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Interviewee: Thyra Haugen
Interviewer: Mary Melcher
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Note: When this interview was conducted, the interviewee requested to remain anonymous in the transcript and audio. Archives and Special Collections has chosen to lift this restriction now that the interviewee is deceased.

Mary Melcher: Mrs. Haugen, you said you were from Copenhagen?

Thyra Haugen: Yes.

MM: When did your family come over to America?

TH: I think it was...let’s see...1800 and...1800 and 90 something.

MM: Were you a young girl then?

TH: Well, I was child.

MM: And you lived in Minnesota when you came?

TH: Minneapolis.

MM: Did you live in a Danish community?

TH: No, we lived in Minneapolis.

MM: Were there other Danes in your community?

TH: Not many.

MM: Not many. What did your father do to make a living?

TH: He was a kind of a bookkeeper.

MM: Did it take a while to learn how to speak English?

TH: Well, they learned that in Denmark.

MM: Oh, they did. There were how many children in your family when you were growing up?
TH: When I was growing there were six of us...

MM: Did you have certain chores that you did around the house?

TH: ...and I was the youngest.

MM: You were the youngest. What type of chores did you have to do around the house?

TH: Help out.

MM: Did the boys have different chores than the girls?

TH: Yes.

MM: What type of things did they do?

TH: Piled wood and carried it upstairs – oh, everything.

MM: Do you remember how you were disciplined as a child?

TH: What was that?

MM: How you were disciplined?

TH: My mother disciplined me. She wasn’t very strict.

MM: What type of social events did your family participate in?

TH: We didn’t have any.

MM: You didn’t? Did you go to church functions or anything like that?

TH: We didn’t go to church. We were Lutherans, but we didn’t attend church.

MM: So, you went to grade school in Minneapolis?

TH: What was that?

MM: Did you go to grade school there in Minneapolis?

TH: Yep.
MM: Were there any books or musical instruments around your house when you were growing up?

TH: When I was growing, no. We didn’t have any money.

MM: And then you went to work after grade school?

TH: Let’s see – yes.

MM: Where did you work?

TH: It the big – It was a store in Minneapolis.

MM: You were a clerk?

TH: Well, I was kind of a run around. I was just a kid.

MM: What other types of jobs were available for teenagers, then?

TH: Well, there was the clerking and then the jobs like I had. I don’t know. There were a lot of jobs.

MM: There were a lot of jobs if you needed one?

TH: Clerks.

MM: You came to Montana in 1897?

TH: Yes.

MM: You came with your husband, is that right?

TH: Yes.

MM: How many years were you married before you came out to Montana?

TH: We were just married.

MM: You were just married. Had you met your husband there in Minneapolis? How old were you when you married?

TH: Nineteen.
MM: When you had been dating your husband did you ever date with a chaperon or anything like that?

TH: Use a chaperone?

MM: Did you go to dances and...?

TH: No, we did other things.

MM: What would you do during dates?

TH: Oh, just go to shows.

MM: Why did you decide to come to Montana?

TH: Because he got a job. He couldn’t get a job in Minneapolis.

MM: It was a job working in a store?

TH: Yes.

MM: So, did he know people that were out here? Is that how he got the job?

TH: No, through a salesman.

MM: Do you remember in Minneapolis if young women were considered old maids if they didn’t marry?

TH: Did I consider...

MM: No...well, were young women considered old maids when they didn’t marry?

TH: Yes.

MM: Do you know at what age it was?

TH: Oh, around 25.

MM: Did most of the women marry that you know – that you knew?

TH: Most of them did, yes.

MM: Do you remember many women going to universities, or anything like that?
TH: That wasn’t my class. That was a different class.

MM: Most of the women that you knew were working?

TH: Yes.

MM: And they were working as secretaries and clerks and things like that?

TH: Yes, we were all working girls.

MM: So, what were your first impressions of Montana when you came here?

TH: I loved it.

MM: You loved it?

TH: Yes.

MM: What did you like about it?

TH: The mountains.

MM: The wide-open spaces?

