was real nice of the Kirks, to invite us as many times as they did at Christmas time and even sometimes at Thanksgiving time, and they were the ones that had the big house in the community. It was a great big red stone house with many bedrooms and big living rooms and a big kitchen and dining room and it was always so
much fun to go there. Well, I remember one Christmas in particular that they invited us there. And they had come from the East where they had had great times over the holiday seasons and they still liked to carry out the spirit: of the times that they had in their old family home in Pennsylvania. So I remember this time Mrs. Kirk had roasted a big, great big turkey and, oh, she had cranberries, and she had mince pie and mashed potatoes and gravy and many just delicious kinds of food on the table. It was just groaning with lovely food. And Mr. Kirk on those occasions served. And I remember him standing up at the foot of the table, as the host, and flourishing his carving knife and saying a lot of funny things to us. And oh, my, how that did interest me. I was just enthralled with it. And then he served the plates and passed them around and what a feast we had. Oh, it was lots of fun to go to the Kirks' on these special occasions. And then, of course, Marguerite and I always had so much fun playing together. So it's no wonder I cried when I had to leave there, when our visit was over.

SC: Do you have any idea what year it was, this particular Christmas dinner that you have mentioned?

BC: Well, I think it was about the time I was seven, the Christmas I was seven years old, so that made it about 1902.

SC: You started to tell us earlier about a 4th of July celebration that you recalled in this area, too.

BC: Oh, yes. The summer after we came here, which would have been the summer of 1900, the community, which included many, many miles, decided to have a community, it was more than Camp Creek, it was the whole, what will I say, the whole south and west end of the valley, decided to have a picnic up West Gallatin Canyon, at the dam. You see, there was a dam there which had been made in order to push irrigating water down into the valley. Well, we all gathered there and it was a long, long way to get there. For us, I think it was, oh, how far, it was probably 16 miles or more. Well, we all went and took our picnic dinners. And from all around, miles and miles, we saw people we'd never seen before and people maybe we'd only seen once or twice before, but we knew about them through the conversations of our friends and neighbors that had been in contact with them. And oh, what a time we had! It's one of the outstanding events of my childhood, and what a dinner. Everything you could think of they brought to that dinner. They had even white table cloths, laid end to end, and laid out their food. Oh, what a wonderful time we had, visiting with everyone. It was really a great experience. And now that road, the road then was on the, let's see, what end would it be, it would have been the, well, going up toward what is now West Yellowstone, it was on the left hand side of the river. Now that road is only a path and the highway is on the right hand side of the river. But that was a wonderful time, cause that was very, very seldom that anything like that happened at this time in this valley.

SC: When was that?
BC: That was in 1900. And the way we got there was with horse and buggy.

SC: Do you have any idea how far it was from here?

BC: Well, didn’t I mention that a little while ago, that I thought it was 16 or 17, might have even been 18 miles from here. But we started in the morning, and we got home late at night.

SC: What did they do for recreation there besides talk?

BC: I think it was just talk because they were so anxious to visit because they didn’t get to do that in those days. They didn’t need any other recreation, but just to get all acquainted again and find out what happened in the family since the last they seen, maybe two or three years ago.

SC: Can you think of any interesting things that took place, attitudes which people had in the homestead days around here?

BC: Well, I think there were many things, but right at this particular moment I don’t, know that anything comes to me. But it’s, it gives me a nostalgic feeling now to come back after all these 70 years and come through this area and find all these people gone. The hills are still here, and the rocks and the trees, and the gulches, but the people are not here. It really gives me a sadness, a feeling of sadness. After you and I were here, Stuart, last week, and looked this over, I went home and I had lived so vividly the days of my childhood that I was thoroughly homesick.

SC: It strikes me that there weren’t very many people around here when you lived here, certainly. But actually, there are fewer now than there was 70 years ago.

BC: Well, you see, this Flying D Ranch incorporates sections and sections, and even miles and miles of this land and people aren’t living on it, with the automobiles that they have. They don’t live here, they live outside, where it’s more thickly populated, and they drive in to look after the ranch.

SC: Right. Well, Mother, it’s been a great experience for me coming out with you and seeing this area that we’ve heard about so much and I hope that our various descendants will enjoy these tapes which we have been making, and possibly the photos to go with the tapes, and that they will have some appreciation that everything just didn’t drop into their laps. It was earned the hard way and over a considerable period of time.

BC: That’s the way with civilization, isn’t it? Almost every part of the country that has grown to be useful, fine and developed country, has come about through many experiences that most people who enjoy it little imagine.

SC: Yes. Well, I guess that we will then stop our conversation.