TH: Yes. Yes, I’d like to point that out.

MM: So, you lived in Choteau when you first came?

TH: No, we lived in Great Falls.

MM: And was that mainly a cattle-raising area right around there?

TH: Was it a what?

MM: Mainly an agricultural area—cattle raising?

TH: Well, I don’t know...Yes, somewhat...and Charlie Russell was there, and fascinated me.

MM: Did you know him or...?

TH: What?
MM: Did you know him?

TH: No, I didn’t know him anymore than he was an artist—cowboy artist.

MM: You just like his work a lot?

TH: What?

MM: You liked his paintings a lot?

TH: Oh, yes. Yes, his paintings are nice.

MM: About how many people were in Great Falls when you first came?

TH: Oh, I’d say about 12,000.

MM: Did you work, too?

TH: When they—

MM: Pardon?

TH: When they needed help, I was an extra.

MM: Then you would go work in your husband’s store?

TH: Well, he and I worked together.

MM: And you had seven children? You have seven children? Did you have your babies with a doctor or in a hospital or—

TH: At home.

MM: At home. Did a midwife come in?

TH: And the doctor.

MM: You came out to Montana on a stage, is that right?

TH: No. No, we came out on the train.

MM: Oh, you did. Had the train just begun running then?
TH: Well, they ran, but they had begun sooner than that.

MM: Had you seen any of the posters that advertised Montana through the...I...?

TH: Yes.

MM: You had seen some of them?

TH: Yes.

MM: Did you come on special rates on the train? Someone else told me there were special...?

TH: No.

MM: When was it that you moved to Choteau?

TH: Let’s see. We were three years in Great Falls, and then we went to Choteau.

MM: And about how many people lived there?

TH: Oh, about a 1,000. Maybe not so many.

MM: Did you like Choteau?

TH: Well, it was an awful small place. I liked it after I got acquainted. It’s an awful little place...after Minneapolis.

MM: How long did you live in Choteau then?

TH: Always.

MM: Always?

TH: Always, until we came down here about three years ago.

MM: You said you were in the Eastern Star?

TH: Yes.

MM: What sort of activities did the Eastern Star have?

TH: I didn’t hear that.
MM: What sort of activities did the Eastern Star have?

TH: Oh, it a ladies organization for the Masons, and we always did just the ordinary social activities.

MM: When you were in Great Falls did the community celebrate the Fourth of July and holidays like that?

TH: Yes.

MM: There would be parades and?

TH: There was a big parade.

MM: Did you celebrate holidays and birthdays in your home?

TH: Well, we always remembered them. We never celebrated, exactly.

MM: Did you have a Christmas tree on Christmas?

TH: Yes...always.

MM: Did Choteau have a hospital?

TH: In Choteau?

MM: Yes.

TH: Well, they had a kind of a...yes a...not hospital as you think of it, but there was a hospital.

MM: Where was it at?

TH: In one of the buildings on Main Street.

MM: And there was some nurses and doctors there?

TH: Yes. Oh, you were well taken care of.

MM: You told me that the women had a parade when they got the vote.

TH: Yes they did.

MM: That was in Great Falls?
TH: Yes.

MM: You were living in Great Falls at that time?

TH: Yes.

MM: Did you go to the parade?

TH: I went to every parade that came along [laughs].

MM: But you hadn’t helped in the...

TH: No.

MM: You weren’t organizing?

TH: No. I wasn’t acquainted.

MM: Did you know many women who were involved in organizing to get the Suffrage Amendment?

TH: No. No, I wasn’t much of an organizer until...I did some organizing after our...in Eastern Star, but not before.

MM: Did you start voting after women got the vote?

TH: Yes, right away.

MM: You were happy about that?

TH: Well, it didn’t impress me too much, but my husband was quite enthused.

MM: Did you and your husband talk politics together?

TH: We didn’t talk too much. Somewhat yes.

MM: Well, what did you think of the Prohibition Movement?

TH: Well, let’s see. What is Prohibition?

MM: No booze.
TH: Oh, well I was in favor of it.

MM: Were most of the nurses that you came into contact with single?

TH: Huh?

MM: Were most of the women who were nurses in Choteau and Great Falls single women, or were some of them married?

TH: You mean that women were nurses—just nurses...Oh, they had a lot of women there—all women.

MM: They were married?

TH: Oh, yes.

MM: What type of jobs were women doing outside of the home?

TH: What?

MM: What type of jobs were women doing if they weren’t working at home...if they were working outside of the home?

TH: Oh, they just have to do housework. But there wasn’t any of that. We weren’t big enough for that. We were just a little town.

MM: Were there women working in the stores in Choteau?

TH: Oh, yes. We didn’t leave any.

MM: Was there much contact between the whites and the Indians around that area?

TH: Not too much. Some, especially with half-breeds, but there still wasn’t that much what you’d call contact.

MM: Were there any Black families around?

TH: No, not many—very few.

MM: Were they accepted by the community?

TH: Well, we had to deal with them. If they wanted to buy something, why, we sold it to them.
MM: Were there any Chinese families?

TH: Chinese—one, I think. Two, I think there was two.

MM: What did they do to make a living?

TH: Well, they had a Chinese restaurant. He was an awful nice man.

MM: Do you remember in the 1920s when women bobbed their hair and started...What did you think of that? Did you bob your hair?

TH: Mine was bobbed [laughs]. Mine was always short.

MM: Oh. What did you think when the dresses started getting a lot shorter?

TH: Well, it didn’t make any difference to me. I wasn’t fussy about dress.

MM: Was the school pretty small there in Choteau?

TH: Well, quite small.

MM: Were all of your children going to school there?

TH: We had to eight grade. Now, we finally got high school. I suppose, in another building.

MM: And your kids all went to school there? Was it really hard hit by the drought in the ‘20s and the ‘30s?

TH: Oh, yes. Yes, it was hard. We had to wait for the Indians to bring water in.

MM: Really, where did they bring it from?

TH: Up in the hills.

MM: How would they bring it down?

TH: Oh, they had mules and carts...ordinary conveyances.

MM: Do you remember about what year that was?

TH: What?

MM: Do you remember about what year that was...what years?
TH: Well, it was about the year that we had the water shortage, around that time. I don’t know what year that was.

MM: In the mid-1920s, I think. And I suppose all the crops dried up and...

TH: Oh, yes. They just dried. It was an awful time.

MM: ...and the cattle went thirsty too?

TH: Now, what?

MM: Did the cattle go thirsty?

TH: Our cattle. Well, they found little streams. They found streams up in the hills and could make it.

MM: And during this time, you still had your store—you and your husband?

TH: Yes.

MM: Was it just a clothing store, or did you sell other things?

TH: It was just a little variety store.

MM: You didn’t sell groceries, though, did you?

TH: What?

MM: You didn’t sell groceries did you?

TH: Oh, a few...a few of those odds and ends that you went and showed off.

MM: Was it about the only store of its type in Choteau?

TH: Oh, no.

MM: No?

TH: No, there was a big store just across the street from us and the store up the street.

MM: Were there any sports for women in the schools then—for the girls. Did they ever play basketball? Did your girls play basketball?
TH: Talking about the boys?

MM: Did the girls play basketball?

TH: Yes.

MM: And the boys too?

TH: Yes. Yes, we had good leaders. Our teachers were good.

MM: What about swimming?

TH: What?

MM: Did you ever go swimming?

TH: I never did, but they swam up there in the river. We had a river there.

MM: Was there a women’s club in Choteau?

TH: Yes.

MM: What did it do? Do you know?

TH: I didn’t belong. I wasn’t old enough [laughs].

MM: You weren’t old enough?

TH: I wasn’t old enough.

MM: Were most of them older?

TH: Yes.

MM: Okay, I’ll stop there. Thank you.

{Interview ends}

MM: Mrs. Haugen is it okay if we use this information in published form, if we don’t use your name?

TH: Yes.
[End of Interview]